Jesus Came To Call Sinners

Matthew 9:1-17  
Key Verse: 9:6 “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

Last week we studied the authority of Jesus. Jesus has authority to calm the storm. Jesus has authority to drive out demons. Today’s passage teaches us that Jesus has authority to forgive sins. In the last part of Matthew’s gospel Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Mt 28:18) Let us study what it means for Jesus to have authority to forgive sins. In today’s passage Jesus blesses those who come to him by faith. Jesus also teaches us what kind of attitude we should have toward his teaching. May God grant us a new heart and a new attitude toward Jesus’ teaching. Amen.

First, Jesus saw their faith (1-2) Look at verse 1. “***Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town***.” Jesus and his disciples met a huge storm on the way to the other side of the lake. Jesus calmed the storm and they arrived safely. Jesus and his disciples’ trip did not go as smoothly as they had expected. As soon as they arrived at the other side of the lake, in the region of Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men harassed them. They were violent and beside themselves because they were possessed by many demons. Jesus had compassion on them and healed them, sacrificing 2,000 pigs. The townspeople pleaded to Jesus to leave their town because of fear for their further financial loss. Jesus valued one lost soul more than the whole world. Now Jesus and his disciples came back to their own town, Capernaum, after the uneasy trip. As soon as they arrived at their town, another group of people were waiting for Jesus. This reminds us of Jesus’ words, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (8:20) Jesus had no time for a break for himself and no time to rest because he was always surrounded by the crowds who came to him for help.

Look at verse 2. “***Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.***” According to Mark’s gospel the paralyzed man was carried by his four friends. (Mk 2:3) Jesus saw their faith. What kind of faith did they have? First of all, they had faith that Jesus could heal the paralyzed man. They had a strong faith in Jesus’ healing power. Paralysis is an incurable disease like leprosy. Paralysis is the loss of function of muscles, mainly caused by nervous system damage. Christopher Reeve, the movie actor in ‘Superman’, was paralyzed in an accident. After a ten years’ struggle with his disease, he died of a sudden cardiac arrest. But the paralyzed man and his four friends in today’s passage believed that Jesus could heal him even from paralysis.

They also had faith which overcame all obstacles. According to Mark’s gospel they could not get the paralyzed to Jesus because of the crowd. (Mk 2:4, Lk 5:19) People gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door. (Mk 2:2) But these people did not give up. They did not wait, either. They went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. (Mk 2:4, Lk 5:19) They overcame the obstacle of the crowd and opened the roof in order to bring the sick man to Jesus. Jesus saw their obstacle-overcoming faith. Jesus wants us to overcome all obstacles in order to bring others to him. When we want to bring our unbelieving friends or brothers or sisters, we confront obstacles of people. Some are worried about how people might think about our behavior or how they look at us. Others are afraid of people’s opposition and rejection. They calculate this and that and become hesitant to bring others to Jesus. These four friends of the paralytic must have confronted the same challenges as we do. But they overcame all these ideas because they believed that Jesus could heal him and that this might be their last chance to bring him to Jesus. Jesus saw their genuine love and compassion for their friend as an act of faith. Jesus blessed their faith and friendship, which overcame all obstacles.

Second, take heart, son; your sins are forgiven (2-8) When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ***“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”*** (2) Here the words ‘take heart’ means ‘cheer up’ or ‘be encouraged’. Jesus encouraged the paralytic to have hope for being healed. Jesus did not heal him right away by touching him. Instead he said to him, “your sins are forgiven.” Jesus wanted to forgive his sins first before he healed him from paralysis. Jesus saw forgiving his sin as being a more urgent and important matter than healing his physical sickness. Of course sin is not always a cause or reason for our sickness. Still, Jesus saw his sin as his essential and fundamental problem.

What is sin? Sin literally means ‘missing the target’ or ‘falling short.’ Paul said in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” According to this word, sin is unbelief in and disobedience to God. Sin is breaking God’s law. It is also doing something wrong against our conscience. Sin separates men from God. Sin is a spiritual disease which makes our heart and soul paralyzed and leads us to death. The price of sin is death. (Ro 6:23a) To the eyes of Jesus, what kind of a sinner was the paralytic man? We don’t know why and how he became paralyzed. He must have suffered from his sickness for long time. He must have blamed his parents and complained to God about his sickness. He complained to others when they didn’t help him. He hated those who looked down on him. He was hateful and ungrateful. His heart was crooked, crippled, even paralyzed by his sin.

Jesus said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus forgave all his sins. Sins are gone when they are forgiven by God. What was the response of the people to Jesus’ words? Look at verse 3. ***“At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!***” Other gospels add their words, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk 2:21, Lk 5:21) Blasphemy is sin against God through offensive and irreverent words and actions. The teachers of the law thought that Jesus, as a mere man, was blaspheming by considering himself equal with God. Indeed, God alone has authority on earth to forgive men’s sin.

How did Jesus say to them? Look at verses 4-6a. “***Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins…***” Jesus knew what the teachers of the law were thinking in their hearts because he is God himself who knows all things about all men. (Jn 2:25) For the teachers of the law and to us, to say ‘Your sins are forgiven” or to say “Get up and walk” is not easy at all. Both of these are ‘mission impossible’ with us. But with Jesus all things are possible. ***So Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.***” (6b) What happened to the man? ***Then the man got up and went home***. (7) A miracle happened! The paralyzed man got up and took his mat and went home in front of the crowd. By raising the paralyzed man Jesus proved that he has authority on earth to forgive sins. Look at verse 8. “***When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man***.”

The fact that Jesus has authority to forgive our sins gives us a great hope. Jesus is God who can forgive our sins. Whoever comes to Jesus can be forgiven. There is no sin which cannot be forgiven by Jesus. 1 John 1:7 says, “…the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” Today each of us may hear Jesus’ voice of salvation, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” “Daughter, your sins are forgiven.” Whoever comes to Jesus and calls his name will be saved. (Ac 2:21, Ro 10:13) John 3:17 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Third, Jesus came to call sinners (9-13) “***As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.***” (9) Other synoptic gospels call Matthew ‘Levi’. Levi was a tax collector. Who were tax collectors? Tax collectors were the modern IRS agents. In the first century tax collectors were regarded as public sinners like prostitutes or thieves or gentiles. This was because they extorted money from their own people. In order to make collecting taxes easy, the Roman government hired tax collectors among their native people. After assigning to the Roman government a certain amount of money, tax collectors kept the rest in their pockets. Matthew, called Levi, was sitting in his tax booth when Jesus was passing by. He had heard about Jesus. He wanted to know about Jesus. He desired to talk with Jesus and spend time with Jesus, but he couldn’t because he was a tax collector. People kept tax collectors away from them. They despised tax collectors and hated them. When people met him by chance on the street, they ran away as hurriedly as if they had met a leper. Matthew was lonely because no one wanted to be his friend.

While Matthew was sitting at the tax booth, he heard Jesus calling him, “Follow me.” Matthew doubted his ears. Me? Jesus called ME? Jesus had eye contact with Matthew. Yes, Matthew. It’s you! Jesus’ calling ‘Follow me’ washed away his sadness and loneliness. Jesus’ calling healed Matthew’s brokenness and wounds caused by people. Jesus’ calling gave him bright hope for the future. This is the moment which Matthew had been waiting since he started work as a tax collector. No one asked him to follow them. All rejected him and kept him away from them. But Jesus called him and invited him. “Follow me”. ‘Follow me’ means ‘Be my disciple.’ Matthew got up and immediately followed Jesus.

Look at verse 10. “***While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.***” Here we learn about Matthew’s dramatic change. He opened his house and invited Jesus, his disciples, and even other sinners to a dinner. Hosting Jesus to a dinner means opening his heart to Jesus and all others. He was not lonely anymore because Jesus was with him. He was not sad any longer because the presence of Jesus was heaven to him. God’s presence in Matthew’s life was special. Matthew’s gospel starts with Immanuel God Jesus “God with us” (1:23) and ends with Jesus’ command, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (28:20) Matthew was lonely, but his loneliness was a space for God’s presence.

Matthew’s house was full of joy and thanks. It was the kingdom of heaven, the heavenly banquet, because of Jesus’ presence and Matthew’s repentance. All who were invited were happy and joyful. But there was a very unhappy group of people in Matthew’s house. Who were they? They were the Pharisees. Look at verses 11. “***When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners***?” The Pharisees thought that Jesus became unclean because he ate with tax collectors and sinners.

How did Jesus answer them? Look at verses 12, 13. “***On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners***.” Here we learn the purpose of Jesus’ coming to the world. Jesus came to call sinners. Jesus came to call sinners and make them whole. Jesus came to heal the sick and make them whole. Jesus saw all men as sick people who need a doctor. The Pharisees thought that they were righteous and healthy men who didn’t need a doctor. Jesus didn’t call the self-righteous, but broken, wounded, sick, and lonely sinners like Matthew. Jesus is the God of mercy. He is full of compassion for sinners. Praise Jesus who came to call sinners and to save the lost!

One bright young man thought he was a good person. In fact, he was an honor student, and he was a hardworking and responsible man. Morally he was flawless. But he came to realize that he was sick with sin, the sin of selfishness, pride, and self-righteousness. When he heard Jesus’ words, he repented and accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord. Jesus healed him from sin-sickness and called him to be his disciple. Now he serves the Lord Jesus as General Director of UBF church worldwide.

Fourth, pour new wine into new wineskins (14-17) In these verses Jesus teaches us what kind of attitude we should have toward Jesus and his teaching. Look at verse 14. “***Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast***?” In Jesus’ day the Pharisees and pious people fasted twice a week. (Lk 18:12) But Jesus’ disciples didn’t fast. They didn’t have time for fasting because of the ceaseless work of Jesus. In some sense they fasted everyday because they didn’t have a proper meal hour while serving the demanding crowds. Jesus answered the question with another reason why Jesus’ disciple didn’t have to fast. Look at verse 15. “***Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he was with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.***” In this verse Jesus compares himself to a bridegroom and his disciples to guests. According to Jewish custom people didn’t fast during a wedding feast. A wedding is a joyful occasion. Jesus’ disciples didn’t have to fast because of the bridegroom Jesus. But when Jesus is arrested and crucified, they would fast.

In verses 16 Jesus compares his teaching to a new patch and the old Jewish traditions to old garment. No one puts a new patch on an old garment because it looks awkward and ruins the garment. In verse 17 Jesus compares himself to new wine and his disciples to new wineskin, the old legalistic tradition to old wine and the Pharisees to old wineskins. Look at verses 16,17. “***No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved***.” To the eyes of the legalistic Pharisees, tax collectors must not be welcomed. They must be treated as sinners. But Jesus welcomed them, ate with them, and made friends with them. His disciples didn’t fast, but were full of joy and hope. They were unschooled, but full of vision. They were poor, but lived like rich people. They were flexible, dynamic, fresh, creative, explosive, fun, and ambitious like new wineskins. They were learning every day. So to them every day was a new day and every word of Jesus became a new teaching.

Jesus teaches us here that we should become new wineskins in order to hold new wine. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but his teaching should always be new. In order to receive Jesus’ teaching new and fresh, we must be changed. We need a new heart and a new attitude toward Jesus’ teaching. We have to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to accept Jesus’ teaching for our own. Then our heart and soul will be like a river overflowing with living water. Let us pray to God for a new heart, a new spirit, and a new message from the old story of Jesus. Amen.

In today’s passage we learned that Jesus has authority to forgive sins. We may hear Jesus’ voice, “children; your sins are forgiven.” Jesus also blessed those who came to him by faith. Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, because Jesus came to call sinners. Whoever responds to Jesus’ calling will be changed. Whoever invites Jesus into their hearts will be saved. I pray that we may all invite Jesus in our hearts and eat with him and live with him. Then we will be new wineskins who hold the new wine Jesus throughout our life time. Amen.