

Text: Luke 5:18-26.

Friendship Sunday/Church Picnic.

**August 21, 2016.**

Friend, your sins are forgiven. Amen.

What's the best news you have ever heard? Think about that for a second. The best news. Ever! "Yes, I will marry you." "It's a girl!" "It's benign." What is it for you? What's the best news you have ever heard? Friend, your sins are forgiven. Would those words of Jesus make the list? Friend, your sins are forgiven. Isn't that a bigger relief than, "It's benign"? Friend, your sins are forgiven. Isn't that longer lasting than, "Yes, I will marry you"? Friend, your sins are forgiven. That's the best news ever. Friend, your sins are forgiven. That's what you came here to hear. That's what a friend invited you to not just know in your head, but treasure in your heart. Friend, your sins are forgiven. Friend, your sins are forgiven.

We meet some pretty amazing friends. A group of guys, likely four, had a friend who was paralyzed. They didn't abandon him. They helped him. What friends! They wanted him healed. They believed Jesus could do it. They brought their friend to the house where Jesus was. But the house was crowded, so crowded they couldn't get in. They didn't stop. They weren't deterred. They climbed up the very common outside stairway to the roof. They removed the roof tiles and lowered their friend, on his cot, down through the opening, right in front of Jesus, right in front of all the crowd. What friends! And what does Jesus see? A paralyzed man? Four good friends? A hole in the roof? No! Jesus sees their faith! The first thing Jesus sees is their faith! That's really all that mattered to Jesus. They had faith, not just in Jesus' power to heal the body of the paralyzed man, but faith in Jesus to heal their souls. Wow! Jesus saw their faith! How? How did Jesus see that faith? The hole in the roof didn't contain x-ray machine for the soul. Jesus saw their faith because Jesus was God and still is God. And Jesus saw beyond the body and Jesus saw the soul. Jesus saw the heart. Jesus saw the faith in their hearts.

And so the first thing Jesus said was not about the man's body. The first thing Jesus said was, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The best thing Jesus ever said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The best news ever! "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Your biggest problem is solved. Your sins are forgiven. Your worst affliction is not paralysis. Your worst affliction is sin. And friend, your sins are forgiven.

The words Jesus used are so special, so valuable, so emphatic. Your sins. Literally Jesus said, "For you, your sins." It's very personal. This isn't some vague rumor about someone else. This is for you. Your very own sins are forgiven. Are forgiven. Jesus used a special word there too. And the word forgiven is first in the sentence to be specially emphasized. The word forgiven conveys the sins stand forgiven. They were forgiven in the past and they are still forgiven in the present and they will be forgiven forever and ever in the future. Friend, I'm not just forgiving past sins and telling you to figure out the rest. I'm forgiving all sins. Friend, you don't have to worry about tomorrow's sins. I've already forgiven them too. Friend, your sins, for you, they all stand forgiven. Forever! The best news ever.

So everyone hears this best news ever. Everyone believes. They all live happily ever after in heaven. End of story. Well, not exactly. There's some Pharisees there. The word Pharisee means, "separated." The Pharisees separated themselves from everyone else, thinking, "We are better than everyone else, because we do so many more good things than everyone else." The Pharisees start thinking and notice they are only thinking, they're not saying this out loud, but just thinking, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" And that's a fair question, right? Who can forgive sins but God alone? It's a valid question. Who is this Jesus guy, to just announce, "Friend, your sins are forgiven"? That's easy to say. No one has a spiritual x-ray machine to tell. But let's look deeper at these Pharisees and realize they had a deeper problem. They were enemies of Jesus. They didn't see Jesus as God. And they didn't like this free forgiveness he was passing around. They thought God's love was something you got if you were good

enough, not something God gave freely. And they didn't really see the need for forgiveness, they didn't think they were such bad people.

And maybe now the Pharisees start to sound a lot like us. Come on, Jesus, that's too easy. You just say, "Friend, your sins are forgiven"? What about those really bad people out there? What about those people who don't come to church, don't help out here, you can just say, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." No way, Jesus, that's too easy! Can you see the self-righteousness that's behind that attitude? Well, yeah, my few sins are forgiven, because I'm such a good person. I'm better than most other people. Or maybe we doubt the best news ever. Thanks Jesus, but not me, not mine, my sins can't be forgiven. I'm too bad. I'm not the church going type. I don't think you want me, Jesus. And besides, it's easy for someone to say, "Your sins are forgiven." That's just a guy in a gown. He's not God. How can he forgive sins? How can he be serious when he says, "Friend, your sins are forgiven"? Those are just words. It can't mean me. That's way too easy.

Well listen to Jesus again. "Friend, your sins, for you, just yours, stand forgiven." Friend, your sins stand forgiven." Friend, I'm telling you with confidence that all your sins stand forgiven, because friend, I died on the cross for all your sins. See the nail prints in my hands. These are marks of my love. I would have died a thousand times if that's what it took. Friend, I died just for you. I was thinking of you when I died. It was all for you. Friend, your sins are forgiven. Doesn't matter what your sins have been. I died for murderers and terrorists. I died for gossips and the self-righteous. I died for you. Believe me when I say, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Put confidence in my words, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Treasure this best news ever, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus knows what we are thinking. Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking. Consider that for a second again. Not only could Jesus see faith in the heart, Jesus could see the thoughts of his enemies. Jesus knew exactly and precisely what they were thinking, even before they could say it. So before they could say it, Jesus said, "What's easier? To say, 'your sins are forgiven'? or to say, 'get up and walk'?" Let's examine that a little bit. It seems easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Again, the holes in the roof tiles did not contain an x-ray machine for the soul. You might trust, but how could you verify? But if you could say, "Get up and walk." And the guy actually gets up and walks, now you've got something. Now I'm paying attention. Now I know you aren't just some guy. You must have some special power, dare I call it God's power? It seems easier to say, "your sins are forgiven." But it's actually harder to actually forgive sins.

But Jesus wants everyone to know the truth. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus wants this paralyzed man to know, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus wanted the people to be sure, "this man was healed on the inside." And so, Jesus healed his outside. Notice, Jesus in this case healed the outside to prove the inside was already healed. Jesus healed the paralysis to show the greater problem of sin was also healed. The inside was still the top priority for Jesus. But Jesus wanted the paralyzed man to know, Jesus wanted the Pharisees to know, Jesus wanted that whole crowd to know, "I have authority. Your sins are forgiven." And so, Jesus healed the man's outside. With just the words, "Get up, take your mat and go home." The man immediately, instantly, got up, picked up his mat and went home. Immediately. He didn't need six weeks of therapy to recover. He didn't need to learn or relearn how to walk. He didn't go from crutches to a walker to a cane. That quickly. That suddenly. That completely. His body was healed. That quickly. That suddenly. That completely. His soul was healed.

Friend, that quickly, that suddenly, that completely, you are healed. Your sins are forgiven. That quickly, that suddenly, that completely. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus proved it with his death on the cross. God assured it with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Your sins are forgiven. Have no doubts. Jesus

died for you. You are already good enough. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. And this isn't just a guy in a gown telling you a made up story. Jesus died for everyone. So I know Jesus died for you. Jesus forgave the sins of everyone. So I know that Jesus forgave you. Jesus didn't choose to walk in here today in the flesh. Jesus chose an ordinary guy to bring you an extraordinary message. Friend, your sins are forgiven! I'm telling you the good news that Jesus gave me to share with you, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." That's the best news ever.

I know that can be hard to believe. The people who saw this incident first hand were beside themselves. This seemed so contrary to everything everyone believed and knew. You wouldn't believe what we've seen today. A paralyzed man was healed. His sins were forgiven. All by the power and authority of Jesus. Friend, your sins are forgiven. Thank God you had a friend who brought you to hear that best news ever. Maybe it was a friend who climbed the steps of nervousness to invite you to the picnic today. Thank God that friend made that trip for you to hear the best news ever, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Maybe you're like me and you had two good friends who dragged you to church for years because they wanted you to hear the best news ever, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Doesn't matter who brought you. Doesn't matter the obstacles they overcame. What matters is that you heard the best news ever. "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Keep on coming back, because we are going to keep on saying the best news ever. "Friend, your sins are forgiven." Amen.