

GOOD CHEER FROM FORGIVEN SIN

“And, behold they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”

Matthew 9:2

THIS man was paralyzed in body, but he was very far from being paralyzed in mind. From the little we know of him, he would appear to have been earnest, resolute, energetic and persevering. You very seldom find persons attempting more for you than you, yourself, desire—and if the four men who carried this paralytic person were so zealous in getting him under the Lord’s notice, we may be morally certain that he, himself, was even more set upon it. His bearers would never have gone the length of breaking up the roof and letting him down upon the heads of the crowd unless he had urged them to do so. He was something more than passive under such heroic treatment! If he did not suggest the plan, he evidently entered into it most willingly.

Suppose it to be your own case, my dear Hearer. Are you not persuaded that if, broken in spirit, you were to say to your friends, “let me alone, my case is hopeless,” few would dream of exciting themselves to desperate efforts on your behalf, but would let you lie in your apathy, according to your request? It is a rule that you must, yourself, be energetic if you are to make other people energetic on your behalf and, therefore, it seems to me that this man had a resolute and intense spirit—and had such influence over his friends that he inspired them by his eagerness, having first won them by his importunity. He besought them to aid him in what had become a necessity of life—he must see Jesus. He must be brought before the great Healing One, somehow or other, and because of his personal eagerness and pressing importunity, his friends made up their minds to help him.

We may yet discover a little more about this palsied man and it will not be mere conjecture, for, by certain rules established by observation and experience, we may often learn much of a character from very small circumstances. Our Lord Jesus was accustomed to address the persons who came to Him very much according to their mental condition. When one poor man, half imbecile in spirit, was brought to him, He asked him, “Will you be made whole?” He was so listless as barely to have the will to be restored and Christ’s saying, “Will you be made whole?” is evidence to us that even spoke with some view to them, yet, in the main, His first thoughts were concerning His patient and He generally spoke with an eye to that patient’s case. I gather, therefore, from the fact that Jesus said to this man, “Son, be of good cheer,” that he was very greatly depressed in spirit and unhappy—and when He added not, “Your palsy shall be removed,” but “Your sins are forgiven you,” we are quite safe in concluding that the cause of the man’s sadness was his sin, for which beyond all things else he desired pardon! Our Lord went straight to the root of the mischief—the man was sad, and so He cheered him. The man was sad about his sin and so He granted him forgiveness. His palsy would, secondarily, be a fountain of bitter grief to the sick man and, therefore, the Savior dealt with it in the second place. But first and foremost, over and above all grief for his infirmity, was his painful sense of unforgiven sin. It is not likely that he told his bearers about that, for they might not have been able to sympathize with such a spiritual necessity—to them he spoke of his affliction, not of his repentance, for while they would pity him for his palsy, they might have ridiculed him for his guilty conscience. The Lord, however, knew the heart’s grief without telling—He read it in the sufferer’s looks. The great Sin-Forgiver knew right well that earnest gaze which meant, “Be merciful to me, a sinner,” and He met that wistful glance with a smile and the cheering words, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

I suppose that the patient was a young man, for the word, "Son," would hardly have been spoken by our Lord to a man older than Himself. I gather that he was a man of childlike faith, for Jesus did not call people His "sons and daughters" unless there was something of the childlike spirit about them. He was evidently a man of simple-hearted faith who fully believed that Christ could forgive his sin and so it happened to him, after the rule of the Kingdom, "According to your faith, be it unto you."

The case stood thus—The paralyzed man was burdened with sin, weighed down and oppressed in conscience. This urged him to seek the Savior. "I must see the Christ," he said. His passionate earnestness extracts a promise from the neighbors that they will take him to Jesus. He begs them to do it now. But the Lord could not be reached, for a dense crowd shut Him in. "I must see Jesus," cries the man. His friends reply, "You cannot rise from your bed." "Carry me upon it," cries he. "But we cannot get in." "Try," he says. They reached the door and they cried, "Make room. Here is a man sick of the palsy who must see Jesus." They are gruffly answered, "Plenty of other poor men want to see Him. Why should everybody give place to you? What is the use of pushing? There is no room for that bed here! What folly to drag a sick man into all this pressure and heat! The Prophet is speaking—you will interrupt Him. Away with you!" The bearers cannot enter. They plead and they push, but all in vain.

"Then," cries the resolute man, "take me up the back stairs. Get me to the top of the verandah and let down the bed through the ceiling. Run any risk for I must get to Jesus." Possibly his friends object and state the difficulties of the procedure suggested. "Why," says one, "you will be hanging over the people's heads, for there will be no room for you when we let you down." "Try it," he cries. "If I am let down from the top, there will be no fear of my not reaching the ground! They cannot push me up again, or keep me on their heads! They must make room for me." His earnestness having been ingenious, now becomes infectious! His bearers smile at his eagerness and enter into it with zest. He will give them no rest till his desire is accomplished—and so they break up the tiling, and let him down before Jesus, with the glad result described in the Gospel, "Jesus said to him, Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

We have before us, first, a doctrine—the doctrine that it is one of the grandest comforts in the world to have yoursins forgiven you! "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Secondly, we have before us a question. Mayeveryone of you have the honesty to ask it and to answer it in your own case. The question—Have I had my sins forgiven me? For, if so, I have a right to be of good cheer and to be as merry as the birds in spring. But if not, I am destitute of the greatest comfort which Christ, Himself, can speak to a sinner's heart.

1. Dear Hearer, let us give our hearts at once to THE DOCTRINE. It is plainly taught us here that the pardon of sin is one of the richest comforts which the Lord can give to a man.

It is so, first, because the pardon of sin removes the heaviest sorrow which a man can feel. Some know little aboutthis grief. May the Lord cause them to mourn with broken hearts or they will perish in their sins! Those of us who have known the burden of sin can tell you that it is a crushing load. Thoughtful persons who have seen things in their true light—honest persons who refuse to be flattered, pure-minded people who long to be right with God—all these will tell you that a sense of sin is, of all miseries, the most sharp and disquieting. To know that you have sinned against light and knowledge with special aggravations is as a hot iron to the flesh and as a serpent's venom in the blood. There is no rest day or night to a soul which carries this Hell within it—

*"Sin, like a venomous disease
Infests our vital blood!
The only balm is Sovereign Grace,
And the Physician God."*

I speak what I know from personal experience and I only say what many a hearer knows, too, within his own soul. Once let conviction flash in upon the soul and the world loses its

fascinations—the music hall, the ballroom and the theater are robbed of their enchantments—even business wearies and domestic joys are deprived of sweetness. A sense of sin spoils all. Guilt on the conscience hangs over everything like a funeral pall. It drowns all music with its prophetic knell and withers every green herb beneath its burning feet.

Sin, sin—what direr ill than you are, can even Satan, himself, beget? A man infected with a deadly disease is never at ease. Whatever garments he may put on, or at whatever tables he may feast, he is still unhappy because he has the arrows of death sticking in him! Such is a man conscious of sin. Nothing can please him. Nothing can ease him till his sin is removed. But when sin is gone—when he knows that he is pardoned, he is as a bird set free from its cage!

A great fire raged one night in a village and a large thatched mansion, in which a man of God resided, caught fire. It blazed furiously, but he and his wife and the most of his children escaped. Judge of their horror when they counted them over, to discover that one little one was missing. Nothing would content them while that dear child was in the burning house. “Mr. Wesley,” his neighbor might say, “we have saved your chest of drawers. We have saved your valuable books from the house.” “Ah, but,” the good man would have said, “my boy is in danger.” What his wife thought of it, when she recollected that little John would be burned to death, I need not tell you. But when, at last, he was lifted out of the window and brought to his parents' arms—then be sure that the good man would gather his whole family about him and bless the Lord, even though all his substance was consumed. Now, when a sensible man's soul is in danger, nothing can content him. He prospers in business, his happy children play around him—but what of these while his soul remains in deadly peril? When once, through pardoned sin, his soul becomes like a brand plucked from the burning, then his daily troubles lose all their weight and his heart is full of joyful song! It is clear to every experienced man that the pardon of sin is an immense comfort because it removes the bitterest cause of distress and alarm.

Next, forgiveness of sin is a comfort of the first order, for, indeed, it is altogether indispensable. You may possess every luxury, but you cannot be solidly happy until sin is forgiven. “Why!” says one, “I am really happy and yet I am not pardoned.” Yes, but it is a remarkable thing that happy people of your kind are never pleased while they are quiet. They must get up an excitement and dance, or fiddle, or drink, or play the fool in some sort—or they are not happy. I call that real happiness which I can enjoy by the hour together in my room, alone, calmly looking into things and feeling content. I call that real joy which I feel when I wake up at night and, though full of pain, can lie still and bless God for His goodness. It was said of old, “Philosophers can be merry without music” and so can the saints of God! But the ungodly, as a rule, cannot enjoy themselves without external objects to raise their spirits. The truly happy man is satisfied from himself. A spring within him of Living Water quenches his thirst so that he never feels the drought.

A man cannot be really happy till his sin is pardoned, because sin brings, more or less, a sense of condemnation. Picture a man in the condemned cell. Try to make him comfortable. We provide him with a dainty supper, we sing him gladsome glee, we exhibit fine pictures to him—but he is condemned to die tomorrow and he loathes our feast and our fineries. Bring in a thousand pounds and make him a present of it. He looks at the golden sovereigns and he says, “What is the use of these to me?” Tell him that a rich man has left him heir to a wide estate. “Yes,” he says, “but how can I enjoy it? I am condemned to die.” He is always in his dreams hearing his death-knell and picturing to himself the dreary scene when he is to be launched into eternity. If you could only whisper in his ear, “Her Majesty has granted you a free pardon,” he would say, “You may take away the feast, I feel too happy to eat! All the gold in the world could not make me more delighted than I am now, as a pardoned man.” When men have come out of prison, after they have been shut up for years, everything has been a joy to them. Though they went home, perhaps, and found everybody dead whom they once knew, and saw their own hair turned gray through having lain so long in a moldy den, yet the sweets of liberty made the stones of the streets shine as if they were made of gold and the fields seemed like fairyland to them! Such is the joy of pardon when it comes from our God. A man must have forgiveness, or else everything will be emptiness to him—but when he is absolved, he goes forth with joy and is led forth with peace!

Pardon of sins makes all our sorrows light. If a condemned man is permitted to live, he will not ask whether he is to live like a gentleman or like a peasant. When some kind-hearted men struggle to get the life of a condemned criminal spared, the man's friends think of nothing but his life. When a judge sentences a man to penal servitude for life, it may be thought a hard sentence, but you never hear of complaints when a condemned criminal has his life spared—if we find that he is to be kept a prisoner as long as he lives. The heaviest punishment seems nothing if life is spared. You heave a sigh of relief to think that the gallows will bear one less sad fruit and you forget all about the servitude or the imprisonment which the convict will have to endure. So, depend upon it, if you get sin pardoned and so are saved from the eternal wrath of God, you will make no bargain with God whether you have meat to eat and raiment to put on, or are left hungry and naked! No, Lord, I will shiver in a beggar's rags with full content if I am but pardoned. I will dwell in prison with a dry crust for my food if I am but delivered from Your wrath! Thus it is clear that the blotting out of sin takes the sting from every other sorrow.

Let me add that it makes death, itself, light! I remember the story of a felon, in those days when they used to hang people for very little, indeed. A poor man, who had committed some offense, was condemned to die. While he lay waiting for the sentence, the Lord sent a choice minister of the Gospel to him and his heart was enlightened so that he found Christ. As he was on the way to the gallows, what, do you think, was this man's cry? He was overwhelmed with joy and, lifting up his hands, he said many times, "Oh, He is a great Forgiver! He is a great Forgiver!" Death was no terror now that he had found forgiveness through Jesus Christ! Poverty repines not when sin is removed! Sickness frets no longer when conscience is at ease! It may cost you many a pang to feel yourself melting away in consumption, but what does it matter, now that your transgression is forgiven? Every breath may be a labor, every pulse may be a pang, but when sin is forgiven, the Lord has created such a spring of joy within the heart that the soul can never faint!

Yet again, dear Friend, remember that the pardon of sin is the guarantee of every other blessing. When Christ said, "Your sins are forgiven you," was there any question at all as to whether that paralytic man would be healed? Certainly not, for the love which had forgiven the sufferer's sin was there to prompt the Savior to say afterwards, "Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house." So, dear Friend, if your sin is pardoned, it is true concerning you that no good thing will God withhold from you who walk uprightly, and that all things work together for good to you who love God, to you who are called according to His purpose. Everything between here and Heaven is secured by the Covenant of Grace for your best benefit. And you can sing—

"If sin is pardoned, I'm secure!

Death has no sting beside—

The Law gives sin its damning power

But Christ, my Ransom, died."

You shall never have a need but God will assuredly supply it since He has already bestowed on you the major blessing—the all-comprehending blessing of forgiveness! Covenant mercies follow each other like the links of a chain—"Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies; who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Do you think that God forgives men their sins and then leaves them to perish? Such cruel "mercy" would be more worthy of a demon than of the Deity! Pardon is the pledge of everlasting love and the pledge will never be forfeited!

"Alas," cries one, "perhaps, after the Lord has forgiven me, He may yet turn again and punish me!" Listen—"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." That is, God never repents of what He does in the way of Grace. If He forgives, He forgives once and for all and forever! It would be blasphemy to represent God as making a transient truce with men instead of an eternal peace! The Lord casts the iniquities of His people into the depths of the sea and their transgressions He remembers against them no more forever. Is not this a blessed act of Grace? It secures the removal of all the evil results of sin and is the guarantee of all that will be needed this side of Heaven, yes, and of Glory, forever! If you do but hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven

you,” you may also hear Him say, “Be of good cheer,” for there is everything in the fact of pardon to make your heart dance for joy!

We will not linger longer upon the doctrine, but make our meditation personally practical by pressing home the

II. So, now, let us consider THE QUESTION, Are you forgiven?

Has God, for Christ’s sake, forgiven you? “Ah,” cries one, “do not judge us!” I shall not attempt to do so, but I would beg you to judge yourselves. “We cannot be sure of our salvation,” answers another. Can you not? Then you ought to never be happy, for a man who is in doubt about a matter so vital as this, which involves his all, ought never to enjoy a moment’s peace! How can we rest in fear of Hell, in danger of eternal wrath? Do you not long for certainties? A great novelist began a favorite story with the sentence, “What I need is facts.” In that short sentence, he expressed the longing of many a thoughtful soul—many of us feel that we need indisputable facts. Our proverb has it, “Fast bind, fast find.” Prudent men will take double care about this weightiest of all concerns and will not be content till they are infallibly cured. I will help you to answer this question by remarking that there is a way by which we may know if we are not forgiven.

We may know that we are not forgiven if we have never felt that we need forgiveness. Where guilt has never been perceived, it has never been removed. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” If I feel that I am as good as most people and, perhaps, a little better. If I try to justify myself and think of gaining Heaven by my own endeavors, then I am under condemnation! God has never healed the man who was never wounded, nor has He made the man alive who was never dead. If you have never been humbled before God so as to acknowledge your sinfulness, then you are still abiding under His wrath. Think of that, I pray you, you who are at ease, wrapping yourself about in the garments of your own merits! “Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” you may be sure that, in God’s sight, “you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Dear Friend, I hope it is not so with you.

Again, he has never been forgiven who does not at this moment hate sin and its consequences, but to save us from our sins—and wherever He takes away the guilt of sin, He also kills the love of it. Sin never seems so black as when we see it put away by Jesus’ blood. At the sight of the Cross, we grow angry with ourselves for having slain our Lord by our transgressions. Never dream that you can be pardoned and then be allowed to live as you did before—the very wish to do so would show that you were still under condemnation.

Again, you are not forgiven if you have never sought Christ and His atoning blood. If you have labored by other means to procure mercy, you have not found it, for no one else can give it but the one appointed Mediator. Can your “priest” grant you pardon? Did you offend the priest? Then the priest can forgive you for offending him, but he cannot forgive you for offending God! None but God in Christ Jesus can blot out sin and you must go to Him—and if you do not, you are not forgiven, whatever you may dream. Once more, have you forgiven everybody else? This is a home question to some minds, but remember how necessary it is to answer it. If you do not forgive everyone his brother his trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you. There it stands, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.” If you cannot pardon everyone, no matter how grievous the offense, neither has God pardoned you. A malicious heart is an unrenewed heart. A revengeful spirit is clean contrary to the Spirit of God who passes by transgression, iniquity and sin. This Truth of God may be little preached, but Holy Scripture makes it very prominent and you will be most unwise if in any measure you ignore it. You are not forgiven if you cannot forgive!

Let me now help you, by some positive test, to see whether you are forgiven. Only one is needed—you are pardoned if you are a true Believer in Jesus Christ. It is written, “Jesus seeing their faith”—that is, the faith of the four bearers, and the faith of the man who lay upon the bed—said unto him, “Your sins are forgiven you.” The poor palsied man so believed in Jesus that his very face beamed with confidence when he came into Christ’s Presence and so Jesus, seeing his faith, said to him,

"Your sins are forgiven you. "Do you believe in Jesus? I know that you believe that Jesus Christ is God and a great Savior, but is this a mere matter of doctrine to you, or do you really believe in him? You know what it is to believe in a man so that you can trust him and leave your affairs in his hands—do you believe in Jesus in this way? That is the faith which saves. When a man believes in Christ so as to commit himself to Christ for salvation, he believes rightly, for believing is but another word for trusting, relying, depending upon!

Do not trifle with this question. It is my hope that you can answer, "Yes, unless I am awfully deceived, I am trusting the blood and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am so trusting Him that I endeavor to follow in His footsteps and to copy His example." Then you are saved, for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Dwell on that word, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." If you really trust Christ, though you have only done so during the last hour, your transgressions are put away and your iniquity is covered, for He immediately pardons them who come to Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If you have confessed your sin to Him and trusted in Him, you are most assuredly cleansed by His blood!

Now for my last word. It is this. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." Come, then, let us be of good cheer for our sins are forgiven. Let us be happy. Let us be merry in the Lord. Let us begin to sing for very joy of hearts because our sins are forgiven us for Christ's sake! We are very poor, but our sin is forgiven us. We are very weak, but our sin is forgiven us. We are, perhaps, getting very old, and near to our end, but our sin is forgiven us. We are full of infirmity and vexed with temptations, but our sin is forgiven us for His name's sake! "Son, be of good cheer," said the Savior, and shall we be otherwise? What if our room is a very small one—what does it matter—if our sin is forgiven? "Ah, but there is a sick one at home!" "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." You know how the Master, when the disciples found another source of joy, turned them back to this, "Notwithstanding in this, rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in Heaven." And so, when you find a multitude of troubles, follow the same good advice!

Does someone say, "I am head over heels in trouble, for I am in great straits"? Let me lay my hand upon your shoulder and say, "Brother, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." "Oh, but I have very little to live upon!" True, but you have this comforting message, "Your sins are forgiven you." Be of good cheer—your Lord bids you to be so, for your sins are forgiven you!

If you are not happy, it will be disobedience to Christ, for He commands you to "be of good cheer." It will look as if you did not value the blessing that cost Him His blood. "Your sins are forgiven you." It cost Him His life to buy you this redemption—are you going to groan when you get it? No doubt you are pleased to give good things to poor persons and, if so, you like to see their gratitude. I gave something, not many days ago, to a man and he just put it in his pocket and walked off without a word, as if he would say, "I thought you would have given me at least ten times as much." I thought, "If I had seen the way you would take it, my Man, I would not have been in such a hurry with your gift." When you give your children a little treat, you like to see them pleased and thankful. But if they sit down and fret over your kindness, you are disappointed and are in no great haste to indulge them again! Our Heavenly Father's gifts must be valued and delighted in—if He has forgiven us our sins, let us be happy!

"Son, be of good cheer." Have some regard to the outside world, for, if they are pardoned men and women with gruesome countenances, they will infer that there is not much comfort in the Grace of God, after all. "My wife," says one, "declares that her sins are forgiven her, yet I am sure when there is a little trouble in the house she is more downhearted than I am." "There," cries a woman, "my husband tells me that his sins are washed away, but he grumbles and murmurs till we are all made miserable by him!" Do not let it be so. If you have a cross to carry, let us bear it joyfully for Christ's sake. If we have work to do for Christ, let us do it with delight. Let us live to music. Let us march to Heaven to a gladsome tune, rejoicing in the Lord because our sins are forgiven! And let each one of us say—

*“All that remains for me
Is but to love and sing
And wait until the angels come
To bear me to the King!”*