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Body

1.

Justification by Faith vv. 1-2. In vv. 1 and 2 we are not so much taught the principle as shown the reality of justification by faith, that it is those who believe in God who receive God's forgiveness; it is by faith in God that we
seek
His forgiveness,
believe His promise
of forgiveness, and
receive
that forgiveness itself.

1.

Text

1.

1 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

2.

2 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."

3.

Christ saw their faith evidenced in their works – do you see their faith?

1.

In v. 1, after casting the demons out of the two demoniacs on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum on the east side which Matthew calls "his own city." Capernaum was not His birthplace or hometown, but at this point Jesus made it His base of operations.

2.

In v. 2, Jesus was visited by a paralytic and his friends, and Matthew tells us "Jesus saw their faith ." I want you to see their faith too. You see it evidenced in their works; their faith was a living and active faith. This man who was paralyzed, who was unable to walk, had friends who believed Jesus could heal him. So they carried him to Jesus on a bed.

3.

But they encountered a major roadblock. They couldn't even get into the house where Jesus was, because as Luke tells us, many Pharisees and scribes had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem to listen to Jesus' teaching, so many that they spilled out the doors and surrounded the house.

4.

The paralytic and his friends could have given up hope of even seeing Jesus, but they didn't! Throwing caution to the wind they climbed onto the roof of the house—which was made of branches covered with mud, supported by rafters—they dug through the mud and lifted up a section of the roof, tied ropes to the sides of the bed, and lowered their friend down into the middle of the house! I can just imagine the paralytic's balancing act as his friends lowered him through the roof. "Whoa! Not so fast on this side!" This is the kind of crazy stunt teenage boys pull when their parents are on vacation. Can you imagine the uproar if you tried lowering a hospital patient out of their second-floor window to the sidewalk just so a doctor passing by would take a look?

5.

But these men put their paralytic friend on a flying trapeze because they believed Jesus could heal him. Do you see their faith? "Don't worry, brother, if I drop you, Jesus will catch you. It doesn't matter anymore that you're paralyzed; you're gonna walk out of this place a healed man."

6.

Christ pardoned his sins. Jesus saw their faith, and forgave the paralytic's sins.

1.

Now you could close up the hole in this kind of roof easily without any damage, so the owner of the house would not be up in arms. But dropping out of the sky into the middle of someone's living room is not polite in any culture. This paralytic was a believer, but a believer who took a big risk. Would Jesus throw him out of the house? No, Jesus' first words are "Take heart, my son! " Jesus' purpose for this man is gracious from beginning to end, from forgiving his sins to healing his body. The paralytic need not worry that he arrived through the roof, because Christ cares more for his soul and body than the fact he crashed the party.

2.

Application – Reconciliation precedes healing, so pray for reconciliation first.

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Reconciliation precedes healing. Initially the paralytic didn't get what he came for. He didn't come to Jesus for forgiveness. But Jesus forgave him because he trusted Jesus for everything! Jesus forgave him to show us we must be forgiven of our sin before sin's cursed effects can be removed. Calvin comments, "The only way of obtaining deliverance from all evils is to have God reconciled to us." [1] I ask you, what use is it to pray for healing if in the end your body will rot in hell? Where the "
worm does not die
."
(Mark 9:48
)
Some men will gain the world today but lose their soul tomorrow. Unbelievers want healing and may even receive it from God out of His kindness that they may have more time to repent and believe, as God gave the evil Hezekiah more years to live. Sinners, "
be reconciled to God
" "
while it is still called today.
" (
2 Cor. 5:20; Heb. 3:13
)

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So pray for forgiveness first. Christ taught this paralytic, all who were watching, and us today what we should pray for first, before praying for relief from bodily ills. Pray for forgiveness for your sins. Calvin says "It is proper to attend to this order in our prayers. When the feeling of afflictions reminds us of our sins, let us first of all be careful to obtain pardon, that, when God is reconciled to us, he may withdraw his hand from punishing."
[2]

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Condemnation through Unbelief vv. 3-5. Justification comes by faith. But in vv. 3-5 we see condemnation comes through unbelief
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1.

Text

1.

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

2.

4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?

3.

5 For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, ‘Rise and walk'?

4.

Blasphemy?

1.

Whether the paralytic knew it or not like Indiana Jones he had descended into what Jesus called a "brood of vipers." (**Matt. 12:34**) But these vipers' poison was not reserved for the paralytic. Their eyes were trained on Jesus, who came to "
crush the serpent's head.
"

2.

They said to themselves, in their hearts, "This man is blaspheming." Blasphemy is when a man dishonors God. What the scribes would not believe was that Jesus the man is "
God
manifested in the flesh.
" (
1 Tim. 3:16
) They had a hunch Jesus believed Himself to be God when He declared this man's sins forgiven, for they say in Mark and Luke, "
Who can forgive sins but God alone?
" (
Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21
) And it is true—ultimately only the one who was offended can forgive your sins!

3.

Unbelief – evidenced by evil thoughts

1.

The nature of the scribes' unbelief puts in sharper relief the nature of the paralytic's faith. We already recognized the paralytic trusted Jesus to fix everything. But now we see he had this complete trust because he believed Jesus had all the power of God. That Jesus is the omnipotent, all-powerful, almighty God
. This trust in God's sovereignty—and the belief that Jesus has it—is of the essence of true saving faith. What is more, it is of the essence of justifying faith. True saving faith says "
I
am not the Savior!
Only Jesus

is the Savior!" True saving faith even admits "My faith itself is in no way the Savior." God is sovereign; we are responsible. At the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ we have only God to thank and only ourselves to blame.

2.

Christ condemns the scribes' unbelief by unveiling it for all to see. "Why do you think evil in your hearts? " He asks. Just as in the days of Noah, when "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (**Gen. 6:5**), so Jesus saw the secret thoughts of these men's hearts and condemned it for the evil it was. Jesus saw the paralytic's faith, and He saw the scribes' unbelief.

3.

Why did they think evil in their hearts? They had no good reason. Jesus' words can be interpreted to be nothing more than Moses the prophet or Levi the priest would declare, even nothing more than the general believer could declare on the basis of God's promises. But the scribes construe Jesus' words to have the worst possible meaning—they believe as a mere man Jesus claims to have divine authority. " Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. " (**John 3:18**) Condemnation comes through unbelief. The scribes' unbelief pushed Jesus to condemn their unbelief and prove His power to forgive sins.

4.

Which is easier—to forgive or heal?

1.

So Jesus challenges them with a question they cannot answer unless they believe. "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?
" Both are easy to say. But both are impossible for man to do as only God can do. Man can forgive the offense against his fellow man, and a physician can use the outward aids of medicine. But ultimately only God can heal, and only God can forgive.

2.

The Proof to All – Help for your faith vv. 6-8. The scribes claim Jesus speaks empty words, but in vv. 6-8 Jesus proves He works by the
power of God
. You won't believe "
the words I say to you
?" Then "
believe on account of the works themselves
," and stand in awe before the power of almighty God! (
John 14:10, 11
)

1.

Text

1.

6 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.
"

2.

7 And he rose and went home.

3.

8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

4.

Power to forgive sins. Jesus Christ has the power to forgive your sins.

1.

You can see this because Christ reverses sin's effects. Paralysis and all ills in this life came about because of Adam's sin. "
The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
" (
Rom. 6:23
) If Christ has power over sin's effects, He has power over sin itself.

2.

You can see Christ has power to forgive sins because He works with divine power. This is a resurrection, which can only happen by the power of God. He tells this man to "
Rise
," and one day Christ would rise from the dead. Only God can raise the paralytic, and only God can raise the dead.

3.

The gospel is always aimed at breaking the proudest heart, and heal the most wounded heart , and God's sovereignty is the "Big Bertha" that does this work. God's sovereignty is not a scary doctrine to avoid in evangelism; it is the big gun that does the work. Jesus said " No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.
" (John 6:44) You think you can come tomorrow if you want? You can't, because God is sovereign. You think you must evaluate the kingdom of heaven and choose of your own free will whether you want to enter it? As if you hold the key to your salvation! But "
I tell you the truth, unless

" by the sovereign work of God "
one is born again he
cannot see
the kingdom of God.
" And "
unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he
cannot enter
.
" (
John 3:3, 5
) These truths are calculated to break the hard of heart and drive them to repentance. God's sovereignty is our greatest encouragement as well--"
No one will snatch them out of my hand.
" (
John 10:28
)

4.

What Jesus taught in the area of regeneration is true in justification as well. He thunders against the scribes in His words "
But
that you may know
that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...!
" You deny that I have the power of God? Then stand in awe at my power to heal and run in fear of my power to destroy! And know this—whom I free on earth will be free in heaven, and whom I bind on earth will be bound in hell. "
The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins!
" But before that power you stand condemned already! You admit that God alone can forgive sins? I am God, and I do not forgive your sins! But I do forgive this paralytic. "
It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!
" (
Heb. 10:31
) His sovereignty matters in the area of justification, because He has the power to forgive sins.

5.

God's sovereignty breaks the proudest heart, and heals the most wounded heart. The paralytic can't get up from his bed; it would have become his deathbed! If you lie on your deathbed and say "I can't make right the wrongs I have done, and have no right to God's mercy," Jesus' words are for you. "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven." Your works will not atone for your sins. Only Christ's blood can atone for your sins. Trust that it did and so trust that Jesus has the authority to forgive your sins. You have no right to His mercy, but He has the right to give it! By

His sovereign mercy He laid down His life for His sheep, and no one took it from Him. And by that same sovereign mercy He forgives your sin, calling you only to repent and receive that forgiveness by faith alone. You need only call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved, because He is the Savior. This is the right way to receive the free gift of forgiveness—by depending wholly on the power of God to forgive.

6.

Conclusion. The conclusion of this passage's application is written right on the surface of the text. " When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. "

1.

Fear God. This passage calls you to fear God. Fear His awesome power to destroy and to heal, to condemn and to forgive.

2.

Glorify God. But fear does not capture the whole response we must have to how good God's blessing of forgiveness is. We must glorify God! Give praise to God! Recognize how praiseworthy is His mercy and grace in forgiving our sins. "
Come, now, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.
" (
Is. 1:18
) This is not the depraved reasoning of the natural man, of the Serpent and His brood that would bruise the heel of Christ, but it is the reasoning of the sovereign grace of God. See the glory of God in the riches of His mercy.
"
Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
" (

Is. 55:6-9
) Give glory to God for His merciful thoughts and ways.

3.

Believe that Jesus has the power to forgive your sins. Finally, and most importantly, believe Jesus has the power to forgive your sins
. The crowds of Pharisees, scribes, and villagers marveled that God had given this authority to men. The crowds failed to fully believe Jesus was God manifested in the flesh; you must do better than they. But because you believe Jesus is the true and living God, believe also that He has the power to forgive your sins. Ask Him for that forgiveness, and He will abundantly pardon.

1 Calvin, *Commentaries*, 394.

2 Calvin, *Commentaries*, 394.