

Sermon preached by Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney  
on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006.  
Reading: Mark 2:1-17  
Topic: "Forgiveness Through Jesus"

## 1. THE DANGER OF RESENTMENT

Once upon a time there was a man, named Bruce, who wrote a novel. It was not a very long book. He gave it to a friend to read and make some comments on. About a month later, he asked his friend what he thought and asked if he could have the book back. His friend told him that he did not think it was a very good book, but he had misplaced it and would bring it back to him soon. Six months later the book had still not been returned. But as it happened his friend had had a book of his own published. This so called friend had taken all the good ideas and re-written the book in his own words and published it under his own name. Bruce was steaming mad. He employed a copyright lawyer to make a claim of breach of authorship. He took his friend to court. He spent stacks of money and lots of time chasing up this theft of literature. But all to no avail. Bruce would toss and turn at night. All he wanted was justice. He became obsessed with revenge. When he could not get his way in court, he tried to think of ways to spoil his friend's success. He bought lots of the books and threw them on the garbage tip, but in the process his funds went down and the sales of the book went up. He became so absorbed in getting back at this person that his marriage broke up and he developed a stomach ulcer and is now in hospital having more tests.

Many other people will have their own stories to tell about the way in which they have sought revenge, vindication, justice and retribution for wrongs that have been done to them. The desire to settle old scores can become such a righteous cause, such an all consuming passion, that everything else in life gets out of perspective. People cannot get on with their lives until they are vindicated, and the people who have wronged them end up in gaol or worse.

The passion for revenge eats away at people when it cannot be satisfied. When people are unwilling or unable to forgive they do damage to themselves and to those around them. If they are young enough it may not affect their bodies for a number of years. If they are older it may put a strain on problems that were already there. A great deal of our illnesses are stress related. Seeking revenge, whether it is in a righteous cause or not, will most often backfire on us. It is generally good advice to accept what you cannot change. We keep hitting our heads up against a brick wall if we persist in trying to make things happen when the things we want to change are outside our control and beyond our competence. It is generally good advice too, to let it go, when we have a grievance against someone. But just to leave it at that, is just good advice. The sort of advice that you could get from an atheist, or from some other religion or someone with no religion.

What is distinctly Christian about forgiveness?

## 2. THE DANGER OF BEING UNFORGIVEN

We can also come at the question from the point of view of the people who we have offended and hurt ourselves. If we have done damage to other people and we have not asked for their forgiveness, and they have not forgiven us, then to some extent, we will struggle in our relationships with those people. Whenever we see them we will have a level of anxiety, or fear, or even loathing. We might even feel that what we have done to them was indeed justified, and we may not want to be forgiven, even though we knew it was wrong to be so hurtful to them.

We all live in a broken world in which there are many tensions and troubles. It is very hard to find peace and love in all our relationships. The danger of being unforgiven by people that you know is that you will have friction and division in the ways we related to one another. And that hostility will also lead to pressure on the health of our bodies. The pace of life is stressful. The tensions of life add significantly to that stress.

But what about our relationship with God? However we manage this life, how will be in the life to come, if we go through life being unforgiven by God?

We may find all sorts of ways of justifying going against the will of other people, but how on earth can we justify going against the will of God, and we all do. How can we claim to know God and acknowledge him in all our ways, if we go through life ignoring him, and doing our own thing without any reference to him?

So often we feel that it is OK to tell a lie, to get us out of a difficult situation, or to gain some advantage, only to find that we have to tell a bigger lie to cover up the first one.

Many people do not even want to read the Bible because they do not want to know what God wants them to do with their lives, because they do not want to know. They want to live their lives their own way.

And yet that means, offending God, bringing on God's anger, and breaking his laws, sometimes by accident, carelessly, and at other times willfully and on purpose. To remain unforgiven, may or may not lead to a great deal of suffering in this world, but it certainly will in the world to come. They do not call it eternal life for nothing.

### 3. THE MISTAKE IN FORGIVENESS

The reason that I want to begin by speaking about the need for forgiveness, for better health, but also the need for forgiveness from God, is that the two are vitally connected. People miss out on the true benefits of forgiveness when they treat it as good advice and not as a heartfelt response to the love of God. The mistake is to keep forgiveness general, something that you should do. Let me give you an example of how people can get it so wrong. In the story of Jesus and the paralysed man in Mark 2 we have a number of different interpretations, as you do with many passages. This view of Mark 2 reflects a common view that we all need to forgive others. It goes like this. And please do not laugh too loudly, for this man's view is indeed in print. But from my point of view I will understand if you think that I have made it all up. When we read in Mark 2:1 that Jesus is "at home" it means that Jesus has come back to his own home, his own little piece of real estate in Capernaum, an investment property for his retirement.

In verse 4 when the friends of the paralysed man remove the roof, we can imagine Jesus calculating the cost of repairs and the names of tradesmen he knows. It is with the cost of repairing the roof in mind that Jesus says the immortal words of verse 5: "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" Therefore, in the same way that Jesus is willing to forgive the man and his friends for wrecking his roof, we also should forgive those who offend us, by coming in through our roof, or in any other way.

Jesus models forgiveness. In doing so, he gives a golden key to living to all humanity: Forgive One Another, seek reconciliation, love one another and forgive all those who offend you. In as much as we would seek to apply that principle to our lives it sound pretty good. And it does fit in to what many people in the world would think was a good philosophy: What the world needs now is love, love, love. We are all brothers and sisters and we need to get on with one other. But it is dangerous for three reasons. **Firstly** it is a misreading of the passage. **Secondly** it is a misreading of the problem. **Thirdly** it is a misreading of Jesus.

### 4. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

What do you think of Jesus? Is he the guru with the goods? The creature with the clues? The master with the message? Or is he the Son of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Is he the Son of Man, the Master of the Universe? Is he both God and Man? Let's look at the passage, especially with the question in mind of the authority of Jesus. Mark 2:1-4 (ESV)

**Firstly** then we have the problem: Delivering the parcel. In the regular course of events, Jesus is preaching the word(verse 2). That's his pattern and his purpose. It is why he came and why he come out and left the town where lots of people were gathered at the door to be healed, in chapter one. The paralysed man and his friends have a problem, getting to Jesus. They know he can do great things if only they can get his attention. So they wreck the roof and lower their friend on his stretcher. We can imagine the paralysed man hanging on tightly on his perilous journey to the floor. One tip the wrong way and he would be airborne.

**Secondly** we have the solution: Being granted Forgiveness In response to "their faith" Jesus gives him the greatest gift in all the world.

He says to him: "My son, your sins are forgiven." How great it is to know that all things you have done wrong, things you can remember with hurt and regret, as well as all the mistakes you have made that you have forgotten, all gone, not remembered by God anymore, taken away, removed, let go, never to be held against you. It is the best thing in the world.

It may not have been what they were after. They may have been a little puzzled, but true faith in Jesus, trust him to give us what he knows we need most. And in comparison to his other gifts and blessings, nothing beats forgiveness.

**Thirdly**, we see opposition: the scribes question Jesus authority to forgive sins. He is speaking about things that he has no control over. He has gone beyond his level of competency. Jesus has exceeded his brief. No ordinary man can forgive sins.

That is God's prerogative alone. So they accuse him of blasphemy. They are not at all likely to come to this conclusion if Jesus is just saying to the roof wreckers, don't worry about it. I'll let you off!

**Fourthly**, we see the demonstration of his authority: the man is healed.

Jesus shows that he has the power to forgive sins, by telling the man to take up his bed and take a walk. And he does. The physical miracle authenticates the spiritual miracle. He makes the point about his authority in verse 10 by referring to himself as the Son of Man. Jesus calls himself the Son of Man 14 times in Mark's gospel.

It is mostly a reference back to Daniel 7 Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV) The Son of Man is given all authority, dominion and power. Any opposition is no threat, no contest. If this one says that your sins are forgiven then that's exactly what has happened. It is almost as if the real miracle is the forgiveness of sins and the healing of the paralysed man is a minor miracle. No wonder that the people are amazed, in verse 12. Mark 2:12 (ESV) *And 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!"*

## 5. THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS

Look with me at the second story in our passage, in verse 13-17

It makes the point too that Jesus' main mission is the forgiveness of sins. Mark 2:13-14

In the midst of his regular teaching programme, Jesus singles out one man, named Levi and calls on him to follow him. It is quite surprising that Jesus should call a tax collector to become part of his team. Tax collectors worked for the Romans, and were widely known as cheats and stand over merchants, with soldier backing.

Levi recognizes Jesus' authority. He accepts Jesus as his king. Levi, leaves it all behind and makes a fresh start with Jesus. But Levi does not keep his change of lifestyle to himself. He invites his friends and colleagues over to his place to meet his new friend. They are described here as "many tax collectors and sinners".

Other people, especially the moral wowers of that society, would have called them the dregs of society, the fringe dwellers, the outcasts. And yet Jesus shared food and time with them. They heard him gladly. Because he offered them a second chance, whereas the moral police of that society, the high and mighty religious people had written them off. The religious right, the scribes of the Pharisees, had a go at Jesus. They had learnt and they taught that it was most proper to keep your distance from such people. They would have told their children that if you lie down with dogs you end up with fleas. Stay clear and stay clean. Keep your distance and keep you purity. And here is Jesus spending time with them. He should have known better.

But notice what Jesus says about their need for healing in verse 17. Mark 2:17 (ESV) At least these people know they have a problem and they are willing to look out for a solution. The religious goody two shoes think that they are already right with God and they reject Jesus as the solution they do not need. Jesus is the only doctor for sin. And that is our greatest disease. It infects all of humanity and there is no cure, apart from Jesus.

He came into the world to call sinners to himself and to forgive their sins. Jesus not only came to call them to himself, he came to call them to repentance. It means a change of mind and a change of lifestyle. It means that he knew that he would die on the cross. His death is the punishment that we all have earned by our rebellion against God. He has taken the penalty for our sin, so that by God's grace we can be totally and completely forgiven for all our sins, past present and future.

That is the ultimate healing, that opens the way for all sorts of other healing. That is the complete healing that we all should value above all else. That is the thing that we should long to see taken up by all our friends and family members as the greatest thing in all the world.

Do you know the forgiveness of your sins through Jesus Christ? Have you experience the complete lifting of the sentence of eternal death from your shoulders? If you truly have, then you can truly forgive others, from the depths of your heart. If you have not yet received that forgiveness, then you will be struggling to forgive anyone else. If you know God's forgiveness in your life then you can start

to think about the people who have hurt you and treated you badly, and you can seek to forgive them, as God enables you.

You can let revenge go. You will be able to remove the plans for retribution. You can lift the barriers for physical and emotional healing in your life. You can pray to God for strength and wisdom and the grace to live a healthier and more meaningful life, for his glory.

I need to say as well, that there is no necessary connection with forgiveness and sickness.

And there are people who are in the world today, who tend to mislead people about the opportunity for health. It is not true to say that everyone who has been forgiven by Jesus will always be fit and well. It is not true to say that if you are a Christian and you do get sick, that it must be that God has not forgiven you for something in your life, that you need to confess. Such things can be very damaging to people. Jesus' death is the complete payment for all our sins, past present and future.

Our eternal destiny is assured. Our physical and emotional health in this world will have its ups and down. We can pray to God through our Lord Jesus Christ, with absolute faith and confidence that he hears us and will grant us what is best for us.

But continuing issues with health and sickness do not mean that he has not heard us or that we have not been forgiven.