**Forgiveness with Authority**

Based on [Matthew 9:1-8](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt9.1-8)

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Thanksgiving Day (Observed)

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Thanksgiving is when everyone is urged to give thanks to God for their earthly blessings…especially the fruits of the earth. Even the ungodly and pagans celebrate this implicitly theological holiday. **And it’s fitting, because God causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.** And he gives daily bread to everyone, even to evil people. // Why is it that so often in this life, good people suffer while the evil prosper? Because God is generous. He gives earthly blessings to everyone, even those who don’t deserve it. In fact, God is so inscrutably generous that we cannot know what God thinks of a person by how much health, wealth and happiness he has in this life.

It’s not the amount of food in the pantry, or money in the bank that tells us what God thinks of you. **Yet, what God thinks of you personally is the most important question in the world, but this question cannot be answered or known apart from a word.** And Jesus speaks *this* word to a man with palsy…a paralyzed man who—(if health, wealth and happiness were indicators of what God thinks of a person)--he would have double cause for misery. But Jesus says to him this word from the mouth of God, “”**Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven**.”

If you are suffering from a disability, what words would you rather hear, “**You can walk now**” or “**Your sins are forgiven**?” That entirely depends. // It depends on whether what is spoken is true or not. You can go into a hospital, wandering from room to room saying to sick people, “**You are healed**”, but it wouldn’t do any good. Because it’s just talk…just words. **You don’t have the power to heal with words, because you don’t have the authority from God to do so.** You can go to medical school, learn about surgeries, medications, treatments, and so on…and you can use your hands and your brain to try to heal a person physically, and you might sometimes succeed and other times fail. But you don’t have the authority to change nature with a command.

But Jesus Christ has the authority to change nature with a command. And he proved it on many occasions. **Once, when he was in a boat with his disciples, and there was a storm on the sea they were nervous.** But he simply said, “Be still”, and the wind and the waves obeyed, and the sea was calm. That is authority.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh. He was with God in the beginning and was God from all eternity. If this Jesus were standing here right now, and you were paralyzed, or blind, or deaf, what would you rather hear from Jesus, “Your disability is healed” or “Your sins are forgiven.”?

Some people brought a paralytic on a mat to Jesus. They had faith in Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “**Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.**” We don’t know the paralytic man’s reaction; we don’t know if he had faith. **But what is clear is that Jesus believed the man’s greatest problem was not his paralyzed limbs, but his sins.**

Every single human being by nature, since the fall, is an abomination to God. The holy, perfect creator of heaven and earth is disgusted by what his most prized creatures have done and have become. **From your very conception in your mother’s womb, your senses were deadened to God, you were paralyzed in sin, and all your desires and inclinations were against God.**  *The world* teaches that everyone is good, and they only become evil. But *Christ teaches* that everyone is evil--in reality and in God’s eyes--and must become good in his sight. The problem is that dead men can’t work; blind men cannot see; and sinners cannot do what is good…there is no goodness in them that is of them. Their only hope is to be rescued, delivered, saved by someone else. In order to be acceptable in God’s sight, they must be forgiven.

Make no mistake, your greatest problem is your sin, because it makes you an enemy of God. You may have health, wealth and happiness now, but many such people are enemies of God. And if you die an enemy of God--well, temporary paralysis is a small thing in comparison to eternal wrath. **So Jesus did not immediately heal the palsied man’s limbs, he immediately did the most urgent operation. He forgave him his sins.**

Some might think this is a small thing, but that’s only because they don’t believe in the authority of God, or else they don’t believe their sin is that bad. But the scribes there knew how big a thing it was that Jesus was claiming. They knew that he was claiming to have authority from the Creator of the universe…authority to pardon one’s offenses--and that’s never just empty harmless “talk.” When someone claims to speak for God, without God’s permission, it is blasphemy and a capital crime. It’s a type of fraud, identity theft…to steal God’s personal information and draw forgiveness funds from his account. The scribes are right to treat Jesus words seriously, because it is a serious matter to presume to speak for the living God.

And other Christian Churches are right to take a Lutheran Pastor’s words seriously. At the beginning of church, after the confession of sins, the Lutheran pastor says, “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, ***I forgive you all of your sins***.” At that moment, I am claiming that I--as a called and ordained servant--have the authority, (am “authorized”), to forgive your sins. If I am right, they you have received the greatest gift on earth as if Jesus were here giving it to you himself. But if I am wrong, then I have blasphemed, stolen God’s identity to commit fraud and should be driven out of the church. That’s what other protestant Christians believe and why they are not Confessional Lutherans. And that’s what the scribes believed and why they were not Disciples of Christ.

When Jesus forgave the paralytics sins, the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming”. In other words, he doesn’t have the authority to forgive sins. But Jesus 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**.”

Jesus proved his heavenly authority with an earthly miracle. **This was because his forgiveness, as effective as it is in heaven, is of not good to the conscience of someone who doesn’t believe it.** And so, just as he stopped the storm with a word, so he healed a man with a word. Jesus gave proof to faith, that has the authority of God on earth.

I have no such miracles to demonstrate my authority. Lutheran pastors haven’t been given charismatic gifts of healing by virtue of their call into the ministry. What they have been given is an authoritative word from the Resurrected Jesus, given to the first ministers of the church. Jesus said to them, “**Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you…Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.**”

This is why you should come to church. It’s not an empty ceremony to honor God. No, you receive ***real*** healing for your sins from the authoritative word of Jesus, spoken by his sent minister. **If you sincerely confess, then I am under orders to forgive you; and you are under orders to believe that by it, you are forgiven.** And though your new status is not seen in an increase of health, wealth, or material happiness—it is seen by God, who looks upon you favorably on account of His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for you…rose again for you,…sits in power on high for you,…has sent his minister to you,…and will come again for you…for ***all*** of you who have believed in his Name, and the authority of His Word.

O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, His mercy endures forever!