

## "POWER ON EARTH TO FORGIVE SINS."

– MARK 2:1-12. – FEBRUARY 14. –

AFTER the busy experiences of the Sabbath day, referred to in our last lesson, our Lord withdrew from Capernaum to a desert place for private communion with the Father. Later his four disciples joined him, as also others, who urged his return to Capernaum, but instead he went for a time to other cities and villages of Galilee. Our lesson marks his return to Capernaum, where the people soon learned of his presence and gathered in large numbers to see and hear him.

It was probably at Peter's house, which in construction was

### **LIKE OTHER ORIENTAL HOUSES,**

that the gathering was held. Many of these houses are built with a central court or yard, from which access is gained to the various rooms, which receive their light and ventilation from the yard and are usually one story in height. Oft-times a part of this yard is covered with a tile roof, making of it a kind of veranda. The outside wall extends two or three feet above the roof, which is reached by an outside stairway and in summer is the usual sleeping place. Some of the incidents of this lesson imply that this was the arrangement of the house in which our Lord was stopping, the multitude coming around by the door in the courtyard, and our Lord probably addressing them from the further end of the veranda or covered part of the court.

"He preached the Word unto them." How we would have enjoyed hearing him! how we would like even now to have a stenographic report of his "Wonderful Words of Life"! His text must have been from the Old Testament, as the New was not yet written. Quite probably his message was respecting sin and the defilement which comes to humanity through sin, and the penalty which God has prescribed, namely, death. We can mention many excellent texts

for such a discourse, as, for instance, "Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Or the types of sin and its cleansing, as represented in the treatment of the lepers under the Mosaic Law; or the types of the Law showing the necessity for the sin offerings and the work of the atonement day, as being the blotting out of sins and the reconciliation of the people to God; or the type of sin represented in the fiery serpents of the wilderness and the cure for their venom in a look at the brazen serpent on the pole, typifying our Lord. In any event we may be sure that the grand truths of the Gospel were gloriously set forth by him who "spake as never man spake."

While the preaching was in progress, four men bearing on a stretcher a palsied companion approached the house; but the throng at the door, intent upon hearing and seeing, would not make way, even in the prospect of seeing a miracle performed. Full of faith, the bearers carried the stretcher up the stairway to the top of the low roof over to the veranda: some of the tiling was lifted and, apparently without ropes, the stretcher was handed to those below, immediately in front of the place where the Lord stood preaching. Of course

### **THE PREACHING WAS INTERRUPTED.**

However, the Lord evidently interwove the circumstances of the interruption with the lessons of his discourse. He quietly waited and mentally reflected upon the faith of the man and his companions while the sick one was thus being lowered before him, and then said to the sick, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." We doubt not that in the Lord's providence this declaration of the forgiveness of sins came in opportunely with Jesus' previous discourse. Here was an opportunity to show that the great difficulty afflicting the whole human family is sin, without which there would be no sickness, no pain, no death, no separation from God. The Lord did not ask the man respecting his previous course in life, nor wait for him to express sorrow for sin, but handed him a pardon as a gift or benefaction. One thing, however, he did have – a condition indispensable to pardon – he had faith, faith

in the Lord as the sent of God; and at that time he could have had no greater faith than this, no more particular understanding of how the grace of God extends toward us through Jesus. [R3314 : page 40]

This teaches us several lessons: First, how important faith is in the Lord's estimation – he asked for faith, not for works – though of course he knew, and we all know, that if true faith were exercised corresponding works would naturally and unavoidably follow. Another lesson it taught is the willingness of the Lord to forgive sins, to ignore them, to deal with us as though we were free from sin. This, however, does not mean a total blotting out of the sins, so that they could not be revived by our loss of faith or misconduct. The parable of the two servants who were forgiven a large debt, and one of whom was subsequently cast into prison for the very debt he had been forgiven, because he did not exercise mercy toward his fellow-servant, is a proof of this. Forgiveness extended to us now on account of faith is of the nature of a covering or hiding of our sins. As the prophet expresses the matter, "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered – unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." (Psa. 32:1,2.) Our sins are not imputed so long as we would renounce them and seek to follow the Lord in faith and in sincerity. The time for the blotting out of sins, their complete eradication, is future, as the Apostle Peter declared. Our sins will be blotted out when we receive our new perfect bodies, in which there will remain no trace of the weaknesses, imperfections and maladies that came upon us because of original and subsequent sin. – Acts 3:19-21.

### **"WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS BUT GOD ONLY?"**

Our Lord perceived the thoughts in the hearts of some of his hearers in connection with this declaration that the sick man's sins were forgiven him, and he answered the objection – not specifically and in detail, but in a general way. He asked them to bear witness as to which would be the easier thing to do, and which therefore would be the more complete test of his divine authority and powers. They

had thought that the forgiveness of sins would represent greater power and authority than the doing of miracles, but our Lord illustrated how much easier it is to declare the forgiveness of sins than to perform a cure, and then he did perform a cure as proof that he did have the authority to forgive sins. He said to the palsied man, "Arise, take up thy bed and go thy way." And immediately the miracle took place; the sick man was cured and able to bear away his couch on which he had previously been carried.

The question of the scribes may arise in some minds today [R3315 : page 40] and we confess that it is not entirely answered even by the miracle. The miracle shows us that the Lord did have the power to forgive sins, but it does not explain to us the philosophy of the arrangement by which our Lord Jesus was permitted to suspend the condemnation of sin which the Father had imposed. We suggest that he had authority to do this, to pronounce the forgiveness of the sins, because he had come into the world to be the Redeemer of mankind – because he had already made a covenant of consecration unto death at the time of his baptism – because at the very moment when he made this declaration he was in process of giving his life, "laying down his life," for man's redemption. Our Lord's authority, therefore, is well established. He had already done much of the work necessary for the blotting out of sins; he had left the glory which he had with the Father; he had become a man; he had consecrated his life; he had partially given it, and very shortly the sacrifice would be complete at Calvary. On the strength of all these facts, our Lord was evidently justified in declaring the man's sins forgiven.

### **CAN OTHERS FORGIVE SINS?**

We may perhaps put an old thought in a newer and more startling form when we say that others besides Jesus can forgive sins. We do not refer to the claim of power by Catholic priests that, through the operation of forms and ceremonies and the sacrifices of

the mass, they are commissioned to forgive sins; but we do refer to the commission of God's consecrated people, the Royal Priesthood. These, as the members of the body of Christ, as ambassadors for God, as mouthpieces of the Lord, are fully qualified to declare to people today – to all true believers in Jesus – the very words which he addressed to the paralytic of this lesson. We have said, and do say, and will continue to say to all penitent believers in Jesus – to all who have come to a knowledge of God's grace in Christ, and accepted him and his Word – to these we are privileged to declare, Thy sins are forgiven thee; – thy sins are covered by the sacrifice of Calvary, and if thou wilt continue steadfast in faith and in obedience, thy sins shall ultimately be completely blotted out, and thou shalt have a share in the glories of thy Lord, in resurrection power, free from every sin and stain and blemish. – Acts 3:19.

Which is the greater power, to work miracles upon the natural body or to work a miracle of grace in the heart? – to straighten crooked limbs or to straighten out moral characters? – to heal those palsied and benumbed in body or to apply the vitalizing current of Truth, which will vivify and quicken those who are morally comatose, benumbed by sin, deadened to righteousness, truth, goodness, etc.? – to open blind natural eyes or to open the eyes of men's understanding, that they may see the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the divine character and plan?

Again we hold, as in our last lesson, that the great Head of the Church has given to the members of his body greater works to do than those which he did; because under his blessing and guidance we are living in the time when, under the anointing of his Spirit, it is possible to do these higher and greater works.

### **THE LESSON OF HELPFULNESS.**

Several other lessons may be drawn from this narrative. One of these is the propriety of helping to bring one another to the Lord, to the Truth, to the influences and benefits and blessings sure to come

from the contact with Jesus [R3315 : page 41] or the members of his body. A very large proportion of the blessing which has been bestowed upon the Lord's people through the Gospel has come through individual and private effort. In saying this we do not make light of preaching, studying, tract distribution, etc., etc., – we are glad to believe that the Lord uses all of these to carry forward the Truth and to make it known, – nevertheless, we believe that there is an individual work also to be done, a personal work. We advise that all of the Lord's people, while giving diligence to use opportunities for general service of the kinds mentioned, do not forget nor neglect to look for opportunities for individual service in bringing their friends and neighbors to the Lord and into contact with the Truth.

Many in the world hear about Jesus, hear about the great Jubilee times of restitution coming, hear about the blessing of all the families of the earth through the Seed of Abraham, hear about the call and the election of the Seed of Abraham at the present time, and have the desire to approach the Lord and to make consecration and to obtain a share in the blessing that is now being offered, yet they are morally paralyzed. They need some one to help them into the Lord's presence, to help them to the point of making a consecration of their all to the Lord. They have faith to some extent, yet they are weak in other respects, and they need others who are stronger than themselves to assist them.

To what extent are we each and all zealously using the opportunities which the Lord has put in our power to glorify his name and to bless our sin-sick neighbors, not only by telling them about Jesus and his wonderful words of life, but to what extent are we additionally helping them to come to him? There are various ways in which we may assist, by word, by letter, by invitation to meetings, etc. However, one necessary element in all help is that our own course of conduct must be in accord with that which we commend to others. If we ourselves have been to Jesus and learned of him and caught some of his self-sacrifice and love, we will be the better able

to help others who desire to come to him. They who would be the ambassadors of the Lord in telling men of the forgiveness of sins and the privileges of sonship in the present time, must themselves manifest not only a faith in their own forgiveness but, additionally, must show a transformation of life in progress, evidencing the fact that they are now the friends of God, that they have been with Jesus and learned of him.

It is one thing to "bore" our friends and children with our religion, and quite another thing to manifest always such an interest in their spiritual welfare as would draw them to us for assistance when, under divine providences, they might desire to seek the Lord. Our experience teaches that many parents, otherwise loving and careful, neglect this matter, and hold themselves too much aloof from their children, particularly on religious matters. Furthermore, there is a delicacy on this subject with the sincere, lest they should be thought hypocritical, that makes them more diffident than on most other subjects. And many desirous of a word or two of encouragement and sympathy, have approached friends for advice, and have been repulsed by a joke or a worldly spirit. Every member of Christ, every Royal Priest, should remember that his first business in life, aside from his own development, is to help others to the Redeemer. Let us each strive this year, more earnestly than ever, to let our lights shine out, so that those seeking the Lord may be drawn to us as his representatives; and that in coming to us they may not be repulsed by our words or manners, but find us anticipating, sympathetic, helpful.

