

Dr. Jesus

The Galilean Ministry Part 22

Mark 1:40-2:20 5/27/2018

Summary: We are like spiritual lepers, in desperate need of forgiveness. Jesus is willing and has the authority to forgive even the likes of Levi, and celebrates the repentant. To receive forgiveness, realize your disease, have faith, and follow him. And once you're forgiven, obey, invite others, and rejoice.

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Mark 1:40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” **41** Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” **42** Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. **43** Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: **44** “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” **45** Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 2:1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. **2** So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. **4** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. **5** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” **6** Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7** “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” **8** Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? **9** Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? **10** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” He said to the paralytic, **11** “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” **12** He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. **14** As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. **15** While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and “sinners” were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. **16** When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating

with the “sinners” and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” 17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

18 Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?” 19 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

Introduction

I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, “Loving kindness is my religion.” Is that a good religion? It’s nice to try to be loving and kind, but the reason that doesn’t work as a religion is it doesn’t do anything about the problem of our constant failures to be loving and kind. Nor does it do anything to restore our broken relationship with God.

In today’s passage of Scripture, Jesus tells us the reason he came into the world. And it wasn’t just to spread love and kindness.

Mark 2:17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus came into this world to call sinners, and he describes them as being sick and in need of a doctor. The reason we constantly fail in our efforts to be loving and kind or honest or self-controlled or patient or all the other things we should be – the reason we fail is that deep down in our souls there is a horrible sickness. And that’s where religion comes in. No religion is worth anything unless it has the power to cure that disease and repair the damage it has caused – especially the damage it has done to our relationship with God.

Today we begin a new section of the book of Mark that shows us three men that Jesus encounters – a leper, a paralytic, and a tax collector. And each of these three encounters is given to teach us something about that disease, and we’ll see the the glory of the incomparable Christ in how he deals with it.

Review

We left off last time Jesus in the middle of a speaking tour in the villages of Galilee.

Mark 1:38 Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” 39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

So Jesus is on the road, between villages, and out of nowhere something very unpleasant happens – something designed to teach us about the disease of sin.

The Need for Forgiveness

The Disease Makes Us Repulsive to God

1:40 A man with leprosy came to him

If you took a show of hands back in first Century Israel and asked, “What is the worst possible disease you could ever catch?... ” everyone would agree – leprosy, hands down.¹ It was the most feared

¹ Modern day leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) does not have the same symptoms that are described in Lv.13. However it was around in the time of Jesus, and probably would have been categorized under the broad heading of biblical leprosy. So it’s possible that

disease there was. Lepers had grotesque, oozing, bloody, open sores from head to toe. Their hair would turn yellow, and then white, and then fall out. The smell was horrible. It affected their voice. It was considered highly contagious, and so lepers were outcasts in society. Leprosy absolutely destroyed a person's life. One rabbi was bragging about how ritually pure he was and he said, "When I see lepers I throw stones at them lest they come near me."

Leprosy Illustrates Sin

It was a horrible disease, and so God used leprosy as one of the main illustrations in the OT to teach us about the disease of sin in our hearts. That's not to say it was sinful to have leprosy it's not. But it does show us in a way we can see what the unseen reality of sin is really like. What leprosy does to you physically, sin does spiritually. Leprosy destroys your body; sin destroys your soul. Leprosy is physically contaminating, sin is spiritually contaminating. Leprosy is systemic, not just superficial or skin deep, just like sin is not just superficial but resides way down deep in the core of your being. Leprosy was incurable outside of a special act of God, just like sin. The law had cleansing rituals for other diseases, but there was no ceremony for cleansing leprosy. The leper just had to go live in isolation. If he ever did see any people he had to warn them by covering his mouth and shouting, "Unclean, unclean" so they would know to keep their distance. Because if anyone touched a leper, not only would they catch the disease, but they would instantly become ritually unclean themselves.

Leviticus 5:2 if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean...even though he is unaware of it, he has become unclean.

As a Jew, there was nothing worse in the world that you could ever touch than a leper. No matter what, you don't ever touch a leper.

All of that was to illustrate to us how damaging the disease of sin is to us and to our relationship with God. It alienates us from God because it makes us disgusting and utterly loathsome in his sight. If you can imagine if you looked down right now and saw a huge spider crawling on your hand, or a big, 5 foot snake in your lap. That's what it's like for God when he looks down at our sinful hearts.

Holiness

And so the result is we can't approach him. Habakkuk 1:13 says that God's eyes are too pure to look on evil.

Exodus 33:20 no one may see me and live.

God, in his holiness, is like the sun. And man, in his unholiness, is like a piece of paper.

Romans 1:16 The wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and wickedness of men

Psalm 5:4 You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil ...5 The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong.

That's why our only hope is what John the Baptist was preaching about back in v.4 - forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is our greatest need. Not just to be off the hook for the punishment of our sins, but full forgiveness – the repairing of what was broken in our relationship with God. We can ask for that – we can ask forgiveness, but if God is that repulsed and angry, is he going to be willing to forgive us? That's what this first encounter is about.

The Source of Forgiveness

the man Jesus encountered here may have had Hansen's Disease or something similar.

Willingness to Forgive

The Approach of the Leper

1:40 A man with leprosy came to him

He doesn't keep his distance and yell "unclean" like he's supposed to. This highly contagious, wasted away, decayed, rotting mass of putrid flesh just walks right up to Jesus. And you can see the disciples, "Whoa, whoa, whoa!" They're backing off. But Jesus doesn't move. He just stands there and lets this guy walk right up within arm's reach. Then the man falls to his knees, and then on his face. And it turns your stomach when you smell him, and you hear his raspy, grating voice.

40 ... "If you are willing, you can make me clean."

So how is Jesus going to respond to this walking portrait of sin?

Compassion

41 Filled with compassion

Not revulsion or disgust - compassion. Here's a question: how did they know Jesus was filled with compassion? Compassion is a feeling – how do they know what Jesus is feeling? A tear in Jesus' eye? The look on his face? Somehow it was obvious that Jesus had deep compassion for this man. What a contrast to the religious leaders of the day who prided themselves on throwing rocks at this guy.

Cleansing Touch

Now look what Jesus' compassion drives him to do: the unthinkable.

41 Jesus reached out his hand...and touched the man.

We could add, "and the whole crowd GASPED." Jesus healed other people with just a word, but this guy Jesus touches him.

And some have said that made Jesus unclean. Is that true? I don't think so. Jesus would have become unclean if he had touched a leper, but he didn't really touch a leper.

41 ... "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Jesus didn't touch a leper, because the moment Jesus touched him, he wasn't a leper anymore. We touch something unclean and we get defiled; Jesus touches something unclean and that thing gets cleansed.

42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was clean.

It didn't start gradually clearing up. He looks down at his stumps and the missing fingers popped out one at a time.- perfect hands. Clear, smooth skin with a nice tan. Eyelashes are back, eyebrows are back, hair the right color. Every trace of the leprosy is gone. When the sun came up that morning, he was a hopeless mass of sores and corruption – more dead than alive. Now, he's as clean as the wind driven snow.

And the reason Jesus came into this world was to do that to our hearts. We are all born spiritual lepers.

Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean

What this man was a picture of, we are in reality.

And the most poignant part of this whole event is in v.40 when the guy says to Jesus, **if you are willing, you can make me clean**, and Jesus answers, **I am willing**. Is there any more wonderful and

glorious three words in all the Bible? Jesus said, *I am willing!* Is God willing to forgive us? Yes! But how can that be when we are so repulsive to him? We'll find out later in the gospel, but there's a clue right here.

Trading Places

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.

The leper used to be the isolated outcast; now he's going around talking to everyone, and Jesus is the one out there in seclusion. Do you see what happened? Jesus traded places with the leper. And that is a profound illustration of how Jesus would cleanse spiritual lepers like us. He is willing to cleanse us, but to do that, it meant trading places with us. And so at the end of the book we see Jesus hanging on a cross suffering the punishment that we deserve for our spiritual leprosy.² That's how God can forgive us – because Jesus suffered in our place and took the punishment we deserved.

Authority to Forgive

Ok, so Jesus is willing to forgive. Now let's look at this next encounter.

2:1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

So Jesus starts preaching, and outside on the fringes of the crowd...

3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them.

This guy was paralyzed, so he required 24-hour care – had to be carried everywhere. Fortunately, he had some great friends. They haul this guy to where Jesus was. “We're almost there guys. His house is right down there.” They come around the corner, and their hearts sink. “Oh no – look at the crowd.” They try to press their way through, but nobody will let them in. So they do the only thing they can do – they leave. Off they go, right back down the road they came on.

Meanwhile, Jesus is in there preaching his heart out. The Pharisees and Scribes are there. The house is packed, and Jesus is proclaiming the gospel of God. And as usual, the people are captivated – listening in rapt attention. Jesus is revealing things about God that had never been revealed. He's teaching with authority they had never seen. And Jesus is going on, teaching about the kingdom of... [he brushes off his hair and steps to the side] ... He's teaching and preaching about the great messianic kingdom promised in... [brushes off his hair again and looks up, stepping further to the side] ... He's proclaiming the truth of ... What in the world?

What are those noises up there, and all this dust falling down? Now nobody is listening to Jesus anymore – they are all looking up. And now you can see daylight through the ceiling – someone is up there ... digging a hole through the ceiling. The hole is getting bigger and bigger. And it's ... it's those guys – those same guys that were there earlier with their friend on the stretcher. When they left, they didn't go home; they went to buy some ropes. Then they came back and somehow hoisted their friend up onto the roof, cased the place out to figure the exact spot where Jesus was standing.

4 ... they made an opening in the roof (lit, they unroofed the roof) where Jesus was

² There is a subtle hint of that down in 2:20 where he talks about the fact that he will eventually be taken away by force even though he's the bridegroom. That's talking about the cross.

They figure, “If we just take our friend and drop him right on Jesus head, then he can’t ignore us.” This is such a dramatic moment. No one has said a word. Look around the room. The Pharisees and Scribes are sitting right in front, looking down at this guy in thinking... , *I wonder what kind of horrible sins he committed for God to strike him with this curse.* A guy on the side with his sick little baby in his arms thinking, *Wow, I should have thought of that.* Look at the paralytic. Beat red, embarrassed, all eyes on him, shaking in fear. He’s looking up at Jesus – what is he going to do? The crowd, in stunned silence, watching, waiting. Four upside down heads poking down through the ceiling – they want to see what’s going to happen. What is Jesus going to do?

Jesus Heals the Paralytic’s ... Heart

What you expect is for Jesus to just heal the guy at this point. But Jesus is full of surprises. Instead of saying, “Son, your legs are healed,” he says, **Son, your sins are forgiven.** Nobody saw that coming. And you look down to see if they guy’s legs are moving, and he’s just as paralyzed as ever.

The Priority of Forgiveness

Do you think Jesus just misunderstood what these guys wanted? “Oh, you were wanting healing? Oh yeah of course, the paralysis, I should have known. My bad – I was thinking you wanted forgiveness.” No. Jesus knew exactly what they wanted and what everyone expected, and he intentionally throws all of us for a loop to teach us something. To teach us what? To teach us what’s most important. If Jesus walks up to a quadriplegic and forgives his sins but leaves him paralyzed, that would be a wonderful thing. But if he healed his body but didn’t heal his soul, that would be a horrible thing.

The spiritual is so much more important than the physical. We look at a quadriplegic and think, *Oh, poor guy – he can’t walk.* Jesus looks at this guy and his first thought is, *Oh, poor guy. He’s lost. He doesn’t have forgiveness of sins.* The paralysis is incidental compared to that.

If we could interview that paralytic right now from heaven, I could imagine him saying, “Yes, at the time, I thought being able to walk would be the greatest gift I could ever get. I wanted that more than anything. But I’ve been up here with Jesus for about 2000 years now, and I can tell you that being able to walk or not being able to walk during those quick few years on earth was nothing compared to forgiveness of sins.”

The Challenge

So Jesus forgives him and still, other than Jesus, no one has spoken a word. The Scribes aren’t saying anything, but they are thinking plenty.

2:6 Now some scribes were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

That last part is true – only God can forgive. It’s great that Jesus has the willingness to forgive us, but does he have the authority? Only the person sinned against can forgive the sin, so what Jesus has just said here is that every sin this man had ever committed his whole life was committed against Jesus. That’s quite the claim.

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things?”

They still hadn’t made a peep, but Jesus responds to their thoughts. “You’re questioning whether I have the authority to forgive sins? Fair enough. I realize you can’t see forgiveness of sins, so let me do something you can see.”

9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” He said to the paralytic, 11 “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

Wow, that sounds pretty risky. Every bit of Jesus’ credibility is now riding on this one moment. If this guy doesn’t get up and walk, Jesus is exposed as a total fraud forever.

The Healing

12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

You look down at the guy’s legs at that moment and you see them go from skinny, atrophied little sticks to suddenly having muscles. Jesus altered his brain and gave him muscle memory so he could balance – even to the point where he could carry his bed.

God never asks us to believe on blind faith. He always gives adequate proof. It says **they glorified God** – that means they gave God full credit. Everyone there realized that only God could do what they just witnessed. And so if Jesus can do one thing only God can do then he must be God in human flesh, which means he can do everything God can do.

The Extent of Forgiveness and Attitude Toward the Forgiven

So Jesus has the willingness to forgive and the authority to forgive. Now the third encounter. This one we see the extent of forgiveness and Jesus’ attitude toward the forgiven. How far does it go? And does Jesus feel about you after he forgives you?

14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth.

Tax collectors were the worst of the worst when it came to evil, wicked, immoral reprobates who had no regard for the law of God. Tax collectors were listed in the Talmud with the unclean beasts of the OT. And they would have been rough characters because they had to enforce their taxes. So Levi was a rough guy surrounded by some serious muscle and weapons - not someone you want to mess with.

Jesus is going to mess with him. We just saw Jesus’ confront the religious authorities, now he confronts government authority.

14 ... he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth.

Now remember, in everybody’s mind, the job description of the Messiah is to come and defeat Israel’s enemies and bring military dominance to Israel. Now here he is, going up against the government.

Jesus Rules ... Hearts

Jesus walks right up to this big, tough, scary man with all his guards and weapons, looks him right in the eye, and ... gives him an order. **“Follow me”** (then motions behind him). *Nobody* saw that coming. Jesus doesn’t go after Levi’s power; he goes after Levi’s heart. He calls Levi to be one of his permanent followers.

What a waste of time that seems like. Do you realize, Jesus, that you are calling this man away from everything that has ever excited him in life? And to give up his livelihood? Do you really think this guy is going to be interested?

Levi’s Response

14 ... and Levi got up This big, rough, mean, intimidating oppressor came to his feet. Maybe the thugs who worked for him for enforcement stepped forward toward Jesus as well.

14 ... Levi got up and followed him.

All conversations stop, and the only thing you hear is the sound of Levi's sandals as he walks toward Jesus. Jesus rules hearts, and he wanted this man's heart.

This did not help Jesus' reputation. 150 years after this Celsus mocked the Christians because he said their Master made "infamous men, customs officers and sailors most wicked" his pupils.

The Dinner

But Jesus takes it even further.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples.

Levi invited all his low life friends over to his house for a big party with Jesus. Sharing a meal with someone is an act of closeness and friendship – even more in that culture than in ours. And who you eat with says something about who you are associated with. That's why it mattered so much in Jr. High which table you sat at during lunch. When you eat with a group you are identifying with that group. So it raised a lot of eyebrows when Jesus ate a meal with all these low lifes.

Sinners

So you go into the dinner, there's Jesus enjoying a nice, medium-rare lamb chop, and laughing with a child molester. Next to him, a rapist. A crack head, an ex-con. But they have all repented of their sins and are now following Jesus Christ. Verse 15 says they were following him.

How far does this forgiveness go? All the way to the bottom. And what is Jesus' attitude toward the forgiven? He wants to have a party with them – even if they had committed heinous, unspeakable acts. The moment Jesus forgives you, you are completely forgiven so that Jesus no longer looks at you through the lens of your past sin, no matter what it was.

The Requirement for Forgiveness

So we are all desperately in need of forgiveness and spiritual healing. And Jesus has the authority and the willingness to forgive absolutely anyone completely. But not everyone is forgiven. So what do you have to do to make sure you get forgiveness? What does the Holy Spirit teach us in these three encounters?

Realize Your Sickness (Came ONLY for the unrighteous)

First, you have to realize you're sick. When they asked Jesus why he was eating a meal with a bunch of low-life sicko's, he said:

Mark 2:17 ..."It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Only Sinners

He specifically says **I have not come to call the righteous**. Jesus came to this world only to cure the disease of unrighteousness. So if you're not a vile sinner, Jesus isn't for you.

Now, of course everyone is a sinner, but there are a lot of people who think they are good people. They don't think they have a vile, putrid spiritual disease that disgusts and angers God. They think they are pretty decent, because they aren't as bad as the really bad people, or because of their religious observances, or because they have good intentions. Those people are the self-righteous, and they will never be forgiven.

The Leper's Humble Reverence

Look back at the leper in ch.1. Did he come to Jesus saying, “You should accept me because at least I’m not as unclean as some other lepers I know”? Did he say, “I’m OK because there are some things about me that are not unclean, and that cancels out the unclean parts”? No, v.40 says he **came to [Jesus] and begged him on his knees**. That’s the posture of broken, reverent humility and total submission to Christ’s will. **40 ...If you are willing**

Active Faith

How do you get this forgiveness? Come to Jesus in humble reverence and acknowledge the loathsomeness and ugliness and guilt of your sin. Then, just trust him. Look what Jesus says to the paralytic.

2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus forgives sins on the basis of faith. That’s everywhere in the Bible. That’s how was for Abraham, that’s how it was for this guy, and that’s how it is for us.

Romans 3:28... A man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

If you have faith, then you are forgiven. And if you don’t have faith, you’re not forgiven.

And in this case, it started with the friends’ faith. We see that very often in Scripture. God will have mercy on one person because of the intercession of someone else if that other person has faith. Most of the time, intercession takes the form of prayer. In this case, it’s in the form of action. They were creative and insistent and persistent in getting their friend to Jesus even if they had to tear a roof open.

And when they did, it says Jesus saw their faith. You can see faith, because it acts. Faith is active trust in Jesus. There is no such thing as faith that doesn’t work. Sometimes people will try to tell you to “let go and let God” as if the more faith you have, the less human effort is involved. But here we see that greater faith results in more intensive activity, not less.

But it’s not activity to justify yourself through religious observance or good works. It’s activity focused on drawing near to Christ. There are people who know the Bible backwards and forwards and are as religious as they come, but they would never tear through a roof to get to Jesus. Bible knowledge is worthless if you don’t use it to move toward Christ.³

Follow (Repent)

So how do you receive forgiveness of sins? From the leper we learn to come to Christ in total humility and acknowledge the severity of your disease. From the paralytic’s friends we learn that the forgiveness itself is granted on the basis of faith, which is active trust in Jesus. Then what do we learn from Levi? What did active trust look like in his case? Following Christ. He gave up his life of sin and followed Christ. In other words, repentance. That’s always the response true faith has to sin – repentance.

The Response to Forgiveness

So we’ve seen our need for forgiveness – we have the disease. We’ve seen the source of forgiveness: Jesus Christ, who has the authority, the willingness, and eagerness to forgive – it’s why he came into the world. And we’ve seen the requirement for forgiveness: Come to Christ in humble, active faith and repent of your sin. Now let’s close with last point: the response to forgiveness. Once you’ve been forgiven, then what?

³ They are like the Scribes in Jerusalem when the Magi came to find the newborn Messiah. They knew the biblical answer from Micah 5:2 – Bethlehem. But they don’t even join the Magi in going there!

Obey

The first account, with the leper, shows us the wrong response.

43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.”

Jesus wanted the priests to officially verify the healing, so he gives the guy a very simple command. So what does the guy do?

45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.

He did the exact opposite of what Jesus commanded. He knew the right way to ask for something from Jesus. But once he got what he wanted, what happened to all the humility and faith and reverence and submissiveness? It’s gone. He got what he wanted and so he’s on his way. He’s not interested in obeying Jesus.

45 ...As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.

If Jesus enters a town openly now, it will attract the wrong kind of crowd. It will attract thrill seekers who want miracles, rather than people who are open to Jesus’ message about repentance and forgiveness. So now there are cities who, if I hadn’t been for this guy’s disobedience, would have gotten a visit from the Lord Jesus Christ. But now that couldn’t happen. How tragic for those cities.

So there’s the wrong response (disobedience). Contrast that with the response of the paralytic.

10 ... He said to the paralytic, 11 “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out

He obeys. And it’s at the moment he obeys that he is healed. Very often we don’t get strength from God until we decide to act in obedience.

Invite Others

So what’s the right response to being forgiven? First, obedience. Next, do what Levi did – invite all your friends to come meet Jesus. The paralytic’s friends did the same thing – brought their friend to Jesus.

Rejoice

When you get forgiveness from God, first obey him, then invite others, and finally, celebrate. Jesus gets some criticism for attending Levi’s party and feasting, because this happened on a fast day – when all the religious people were fasting. And Jesus says, “No, this is a time for celebration!” It wouldn’t have been appropriate for them to fast while Jesus was present, because he is the one who has the authority, the willingness, and the eagerness to forgive all our sins if we come to him in humble faith and repentance.

Conclusion: You can be forgiven

Some of us have done some really horrible sins. We’ve got some deep, deep stains on our soul. Some of you have had sick, disgusting things done to you. And you feel dirty because of that – even though you didn’t do anything wrong. Or in some cases, maybe horrible things were done to you, but you also did some things that were wrong, and you have never really figured out where the line is between the two, so you don’t know what to confess and what not to, and so there’s just this cloud of confused, generalized sense of dirtiness. Or maybe it’s the most disgusting filthiness of all – that of self-righteous pride. Whatever variety of uncleanness you might have, no matter how deep it runs, Jesus can make you clean with a single touch.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Psalm 51:7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Come to God like these men did – with deep reverence, broken humility and repentance, total submissiveness, and active trust. Come in faith, ask for cleansing, and he will make you whiter than snow. Then express your gratitude in joyful obedience to his commands. And he will rejoice in you.