

Difficult, Easy, and Differences in Perspective

I wonder what the paralytic, lying there on his cot looking up at Jesus, was feeling when Jesus looks down at him and says, “*Take heart, My son. Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.*” **And that was it.** “*Okay... thanks for that, but what about the whole paralysis problem here? What are you gonna do about this, Jesus?*” What about his friends? These were the guys who had such faith in Jesus’ ability to heal that they hauled their bed-ridden buddy up onto a rooftop and tore a hole in that roof so that they could lower him down to be right in front of Jesus in the midst of the crowded room. “*Your sins are forgiven? That’s it?! That’s all you’re gonna do?! Do you know what we just went through to make this meeting happen?!*”

Admit it: You would be bummed out too—maybe even a bit angry—if you went to all this trouble, only to find out that forgiveness of sins was the ***only thing*** you were going to get out of all of it. ***Why?*** Because, like these guys, you didn’t come to Jesus to get your sins forgiven; you came to get your life fixed. Something is seriously broken, and it needs fixing... and all Jesus does is smile and say, “*Be of good cheer! Your sins are forgiven.*” ***That’s it?!***

Folks: This isn’t a hypothetical situation. ***It happens all the time.*** People come to church all the time with problems they want fixed. Maybe they have broken bodies or sick bodies or sore and worn out bodies. Maybe they have ***broken lives***; e.g., divorce, dysfunctional family drama, unemployment. Maybe they have broken spirits; e.g., depression, grief/loss of a loved one. You name it. People tend to shop for churches that best fit their ***felt-needs***; e.g., youth groups, men’s breakfast club, ladies’ quilting groups, etc. I go to that church because they have the best senior singles’ ministry. Newsflash: The Church doesn’t exist to babysit or entertain your kids or to facilitate a love connection for seniors who are single and still want to mingle! ***It happens all the time though.*** People attend churches, not because the Word is rightly taught and the Sacraments rightly administered; i.e., for the forgiveness of sins, ***but because their particular itches get scratched.*** “*Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.*” Yeah... thanks for that, but that still doesn’t fix my problem. It still hurts when I do this. Broken people come to church with all kinds of brokenness; all kinds of problems they want fixed, and when those problems don’t seem to be getting fixed or don’t seem to be getting any better, ***they either try to change the church or they leave. It happens all the time.***

Back to the text. Jesus pronounces His holy absolution upon this poor paralytic soul. His sins are forgiven. It’s that easy. ***How do the Scribes respond to this?*** What do they think when they hear Christ speak the words of forgiveness? We’re told that they immediately began to say to themselves, “*This man is blaspheming.*” Why blasphemy? The answer is simple. ***Only God can forgive***

sins, right? Who does this guy think He is? Ironic, isn't it? They think that Jesus is evil for pronouncing God's forgiveness, never realizing how right they kind of are. **Only God can forgive sins, and that's exactly what He was doing!** Jesus Christ—God in the flesh—was forgiving sins! They think that Jesus is evil, never realizing that they and their accusations of blasphemy were, in fact, truly blasphemous and evil in the eyes of the Lord.

"Why do you think evil in your hearts?" But notice how Jesus proceeds. He doesn't immediately strike them down having caught them in their evil. Rather, He uses this opportunity to teach. He wants these wicked ones to **repent**. God desires the death of no man, right? He uses this opportunity to teach about His divinity. He teaches about His **divine authority** to not only heal that which is physically broken, but more importantly to forgive sins; that is, to heal and restore what is spiritually and eternally broken.

Now, pay attention to what Jesus actually says, because it's important. He doesn't ask, *"Which is easier?"* or *"Which is easier to do?"* Nope. He asks, *"Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Rise and walk'?"* We know how this works out. Jesus **says** the more difficult thing, right? It's easy to speak the words of forgiveness. Anyone can do that (though not many do, and many who do speak the words just give lip-service. It rolls off the tongue so easily, but talk is cheap. It doesn't really mean anything if the fruits contradict the confession). Anyone can speak words of forgiveness, but it's quite another thing, though, to say, *"Rise and walk!"* **Why? Because the proof is immediately present for all to see.** If I command, *"Rise and walk,"* and you can't get up and walk, **then my words mean nothing.** They're just empty words. Talk is cheap. Jesus doesn't just talk the talk. He walks the walk. You see, Jesus is using logic with these wicked doubters and evil naysayers. If Jesus has the power/authority to actually do the **more difficult thing** (heal the paralytic), then He most certainly has the power/authority to do the easier thing (forgive sins).

But let's look at this from a **different perspective**. As I said, Jesus asks which is **easier to say**. He doesn't ask about which is easier to **do**. Knowing that Jesus is God makes it a foolish question, right? He's God! It's not a matter of easy or difficult to do with God. **Everything is easy! He's omnipotent!** He created by simply speaking into existence. *"Let there be,"* and there was! **How easy is that?!** Look throughout Scripture. Healing the lame, the sick, the blind, the deaf... even raising from the dead **was very easy for God**. In fact, if you look throughout the Old Testament, God worked these miracles through the likes of ordinary men such as Elijah. Think about that for a moment. God didn't even have to physically show up and take care of the "heavy lifting." He didn't have to rend the heavens or anything like that. He simply authorized folks like Elijah and Elisha to simply speak His Word of healing/restoration. Remember Naaman and his leprosy? Elisha doesn't even tell him in person. He sends a messenger to

Naaman to say, “*Go and dip yourself in the Jordan River seven times, and you’ll be all set.*” Naaman wanted so much more! He expected so much more. He **demanded** so much more, and he was angry that more wasn’t done for him. And yet... when Naaman actually listened to/obeyed the word spoken to him, he was healed. He was restored/made whole again. It was so simple; so easy.

Look to this cross... and see things differently for a moment. Speaking the command to that paralytic to rise and walk was **actually very easy for Jesus**. He didn’t even have to be present, if He didn’t want to. He didn’t even have to say a word, if He didn’t want to. He could simply will it from wherever He was at that moment, and it would be done (ref. Roman centurion and his dying servant. “Simply say the Word and my servant will be healed”). **What about forgiveness though?** Yes, Jesus spoke forgiveness and that was it—the guy was instantly and immediately forgiven. Real simple. Real easy. But look to that cross. Let’s talk about the more difficult thing, not to say, but to do. Look to that bloodied corpse nailed to that cross. **Jesus did the more difficult thing... for you... for the forgiveness of all your sin.** When Adam and Eve plunged all of humanity into the sin and damnation, God could’ve simply smote them on the spot, wiped the slate clean, and said, “*Forget it. Not worth the trouble.*” He could’ve taken the easy way we so often do and simply turned a blind eye to the sin. After all, nobody wants to offend anyone, right? He didn’t. Instead, He gave up all of heaven’s majesty for flesh and blood. He gave up all of heaven for a virgin’s womb, a manger... a cross. He gave up all the praise of angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven in exchange for ridicule, mockery, slander, and all other kinds of evil. “*Father, if there’s any other way, take this cup from Me!*” **Don’t tell me this [the cross] was easy for Jesus!** He agonized over what He was going to suffer on that cross... and still He did it. Make no mistake: Your Lord Christ—God in the flesh—did the way more difficult thing... for you... for the forgiveness of all your sin and all the sins of the entire world.

And even here, saying that it’s “more difficult” is a gross understatement. **Jesus did the impossible.** He did what no person borne of Adam is capable of doing. He paid the full wage of sin with His perfect life and death. He actually made full and complete atonement for all sin for all time. **We can’t even make atonement for one single sin, let alone all our sins.** And yet... He does it, not because He needed the forgiveness, but because you need this forgiveness, and He has the only currency that is able to pay the wage of sin. “**It is finished,**” and it was. **It’s that simple.** So in this way we can also say that the cross, while definitely the “more difficult thing,” was also an easy decision for our Lord. He loves us. He loves us so much that He willingly gave up His only-begotten Son to die for us in our place. While we were still dead in our sin, Christ died for us. **What else would He do?** This is what the love of God does. He doesn’t just talk the talk. He walks the walk.

Think on this. Let this sink in. Without this blood-bought, Christ-centered forgiveness of sin, **you have NOTHING!** All your felt-needs could be perfectly met. All your problems could be perfectly fixed. ***POOF! All better!*** Life on earth could suddenly become absolutely perfect; not a care or worry in the world... and yet if you leave this world without God's forgiveness, you've got nothing but eternal hell awaiting you. ***You tell me what's most important!*** Conversely, you may go through all of life with everything broken. Maybe things get so bad that even Job gives thanks God that he's not you. ***You still have the forgiveness of sins, don't you?*** Lazarus lived a miserable life and died a miserable death, far worse than any of you will ever experience. And yet... Lazarus, holding fast in faith to God's gracious gift of forgiveness, reclines at Abraham's bosom at the heavenly side of the feast table even as we speak.

No matter how bad things may get, you too have God's forgiveness. It may still "hurt when you do this," (and it may even get worse), but be of good cheer! Take heart! Your sins are forgiven! ***Isn't that the most important thing?*** Look to this cross. Look to this baptismal font. Look to this altar/communion rail. Here is Christ for you. Here is your blood-bought gift forgiveness. I know the miserable world we live in. I know all the brokenness and despair and hurt and anger and fear and evil that assails us all day every day as we make our way through this shadowy vale of tears and death. *"Yea though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, because Thou art with me."* Look to this cross, this font, this rail. ***Thou art with me, and it is finished, once and for all... for me.*** Baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, I am covered over in Christ's perfect righteousness, all my sins drowned in His all-redeeming blood. *"Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body/blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin."* Understood through faith, ***what more do I need?*** Kind of puts everything in proper perspective... ***at least, it should.***

Be of good cheer. ***Be courageous*** (probably the best translation, considering the fact that we are still called to bear our crosses as we make our way through this shadowy valley of death and despair), ***for your sins are forgiven.*** It really is that easy, and praise God that it is! May this Good News of your complete forgiveness in Christ and because of Christ give you the peace that surpasses all human understanding, and may it also guard and keep your hearts and minds in Him unto life everlasting. AMEN

**After communion, and especially at the Benediction, remind them again that their sins are forgiven. It may still "hurt when I do this," but "be of good cheer! Take heart! Be courageous... and depart in peace and joy. Your sins are forgiven."*