

Sermon
10/10/2021

Sermon on Matthew 9:1–8
Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 10, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Matthew records in our Gospel text the wonderful account of a paralyzed man who is brought to Jesus by several men of faith. Jesus then forgives the sick man his sins; and this without the man confessing his sin or showing any sign of repentance.

This is incredible and teaches us much about God's grace to us in Christ.

This text also teaches us the absolutely important doctrine of faith in Christ and how we are made right with God as shown by the men who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus.

They were full of faith.

Not only that, we can learn from these men how good works relate to faith. Their bringing the man to Jesus was truly a good and God-pleasing work.

The great sin of so many well-intentioned people is a false understanding of good works and thinking that it is good works and not faith that God is seeking.

Also in our text the text Jesus ended up healing the man of his paralysis. So, this man had blessing upon blessing. A double blessing. First was the forgiveness of sins which was the greatest. And then the healing of his body.

Again this shows us God's grace to us in Christ who cares not only for our souls, but even our bodies too.

Listen carefully then, consider what our text teaches about faith, good works and the forgiveness of sins.

This account of the forgiven and healed paralytic man is recorded in Mark and Luke as well as Matthew. It is an important text.

Mark tells us that it was four men of faith who carried the paralytic to Jesus. Mark and Luke also record how determined these men of faith were.

Jesus was teaching in a house and because of the crowd the friends could not reach Jesus. So, what did they do? They went up to the roof and took apart the ceiling so they could let down their friend to see Jesus...

Oh what a wonderful and active faith these four friends had in Jesus!

And friends that is just the point: faith must have an object, and these four friends had their faith in the right place, that is, they had true and saving faith because their faith and trust was placed in Christ.

Everybody talks about faith. Every religion will mention faith one way or the other. Even the unbelieving world and business talk about faith.

But what is the object of such faith? It is invariably some false god, or money, or often the object of faith is yourself. "Don't feel bad about yourself, believe in yourself! You can do it!"

But the Scripture teaches that only one kind of faith really matters, faith in Christ.

Now faith is a matter of the heart. I cannot look at a group of people and scan their faces for signs of faith. No one can tell if someone has faith depending on how nice their clothes are, or what kind of car they drive.

God, however, can look into the heart. And so it is that even when people are doing good things on the outside—tithing, praying, and so on—he can nevertheless see if they really have faith.

And so it is Jesus would condemn the scribes and Pharisees and said, *“You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me’”*

In the case of the Pharisees they did all sorts of commendable things: praying, tithing, and so on, but it was all for show, and they lacked faith and love of God in their heart and so stood condemned.

Think of saving faith in this way: that you believe and trust that in Jesus is all goodness and mercy, and you look to him for comfort from the devil, and from sin, and from disease, and the wrath of God.

Now Jesus miraculously looked into the hearts of these four men who brought the paralytic and saw that they had faith, saving faith. They had turned to Jesus for help in their troubles, this is what saving faith does.

And he went on to reward the faith of these men by giving them what they desired and even more so: he healed the paralyzed man; but even better, he forgave the man his sins.

Consider Jesus saying something like this, *“Oh four friends, you have done well. You believe in me. You trust that in me is God’s mercy and kindness and so you brought your sick friend to me. You believe that I can heal your paralyzed friend and I can. And I shall. But I can do something even better, I can forgive this man his sins and bring him peace with God and a place in heaven.”*

Now notice that it is not clear that the paralyzed man had faith himself. Martin Luther felt that he did not have faith until Jesus gave it to him by speaking to him.

In which case friends notice the grace of God, Jesus absolved the man of his sins and gave him faith through the words, *“Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven”*

And he did this without any worthiness on the part of the paralyzed man. The man did not deserve such grace, he apparently did not even believe yet, but he got from Jesus pure mercy and kindness.

Now we can and ought to understand that the man’s absolution, his salvation, and his healing was a reward for the saving faith of the other four men.

But see the incredible rich grace that God has so showered upon us all in Jesus Christ.

God has forgiven the sins of the whole world in Christ. John the Baptist confessed as such, *“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”* he said.

And so it is that faithful preachers proclaim, *“Jesus died for your sins”* and *“Christ has won for you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”*

And the Gospel call is to believe this good news. Interestingly, God gives faith—belief— through the very act of preaching this good news. You want more faith? Come to Divine Service because through preaching of the Gospel God grants faith and strengthens it.

The problem is the great majority of people scorn the Gospel because they do not want to repent their sins.

Believing in the good news of Christ and the forgiveness of sins he won for us means admitting that you are a poor miserable sinner who without God’s help stand condemned and ripe for God’s judgment.

People do not want to reveal their sins and admit how bad they are; and so they remain in unbelief.

This is what Jesus said in John 3, *"Whoever believes in [the Son] 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. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light [you could say 'hates the Gospel'] lest his works should be exposed"*

This was the sin of the scribes and Pharisees in our text. They could not bring themselves to believe that Christ was the Son of God come to take away the sins of the world.

And they remained in their unbelief and so stood condemned.

At this point in his ministry Jesus had already performed great and incredible miracles, revealing to all that he was God in the flesh. And so these Pharisees were stupid and unreasonable. If Jesus can heal the sick and raise the dead, he can also forgive sins!

And so the evil, the wickedness, the horrible sin, of the scribes in our text is their refusal to believe in Jesus.

Let that not be your sin.

Learn to humble yourself and confess your sins regularly, as God says in the Scripture, *"Confess your sins, one to another."*

Confess your sins of pride and unbelief and excessive worry, and all other sins to God of course, but also when your conscience is burdened to a good Christian friend or to your pastor. Such people can speak the same words of Christ to you, *"Take heart, your sins are forgiven"*

Now, let's turn our attention to the subject of good works. From the get-go, understand that you are saved by faith alone. This is taught throughout the Scripture.

Abraham believed God and God credited to him as righteousness. Habakkuk says that the righteous man lives by faith. Paul says we are saved by grace through faith, and it is *"not a result of works."* And Jesus himself says simply that the one who believes in him shall not die.

And so it is clear, faith alone saves.

However, faith is never alone. Where there is true faith, good works always follow, they follow automatically.

And so it is that the apostle James can say, *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"* And the answer is no!

If you say, "I believe! I believe!" But are a scoundrel, a liar, an adulterer, a law-breaker, then you are not saved, because you do not have good works which is what proves you have faith.

What are the good works we are talking about? Love for your neighbor.

Look at our text. The four men who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus were men of faith. And notice the good work they were doing: they were bringing their friend to Jesus.

And so we see a wonderful example here of faith displaying itself with good works. Faith is always active doing good things.

These men had heard of Jesus and his kindness and mercy, they believed that in him was God come to save mankind from their sins and miseries. They believed it for themselves.

They also happened to love their paralyzed friend and wished for him to be blessed by Jesus by being healed.

And Jesus rewarded their faith, by doing the very thing they hoped for and even better: he healed the paralyzed man *and* forgave him his sins.

Jesus did not reward the four men by saving them, they already had faith, they were saved. But Jesus rewarded their faith by giving them the very thing they wished for, blessings and salvation for their friend.

And so it is that we believers do good things for others, we are faithful in our vocations, and busy ourselves with good works. And we do this that ultimately our neighbor would come to know and be blessed by Christ with the word of forgiveness and true faith that saves...

Notice then how faith and good works relate to each other.

Faith in Christ comes first, and faith in Christ alone saves. But faith always works itself out in daily life by doing good works for others.

The world does not understand this; in fact, the world scoffs at this. And heresies and false religions pop up everywhere denying the biblical doctrine of faith and how it relates to good works.

The Roman church has gone on record saying if you do not have Christ and you do not believe in him, but try really hard to be good you will be saved. This is devilish nonsense!

This is enough for today.

Sermon
10/10/2021

This text shows us many good things. Most importantly God's grace to us in Christ and how he freely forgives us our sins without any worthiness on our part. That he also cares about our bodies and its health and is extra blessing.

And so may we rejoice in the good news of Christ crucified for our sins, and in thankfulness be busy with good works towards our neighbor in imitation of the faith of the four friends.

Amen.