

The Power of Forgiveness

By E.J. Waggoner

May, 1894" And, behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men." Matthew 9:2-8.

One of the most common expressions to be heard among professed Christians when speaking of religious things is this: "I can understand and believe that God will forgive sin, but it is hard for me to believe that He can keep me from sin." Such a person has yet to learn very much of what is meant by God's forgiving sins. It is true that persons who talk that way do often have a measure of peace in believing that God has forgiven, or does forgive, their sins; but through failure to grasp the power of forgiveness, they deprive themselves of much blessing that they might enjoy.

Bearing in mind the statement concerning the miracles of Christ, that "these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:31), let us study the miracle before us. The scribes did not believe that Jesus could forgive sin. In order to show that He had power to forgive sins, He healed the palsied man. This miracle was wrought for the express purpose of illustrating the work of forgiving sin, and demonstrating its power. Jesus said to the palsied man. "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house," that they, and ye, might know His power to forgive sin. Therefore, the power exhibited in the healing of that man is the power bestowed in the forgiveness of sin.

Note particularly that the effect of the words of Jesus continued after they were spoken. They made a change in the man, and that change was permanent. Even so it must be in the forgiveness of sin. The common idea is that when God forgives sin the change is in Himself, and not in the man. It is thought that God simply ceases to hold anything against the one who has sinned. But this is to imply that God had a hardness against the man, which is not the case. God is not a man; He does not cherish enmity, nor harbor a feeling of revenge. It is not because God has an angry feeling in His heart against a sinner that he asks forgiveness, but because the sinner has something in his heart. God is all right, the man is all wrong; therefore God forgives the man, that he also may be all right.

When Jesus, illustrating the forgiveness of sin, said to the man, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house," the man arose and went to his house. The power that was in the words of Jesus raised him up, and made him walk. That power remained in him, and it was in the strength that was given him on removing the palsy that he walked in all time to come, provided, of course, that he kept the faith. This is illustrated by the psalmist when he says, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and *established my goings*." Psalm 40:1, 2; (emphasis supplied).

There is life in the words of God. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and

they are life." John 6:63. The Word received in faith brings the Spirit and the life of God into the soul. So when the penitent soul hears the words, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," and receives those words as the living words of the living God, he is a different man, because a new life has begun in him. It is the power of God's forgiveness, and that alone, that keeps him from sin. If he continues in sin after receiving pardon, it is because he has not grasped the fullness of the blessing that was given him in the forgiveness of his sins.

In the case before us, the man received new life, His palsied condition was simply the wasting away of his natural life. He was partially dead. The words of Christ gave him fresh life. But this new life that was given to his body, and which enabled him to walk, was but an illustration, both to him and to the scribes, of the unseen life of God which he had received in the words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and which had made him a new creature in Christ.

With this simple and clear illustration before us, we may understand some of the words of the apostle Paul, which otherwise are "hard to be understood." First read Colossians 1:12-14. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." See the same statement concerning redemption through Christ's blood in 1 Peter 1:18, 19; Revelation 5:9.

Mark two points—we have redemption through Christ's blood, and this redemption is the forgiveness of sins. But the blood is the life. See Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:13-14. Therefore Colossians 1:14 really tells us that we have redemption through Christ's life. But does not the Scripture say that we are reconciled to God by the death of His Son? It does, and that is just what is here taught. Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity." Titus 2:14. He "gave Himself for our sins." Galatians 1:4. In giving Himself, He gives His life. In shedding His blood, He pours out His life. But in giving up His life, He gives it to us. That life is righteousness, even the perfect righteousness of God, so that when we receive it, we are "made the righteousness of God in Him." It is the receiving of Christ's life, as we are baptized into His death, that reconciles us to God. It is thus that we "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," "after the image of Him that created him." Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

Now we may read Romans 3:23-25, and find that it is not so very difficult: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified [that is, made righteous, or doers of the law] freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission [sending away] of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

All have sinned. The whole life has been sin. Even the thoughts have been evil. Mark 7:21. And to be carnally minded is death. Therefore the life of sin is a living death. If the soul is not freed from this, it will end in eternal death. There is no power in man to get righteousness out of the holy law of God; therefore God in His mercy puts His own righteousness upon all that believe. He makes us righteous as a free gift out of the riches of His grace. He does this by His words, for He declares—speaks—His righteousness into and upon all who have faith in the blood of Christ, in whom is God's righteousness; "for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Colossians 2:9. And this declaring or speaking the righteousness of God upon us is the remission or taking away of sin. Thus God takes away the sinful life by putting His own righteous life in its place. And this is the power of the forgiveness of sin. It is "the power of an endless life."

This is the beginning of the Christian life. It is receiving the life of God by faith. How is it continued?—Just as it is begun. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in

Him." Colossians 3:6. For "the just shall live by faith." The secret of living the Christian life is simply that of holding fast the life which, received at the beginning, forgives the sin.

God forgives sin by taking it away. He justifies the ungodly by making him godly. He reconciles the rebel sinner to Himself, by taking away his rebellion, and making him a loyal and law-abiding subject.

It is sometimes said, "But it is difficult to understand how we can have the life of God as an actual fact; it cannot be *real*, for it is by faith that we have it." So it was by faith that the poor palsied man received new life and strength; but was his strength any the less real? Was it not an actual fact that he received strength? "Cannot understand it?" Of course not, for it is a manifestation of "the love of God that passeth knowledge." But we may believe it and realize the fact, and then we shall have an eternal life in which to study the wonder of it. Read again and again the story of the healing of the palsied man, and meditate upon it until it is a living reality to you, and then remember that "these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

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