

August 2, 2020

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8:27-29

As Jesus' reputation as a healer grew it became increasingly hard for him to remain long in any area. This was especially so after the healing of the leper that we looked at last week. Not long after that healing Jesus returned to Capernaum, the home town of Peter, Andrew, James and John. A huge crowd quickly gathered so that there was no way for anyone else to get near him.

As he was preaching and teaching four men brought a man who had been paralyzed to him and since they could not reach him any other way they climbed onto the roof and made an opening above where the Master was seated and lowered their friend down to him.



Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, **"Son, your sins are forgiven."** (Mark 2:1-12) As Jesus' popularity increased many of the teachers of the law and religious elite of the day came to him as well as countless others. If we understand anything about the religious elite of Jesus' day, we understand that their self-righteousness all but blinded them to most if not all of what Jesus taught and did.

This was just such another instance of that blinding attitude. When Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven their response was condemnation. **"Why does this fellow talk like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone!"** Jesus knew their thoughts even as he knows ours and he responded by challenging their false premise. **"But that you may know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins I tell you, get up, take you mat and go home."**

Immediately the man got up, took up his mat, and walked out. We are not told in Mark's account, but we must wonder if the teachers of the law and religious elite got the point of Jesus' words. Their premise was that only God can forgive sins which is only partially true. More than once Jesus commands us to forgive others telling us **"...if you do not forgive men their sins, you Father will not forgive your sins."** (Matthew 6:14-15)

So, when Jesus told them that this healing was proof that he, the Son of Man, had the authority to forgive sins we must wonder if they understood that the Master, using their own premise, was demonstrating that he was the Emmanuel, God in the flesh.

There is, I think, even more to the story found in this account. The teachers of the law, indeed almost all of the religious elite of Jesus' day, had very much come to depend on their own righteousness. They believed because they carefully kept all of the rules and regulations that had developed around God's laws that their righteousness placed them on a higher spiritual plane than those **"sinners and tax-collectors"** that they lived among.

This spiritual blindness in them would eventually lead them to murder the very Son of God, but even in doing that they still failed, for the most part, to understand the truth. No amount of rules-keeping, no matter how perfectly it is done, can make the rules-keeper righteous. Perhaps

James summed this up best when he wrote, "***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***" (James 2:10)

No matter how well they practice the rules and regulations of the law they could not keep it perfectly and that simple truth convicted them. They literally were the very "***sinners and tax collectors***" they so often condemned. Because they were blinded to their own spiritual failure they seldom realized their overwhelming need for the grace that Jesus died to bring to them and to us.

They failed to take the grace that Jesus offered them because they really believed they did not need it. Their spiritual perfection would save them. Like those religious elite it is so, so easy for us to depend on our own rules-keeping for our salvation and in doing so to reject the grace of Jesus that would really save us. In the end not one of us is sinless and in the end every one of us is in desperate need of the saving grace found in Jesus. The Son of Man does have the right to forgive sins because he is the Emmanuel, God in the flesh, and like our Master we are called to be forgiving and to be forgiven.

