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We do live in turbulent times. In the shadow of the school shootings in Parkland, Florida, where 17 students lost their lives, four more shootings have occurred in the U.S, for a total of 12 since January 1st. And we stand in that same shadow, as threats and school lockdowns have occurred in BC and Canada. If you ask someone what humanity’s greatest problem is, you will get a different answer depending upon who you ask. Some would say it is the trauma a person goes through in their childhood. Others would say it would a lack of self-esteem or so much self-esteem we’ve become pathological narcissists. Still others would argue it’s the struggle to find one’s identity, the inability to find one’s “so-called” true self in a world that offers endless identity options. A medical doctor might say mankind’s greatest problem is the wear-and tear and disorders and diseases of the human body. A social worker might believe its the moral corruption of our culture and society. A politician might say its having the wrong people serving in office or its not having the right policies in place. And a philosopher would most likely describe humanity’s greatest problem in terms that only another philosopher could understand. But the reality to all of these opinions cease to make any sense when it comes to God’s opinion regarding the greatest problem of mankind. Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God cuts through all the smoke and goes to the core of humanity’s problem – which is the problem of sin. The story of Adam and Eve is not a myth developed by mankind to explain the origin of evil. Evil extends prior to creation of Adam and Eve to the rising pride of the devil – also known as Satan or Lucifer, we read of in Isaiah 14:12-14.

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” Isaiah 14:12-14

The story of Adam and Eve does not just the record of the entrance of evil into our world, it also shows us the consequences of Adam’s fall into sin. God created men and women to have relationship with God by living in communion with God in order to do God’s will on the earth by taking care of what God had created on earth. But when Adam and Eve rebelled against God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - sin entered their hearts and they turned their backs on God, and death entered their lives and our lives and everyone’s lives. Our human nature has been corrupted ever since that event. Romans 3:23 tells us, “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” and Romans 6:23 says “*the wages of sin is death.*” Death is a result of being separated from our life-giving Creator. Physical death is the separation of our living spirit from our body, and spiritual death is the separation of our soul from God. Adam’s sin also put a curse on human physical existence. We see that curse personally in that our bodies begin to physically die as soon as we are conceived. Chromosomes break apart; they malfunction and cause genetic disorders. The cells in our body wear out and die and have to be replaced at an incredible rate. Research has shown that 75-90% of the “*dust*” in an average home is dead skin cells that have been shed and replaced by new cells. It is estimated that 30,000-40,000 skin cells fall off an average human *per minute*, which would ultimately mean that a total 8.8 pounds of dead skin cells would fall off our bodies every year. Cancer is nothing more than cells that have gone wild and no longer reproduce themselves according to the bodies design, but in ways harmful to the body.

The curse of sin not only causes our bodies to degenerate, but we are also attacked by all kinds of diseases including parasites, fungi, bacteria, and viruses. These physical maladies function apart from God's original design. All of creation was affected by Adam's sin. Nothing in the universe functions the way God originally designed. We see this right away after the fall when God cursed the earth with weeds sprouting up wherever plants beneficial to man used to grow. In Genesis 4:17-19 God told Adam: *"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."* In Romans 8:19-21 the apostle Paul speaks of how the creation groans under the weight of the curse of Adam, while it waits for release from the curse: *"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* Mankind's greatest problem is sin - morally, physically and spiritually - and death is the consequence of sin, in rebelling against and rejecting God.

In our text for today the Word of God reveals the solution to humanity's greatest problem. In the context of the apostle Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as Sovereign King, framed within the concept of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts of those who surrender their hearts lives to Jesus as Lord and Savior - we will see, how it is, that we can be *"set free from"* the *"bondage"* of sin's *"corruption."* We will also find out, in the context of the Sermon in the Mount, where Jesus spoke of what Kingdom character looks like in those who truly follow him, as well as how Kingdom conduct should flow out of those who possess Kingdom character - what it means to *"obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* And so today - in light of Jesus' divine authority as Sovereign King over the universe, who revealed his power over the physical world of humanity by miraculous healings; and his power over the natural world by calming a violent, deadly, storm in the sea; and his power over the supernatural world of evil by casting demons out of those who were possessed of the darkness of evil - we will now see another revelation of Jesus' divine authority as Sovereign King in *exercising his power over our fallen world by the sovereign, supernatural work of forgiving sin.* Unforgiven sin is Satan's best friend and mankind's chief enemy. We all have of sin problem. Forgiveness of sin is a gift of God.

"And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city" (Matthew 9:1). Picking up where we left off last week we see that Jesus, after being rejected by the Gentiles on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, travel back across the lake to the west side of the lake to *"his own city."* The men of Gadarenes had plainly indicated that they did not want Jesus in their part of the country - after finding out that that Jesus had miraculously cast out over 6000 demons out of two men into 2000 pigs, who then ran off a cliff and drown in the water. And so our Lord leaves, he does not linger where he is not wanted. In the parallel passages to this event in Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26 we are told that Jesus had been busy in another village on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and his disciples had traveled by boat back to *"his own city."* Jesus' *"own city"* at this point in his ministry is no longer Nazareth. Matthew 4:13 and Mark 2:1 both point out that Jesus had left Nazareth and was now residing in Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is where Peter, Andrew, James, and John were from.

Mark and Luke also point out that it was several days after Jesus had come back to Capernaum that word got out and the crowds started arriving again. Matthew does not say anything about the crowd, he just immediately points out the central player in the event that took place that day. Mark 2:2 points out that the crowd that day was very large, *"And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door. And he was preaching the word to them."* Jesus was busy preaching/teaching the people, but there were so many that they were even crowded at the doorway. Luke 5:17 tells us that among these people packed into that house that day there were, *"Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes) sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem."*

“And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed” (Matthew 9:2a). Mark and Luke give us more detailed information about this. Mark tells us that it was four men who helped this paralytic. We do not know if they were relatives or just friends. We also do not know if the paralyzed man was young or old. All we know is that he could not help himself and had to rely on others. Luke tells us that these men tried to find a way into the house so that they could bring the man in and lay him before Jesus, but the crowd was so great they could not get through to Jesus. The men then decided to go up to the roof, make a hole and lower the man through it. Now this is not as strange as it sounds at first. The roofs of the houses were flat and used as part of the living area especially in the warm afternoon where you could cool off in the afternoon breeze by being up on the roof. Stairs were provided in most homes in order to give access to the roof. *So the men are not in some precarious spot where they were all likely to fall off.* The roofs were made of a lattice work covered over with tiles, and then a layer of mud would be placed on top which would make it waterproof. That is why Mark records that the men *“made an opening”* and Luke records that they *“let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.”* This all tells us that the crowd of people in general were unconcerned with the paralytic as they would not make a way for him to be carried in and that his friends were determined to get him to Jesus.

“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven’” (Matthew 9:2b). Jesus had already cured paralysis before (4:24; 8:6) and the four men who carried the paralytic had no doubt heard of his miraculous powers and *“Jesus saw their faith.”* But rather than healing the paralytic Jesus uses the occasion to show that *he is the solution to more than just the problem of the man’s paralysis.* Jesus is also the solution for the ultimate cause of all paralysis - and so, Jesus *“said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’”* Jesus, in being God, knew that the man’s body was paralyzed, but he also knew that his soul was also, because he did not know Jesus. The man’s spiritual state was Jesus’ first and greatest concern. Thus, Jesus spoke the incredible words, in the present not future tense, *“your sins are forgiven.”* Jesus’ bold statement declared that He has power to forgive sin because forgiveness of sin is possible only by God. And everyone was shocked.

Jesus was quite aware that the Scribes and Pharisees were present, and he knew what was in their hearts and what they were thinking about this disabled man. Jesus uses this opportunity to demonstrate to them his authority to forgive sin, revealing to everyone there that he the only solution to and any and all of humanity’s greatest problems. A truth from this story is that those who are handicapped have always suffered social stigma and neglect, but in the Jewish culture of that time, this was compounded by the belief of most Jews believed all handicaps, all disease, all illness and all affliction were the direct result of somebody’s sin – and so they always tended to want to find the afflicted person to blame. Such was the point in the disciple’s question to Jesus in John 9:2 about the man born blind, *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* We see this also in that Job suffered greatly, but his affliction was compounded by his so-called friends who added to his grief by saying things like, *“who that was innocent ever perished”* (Job 4:7). The thought was – and sometimes still is today - that you get just what you deserve, and if you are severely afflicted it must be because you have severely sinned.

The Bible does tell us that sometimes that is true. We see that in Galatians 6:7-8: *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”* God’s Word does tell us that God’s wrath is the natural consequences of our sin. Romans 1:8 tells us that *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”* We do see that in our world today, in regards to sexuality. At the beginning of creation God set the standard of a monogamous relationship between a man and woman. But today we see that when God’s standard is not followed, the result is all kinds of afflictions, illnesses and diseases, - some a direct cause of personal sin. In general, there are numerous causes to our struggles. Some afflictions, illnesses and diseases can be the consequence of our own sin and some are because of what sinful people afflict upon us and some just because we live in a fallen, sinful world.

It is most likely that the paralyzed man held the same view as the religious leaders. He probably thought that his condition was direct punishment for some kind of sin he or his parents, or his grandparents committed and that thought that would have surely added to his suffering. The fact that the man was so severely afflicted that he was paralyzed made him a picture of the *effect* of sinfulness. In this Jesus saw that the man's greatest need was not physical healing, but forgiveness of sin. He needed his sin problem to be dealt with before the health problem could ever be taken care of. And so Jesus said to the man: *'Take heart, (literally "do not be afraid") my son (literally – "my child"); your sins are forgiven (literally – "your sins are dismissed")'* And the sins of the paralyzed man were immediately "sent away" by Jesus.

"And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming'" (Matthew 9:3). This accusation of blasphemy is clarified in both Mark and Luke where we read that the scribes and Pharisees were reasoning in their hearts, *"Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* In this accusation they were correct in one aspect of what they were thinking, in that *only God can forgive sins*. In Isaiah 43:25 God proclaims: *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."* But while the scribes and the Pharisees were right in their belief that only *"God alone"* could forgive sin, they were *incorrect* in their accusation that Jesus was *"blaspheming"* (defaming, slandering, reviling) God – because by claiming the right to forgive sin, Jesus was claiming a privilege that belongs to God alone. The Jews were correct in realizing this statement as potential blasphemy and Jesus as a potential blasphemer, but they would not allow themselves to come to that logical fork in the road of thought. They were judging Jesus based not on the facts, but on their own fallen, sinful, evil motives, They judged Jesus out of their personal prejudice instead of on the evidence. And so Jesus courageously confronted them. He would not and will not ever compromise with sin just to be nice or civil. Jesus would not and will not dilute truth just to get along or be more likeable.

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, 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." Matt. 9:4-6

We read here of Jesus divine sovereignty in that it is *"God alone"* who know what goes on in the *"hearts"* and *"thoughts"* of a human being. Jesus knew what they were believing and thinking and so He scolds them: *"Why do you think evil in your hearts?"* Jesus knew that scribes and Pharisees believed that Jesus was egotistically pronouncing forgiveness - *because they didn't believe that Jesus had the divine power or sovereign authority to heal the broken body of the paralytic*. Jesus responded to their unbelief by comparing their belief in the *impossibility of healing* the paralytic to another *impossibility of forgiving the sins* of the paralytic: *"For which is easier, TO SAY, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or TO SAY, 'Rise and walk?'"* Jesus asks this rhetorical question to challenge their reasoning. He makes the point that he was displaying a supernatural power consistent with the long-promised anticipated Savior/Messiah, who would not only heal physical infirmities but also heal he spiritual disease of sin. The question, *"Which is easier TO SAY?"* was to draw a comparison between the difficulty of *saying without proving* and *saying what is immediately proved or disproved*. Anyone can SAY the words *"Your sins are forgiven,"* but there would be no way to PROVE whether anything took place. But if one said: *"Rise, pick up your bed and go home,"* the power and authority behind that statement can be verified or denied by watching whether or not the person is able to pick up their bed and walk home.

Jesus' authority as Sovereign King and long-promised anticipated Savior/Messiah to forgive was being inwardly challenged by his critics. Jesus' words - even after the multiple healings and miracles that displayed the authority of his divine power - were not sufficient to convince these skeptics. And so now that he had their attention, He gave a second command, which is certainly more difficult: *"Rise, pick up your bed and go home."* Matthew then tell us: *"And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men"* (Matthew 8:7-8) – proving that Jesus was more than just a mere man, but none other than the Sovereign King of all the universe.

In Luke 5:25-26 we read that after Jesus commanded the paralytic to stand up, pick up his bed and go home: *“Immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’”* Mark 5:12 tells us *“he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”* In miraculously doing what was more difficult to say, who would dispute the authority to forgive sin to the One who could accomplish such an impossible thing - as dramatically healing a man with severe paralysis. No charge of blasphemy could be leveled against the One, who by simply speaking a word, could heal the severest of sicknesses. Surely he could also be granted God’s power to forgive sin.

The crowds’ reaction to the healing left no mistake that Jesus’ authority came from God. They praised God that He had given such authority to mere *“men.”* *“To men”* indicates they thought Jesus one of the prophets, like Elijah. They had not yet conceded that He was the Messiah, the promised Savior, the very Son of God who, as God, had the power to forgive sin. If they had, there would have been great movements of the Spirit leading to confession, repentance and salvation on that day. But why is it that we are more eager to see healing miracles than miracles of forgiveness? The truth is, far too often we focus on the powerful hand of Jesus as the Great Physician to heal us physically – because the focus of our hearts, minds, thoughts and souls is on our physical lives more than our spiritual lives. But we need to remember that Jesus is first and foremost our Lord and Savior. He has power to forgive spiritual sickness in the form of sin. Jesus saw this in the paralyzed man. He saw that the man desperately needed a greater healing than just physical; the man desperately needed spiritual health and healing.

This can and does happen to us too. In fact, we can be perfectly healthy in a physical sense, but severely paralyzed spiritually. We may be able to walk physically but we are paralyzed in our walk with God because we are paralyzed by guilt over a sin or a series of sins or by perceived sins which are not sins or by refusing to acknowledge our sins or by the refusing to forgive those who sin against us. We can have strongholds in our life that keep us emotionally, mentally, morally, physically and spiritually paralyzed. If that is you today know that the authority to forgive sin is not arbitrary on God’s part. It is not based on God deciding to forget all the wrong you have done. God is not just a loving God, a merciful God, and a gracious God - He is also a holy God and a just God, and simply *“forgetting”* about our sins against Him and others cannot satisfy His justice. And so God sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, into the world as a man, to live a perfect life, and pay the penalty for our sin by sacrificing his life on the cross in our place so we might be forgiven. In Colossians 2:13-14 we read that, *“God made us alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”* Jesus sacrificially died on the cross as a substitute as the payment for the penalty of our sin. It’s on the basis that Jesus offers us forgiveness.

Charles Spurgeon once said: *“If God does not heal us or someone we love, remember that physical healing is not Jesus’ only concern. He offers emotional healing and spiritual healing for those who listen to Him and come to know Him personally. For all those who are saved by His grace, complete healing of body, mind, soul and spirit is only a matter of time.”* The people of Jesus’ day would have declared the man’s greatest healing was from paralysis but Christ went to the very root cause of every disease and sickness that has come upon this fallen world. The greatest healing we can know is that our souls. Our greatest problem is sin and our greatest need is forgiveness. Jesus has graciously provided for both.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Romans 8:1-5

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:1-11

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
 who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 who redeems your life from the pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 who satisfies you with good
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

*As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
 and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant
 and remember to do his commandments.
The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*

*Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!
Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will!
Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion.
Bless the LORD, O my soul! Psalm 103:1-22*

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