

HE CAN'T DO THAT, CAN HE?

Luke 5:17-26; 7:36-50

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Two stories from the gospel of Luke. And they both end the same way.

Look at Luke 5:20

...Friend, your sins are forgiven you.

Look over at Luke 7:48

And He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

Words spoken to the paralytic who has been healed and to the woman who anointed the feet of our Lord. The most powerful words to ever leave the lips of our Lord: "Your sins are forgiven."

Words that we all long to hear. Isn't that what you want Jesus to say to you? Isn't that what He has said to you? "Your sins are forgiven."

Ernest Hemingway began one of his short stories entitled "The Capital of the World" with the following lines:

Madrid is full of boys named Paco, which is diminutive of the name Francisco, and there is a Madrid joke about a father who came to Madrid and inserted an advertisement in the personal columns of *El Liberal* which said: "Paco meet me at Hotel Montana noon Tuesday. All is forgiven. Papa," and how a squadron of Guardia Civil had to be called out to disperse the eight hundred young men who answered the advertisement.

The joke is about the popularity of the name "Paco" in Spain. But it works only because of the underlying longing of so many to be forgiven by the father.

Two stories. One word. Forgiven.

In the first story, Jesus forgives the sins of a man. And in the second story, He forgives the sins of a woman.

Let's look at the first story in Luke 5.

Jesus is teaching. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were sitting and listening. They had come to find out if all the claims about this new rabbi were true. Could He really heal? Could He really cast out demons? And besides, what was He teaching anyway? They had come, Luke

tells us in verse 17, from far and wide – from everywhere, from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

They were not disappointed. Notice the end of verse 17. “...and the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.”

The word for power is the word from which we derive our word dynamite.

We’ve already learned from our sermon last week that the multitude was growing as people discovered that Jesus had the power to heal, to deliver them from their sickness. You can imagine the crowd gathered around as Jesus taught about the kingdom of God – each person jockeying for position so that his sick friend, his family member could be close enough to Jesus to be touched, receiving the power from the hands that were known to heal.

The paralyzed man had some very faithful friends. But they realized there was no way to get close to Jesus, there was no way to part the crowd as Moses had parted the Red Sea. They, however, were just the kind of fellows who would not be stopped, who would not be discouraged, who would not be put off. They climbed the exterior stairs up to the roof and began removing the tiles, forming a passage way, an opening in the ceiling above where Jesus was teaching.

I can see Jesus now – teaching and beginning to feel the debris and the dust falling down. Looking up and, perhaps, getting some dust in His own eyes. Pausing His teaching because everyone stopped listening the minute sunlight burst through that roof. Or, perhaps, even with the first clang of a roof tile being removed.

They lowered their friend’s stretcher down slowly, steadily, and evenly, until he was right in front of Jesus. When you can’t walk, what do you have to lose? Jesus saw their faith – not just his faith. It’s plural in verse 20. He saw the faith of the friends as well as he saw the faith of the paralyzed man. And Jesus said to him, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

Now, the healing they could take. And the teaching they were trying to comprehend. But no, never – never would they accept that this new rabbi had the power, the authority to forgive sins. Only one has that authority. Humanity does not have the power to pardon. Rather, it is God who has the right to forgive sins for, ultimately, all sins are against God. As the psalmist said, “O Lord, against you, and you alone, have I sinned and done this evil in your sight.”

Ultimately, no matter whom we have wronged, only God has authority – at least in the eternal balances – to pardon our sins.

The Old Testament asserts again that only God can forgive sins when Nathan the prophet announces to David, “The Lord has taken away your sin; you’re not going to die” (2 Samuel 12:13).

In verse 21 they shout the question of this gospel. “Who is this man...?” “Who is it who claims to be able to forgive sins? Who is it that would yank from Yahweh this divine prerogative? Who

is it who blasphemes?” Look at the end of verse 21: “For who can forgive sins, but God alone?” No small accusation for blasphemy called for a stoning!

Now Jesus shows a divine omniscience in verse 22. “I know what you’re thinking. I know how you are reasoning in your hearts,” He says in verse 22. “But let me ask you a question. Is it easier to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say ‘Rise and walk’?”

Healing and forgiveness go hand in hand, all the way back to the Psalter. Psalm 103:3, “Praise God who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.”

Quite frankly, in one way it’s easier to say “Your sins are forgiven you,” because there is no proof in the pudding. There is really no way to measure the success of a proclamation of forgiveness. But you can see whether the man does rise and walk. In another way, many can heal the body, but only God can heal the soul.

Verse 24

But I wanted you to know that the Son of Man – I wanted you to know that I have the authority on earth to forgive sins. Man, I say to you again, “Rise, take up, and go.”

Notice the obedience of the one healed in verse 25. Jesus said, “Rise and take up,” and he “rose up” and “took up.” And he went home glorifying God.

Verse 26

The people are seized with astonishment and begin glorifying God; and they were filled with fear saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

It is a remarkable thing that Jesus has the power to forgive sins.

Story No. 2

Now I want to tell you a second story. Turn to Luke 7:36. It’s a story also about a Pharisee and a sinner. It’s a story also about Jesus’ power to forgive. It’s a story that also rings the question of the text: Who is Jesus? “Who is this man?” they ask in chapter 5. They ask it again at the heart of our second story.

Beginning in verse 36, we learn of a Pharisee who asked Jesus to dine with him. We need not paint the Pharisee as some evil man who was setting a trap for Jesus when he invites Him to his home. We can’t assign to any single Pharisee all the negative attributes that we learn about them in the gospels. In fact, there were some Pharisees who were doing all they could to be obedient to God, to be holy in their walk and in their obedience to the law.

Jesus enters the Pharisee’s house and reclines at the table. In those days, the table was low and there were couches around the table. One’s head would be at the table while one’s feet would be pointing away.

So Jesus was in the Pharisee's home, dining with him. "What on earth is Jesus doing eating in a hypocrite's home?" we ask ourselves. Well, don't forget – don't point the finger too quickly. Remember Jesus in chapter 5, after calling the tax gatherer to be His disciple, sat and ate with the worst of sinners. You see, sometimes, in our efforts to right wrongs, we have a prejudice against those who have prejudices and, thus, we are like they. Think about that one for a while.

Jesus would dine with anyone – sinner or saint. It just didn't matter. He was company to all.

While Jesus is at the home of this religious leader – Jesus, too, a religious leader with disciples – there was a woman in the city who was a sinner. She is a woman of the world.

The drama intensifies. There Jesus is in Simon's house, reclining at the table. All of a sudden a woman – a sinner – walks onto the stage of the text. She had an alabaster vial, a common container used to hold costly perfume. And she began to weep at the feet of Jesus. Weeping because of the remorse of her sins? There is no weeping like the weeping of repentance. There is no sobbing of the soul like the sobbing that says, "I'm sorry for my sin."

Her soul sobbed, and her tears washed the feet of Jesus. And she dried His feet with her very hair. (Now, only a sinful woman would let her hair down in public. In fact, it was a cause for divorce.) Then she kisses Jesus' feet. And finally, anoints them with the expensive perfume, yielding the contents of the alabaster vial.

Feet in the first century were offensive. Streets were dirty with dung and dirt. The ultimate insult to a vanquished enemy is to make him a "footstool" (Psalm 110:1). John the Baptist asserts that he is unworthy to even untie the sandals of the one to come after him (Luke 3:16). Yet in this passage, on six occasions we're told of the woman's actions toward the feet of Jesus. It reminds us of Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Jerusalem, 'Your God reigns.'"

Or in Matthew 28:9 where the women encounter the resurrected Jesus. "And they grabbed His feet and worshipped Him."

The Pharisee who invited Jesus to his house thought to himself (verse 39), "Well now my question has been answered. If this man really were a prophet, He would know what sort of woman this woman is who is touching Him."

What the Pharisee doesn't know is that just like our story in chapter 5, where Jesus can read the minds of the Pharisees, here Jesus, likewise, read the mind of Simon.

Verse 40

"Simon, I've got something to say to you." "Say it, Teacher."

"Let me tell you a story, Simon. There was a moneylender. He had two debtors, two folk who owed him money. One owed 500 denarii, about a year and a half worth of work wages. The other owed 50 – two months, not eighteen. So, there's a lender and one owes him a great amount

and one owes him a small amount. They are both unable to repay and he's a nice guy and forgives them both of their debt. [The literal translation is "he graced them." Each of the debtors were graced by God. To be graced is to have an IOU torn up.] Who do you suppose, Simon, loves him the more – the one forgiven eighteen months worth of wages or the one forgiven two?"

"I suppose," says Simon, not seeing that Jesus had laid the trap, "it's the one whom he forgave more."

"You are a smart one, Simon. You got it right," Jesus says. Then He turns to the woman.

Jesus is a religious leader. Simon is a religious leader. Yet their responses to the woman could not be more different. The Pharisee was repelled by this woman of the world. The Pharisee wanted to have nothing to do with her. The Pharisee was saying, "If only Jesus knew, He would come to the same conclusion I have reached."

Yet, Jesus did know. And Jesus, when He knew of her sin, was drawn to her.

What kind of religious folk are we? Those who are driven away when we hear of sin, or those who are driven toward when we hear of sin?

Jesus is not through with Simon yet. "Simon, do you see this woman?" Now, Simon had not treated Jesus as a social equal, for he had done none of the things that would normally be expected of him. He had not washed Jesus' feet, nor had a servant washed the feet of Jesus. He had not anointed Jesus' head with oil. Nor had he given Jesus the customary greeting of a kiss.

"Simon, I came to your house. You didn't wash my feet. Yet she has wet my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Simon, you didn't kiss my face, but since the time I came in this woman of repentance has not ceased to kiss my feet. Simon, I don't remember you breaking out any oil and anointing my head. But she has done much more. She has anointed my feet with perfume. So Simon, you're right – this woman has many sins. But she has been forgiven. She has loved much, but he who is forgiven little – forgiveness is no big deal to them sometimes – they love little."

Then Jesus makes the same great proclamation He made to the paralytic in chapter 5. Look at Luke 7:48. "Your sins have been forgiven."

There is that remarkable thing again – that Jesus has the power to forgive sins.

"Who is this man?" It's the same question that leapt from the story in chapter 5. "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

"Your faith has saved you," He said to the woman. "Go in peace."

Where does a woman like that go in peace? She can't go to the religious authorities – they have already made it quite clear they have no room for her at their table. She can't go back out into

the world, for in the world she'll fall into the same lifestyle from which Jesus has just released her. Where does a woman like that go?

It's a story that cries out for a church. A story that cries out for a place. A story that cries out for a people – a people like you and a people like me who stretch out our arms to those who seek the forgiveness of Jesus and say, "Peace is right here. Peace is at First Baptist Church. Here you'll find the grace of God and the love of a family."

"Go in peace." It cries for a church.

These are two remarkable stories, and yet they are the same story. One is a man and one is a woman. One has a physical malady and the other a spiritual malady. Yet, they both need the forgiveness of sins. And both stories ask the question, "Who is Jesus?"

I want to point out a few things about these two stories.

I. Jesus has the authority to forgive sin.

Both stories ask the question, "Who is this man who has the power to forgive sins? It's blasphemy. To say one has the power to forgive sins means that one is claiming to be God. Jesus claims to be God. Jesus claims to be able to forgive sins."

Did you hear what I said. Jesus has forgiven your sins.

I think half of the emotional issues we struggle with would be eliminated over night if we would really believe that God, through the death of Christ Jesus, has forgiven and forgotten our sins. Why won't you believe that? Why won't you accept the writing of Luke at its word? Why won't you accept the proclamation of the prophet, the saying of the Christ, for what it is? Jesus said to the man and to the woman, "Because of your faith, your sins have been forgiven."

I don't know what you struggle with – some sin of the past, some secret sin that nobody knows about but you and God. There is no need to carry it any more. Jesus says to you today, as Jesus said to that man and to that woman, "Your sins are forgiven." That's it.

Forgiven.

That Jesus forgives sins is a remarkable thing.

II. The question is "Who is Jesus?"

Luke 7:49, Luke 8:25, and Luke 9:9. The question of Jesus' identity looms large in Luke. When Jesus says He has the power to forgive sins, Jesus is claiming to be God because He is doing a "God thing," a remarkable thing when He forgives sins.

Who is Jesus to you? A moral teacher of the first century? A rabbi with a crazed mind? Or is Jesus God Himself, in the flesh, who has forgiven your sins?

III. When we are forgiven by Jesus, we love more.

Jesus said that woman is going to love much because she has been forgiven much. “And Simon, you don’t love much because you haven’t been forgiven much.” Simon really wasn’t much of a sinner. He really was much a saint. But when you receive God’s forgiveness, when you’ve wept at His feet over what you’ve done, you love Him for pardoning the sin of your soul, the blackness that burdens, the wickedness that weighs down.

“Your sins are forgiven you.” Words Jesus said to the man let down through the roof. Words Jesus said to the woman who anointed His feet.

Listen carefully. I think I hear Him saying them to you now. “Your sins are forgiven.”