

**I want to be free from my Past!**  
**Text: Matt 9:1-8, James 5:13-20**

Friends what do you do when you can't let go of the past? Or perhaps it's better to say what do you do when the past won't let you go, when your past catches up to you?

Maybe you've heard about Jorge Sosa, the Guatemalan man who was living in Lethbridge, who has been accused, arrested, and extradited to Guatemala for his participation in horrific war crimes thirty committed years ago by the military during the Guatemalan civil war.

Or back in 2009 iconic film-maker Roman Polanski was arrested in Switzerland on a US arrest warrant for an offense he committed dating back to 1978 – 31 years prior - which involved a minor.

Or perhaps you know someone who was all set to take a trip to Florida, or Hawaii, or Mexico and when they tried to clear US Customs on the way there, they were denied entry because of a criminal offense which shows up on their record from years past – perhaps that's happened to you?

Or maybe you've heard how women who've had an abortion can silently suffer for years afterwards with guilt and shame and regret, and it develops into physical symptoms and nervous disorders and they are prevented from moving forward in life and in their close relationships – maybe you know someone like this, or perhaps this has happened to you too.

What do you do when your past won't let you go, or when it catches up to you?

Once Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame, played a practical joke on some close friends. He sent them an anonymous telegram saying “All is discovered, flee the country at once!” Within twenty four hours each recipient had left the country.

What would you do if you got such a message? What's in our past?

Well Friends this month we are looking at what our hearts truly desire and how Jesus can meet those desires, and as I've worked with people, and being a human myself☺ has shown

me that many of us desire to be free from a past which holds us in captivity. A past which can threaten to undo us, embarrass us, shame us, get us in trouble, and as such it keeps us from moving forward in some way in our lives.

Whether these past actions are extreme - like the actions of a war-crazed soldier or something more mundane like getting drunk at your high school dance, there are things in our past which paralyze us and cripple us in the present, keep us from growing spiritually with Christ - and our heart desires to be free from them.

So friends, the good news that I want to share with you this morning is that Jesus can meet that desire – he can set us free! Praise God!

But don't just take my word for it – the proof is in the gospel stories that were written down so that we could see it for ourselves, and if Jesus could do it for those people...He can do it for us too!

And I would describe how Jesus sets people free from their past as *healing through forgiveness...healing through forgiveness.*

In our scripture passage Jesus tells the paralyzed man who has been brought to him to take courage because his sins are forgiven. Now if that strikes us as odd we're not the only ones. The bible scholars of Jesus day who heard him say this thought it was odd too.

In fact they figured it was outright falsehood because they knew the scriptures and the scriptures tell us that only God can forgive sins - because ultimately all the wrong that we do against others, or against creation, or against ourselves is really an offense against God the Creator.

And God's mercy had always provided healing as a means of alleviating the suffering in this world. Many prophets and leaders of God's people had been a channel for that healing power for Israel in the past, but forgiving sins is different. Who has the authority to forgive people of their Sins which are ultimately against God?

And make no mistake – Jesus doesn't say “don't worry God has forgiven your sins” or “God is merciful and if you confess he will forgive you” He's not pointing the way to forgiveness.

No, instead Jesus says “take heart, be encouraged – your sins are forgiven” He makes a statement of fact, a pronouncement, a decree if you will...that this man's status with God has gone from guilty to pardoned. And he can do this because He is the Son of Man – the Messiah.

So look what the result of this pronouncement are, the man regains the use of his legs and he can walk again!

And while we may be amazed at the miracle of a lame man suddenly being able to walk again...what we might truly be astonished at - is learning that the root cause of the man's symptoms are his sins!

Now friends, I understand that this might raise all sorts of questions for us about the relationship between sickness and sin. I've had people who've been diagnosed with cancer come and ask me “is God punishing me for something I did wrong?”

or maybe you're wondering if the fact that you've got a cold this week is because you lied to your boss last week?

Well friends, the simple answer to a complicated subject such as that is that Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit and it's the Spirit's job to convict us of what we've done wrong against God.

If indeed you're sick because of something you've done wrong, then the Spirit will make that very clear to you – and also confirm it through other wise and mature Christians – elders - leaders in your church who can come and pray for you so that you will be forgiven and healed as we read about in James chapter 5.

But, I think most times the relationship between sin and sickness comes because a specific sin in your past is unconfessed, unresolved and it sits and festers and puts down roots in your heart and eventually it begins to express itself physically in some way.

And friends the way we tend to live, we ignore things until they physically manifest and then we finally pay attention to

them – in other words your sin catches up with you like paralyzed man’s past caught up with him.

And what this man has done in his past was preventing him from moving forward in life, and I’m sure that his hearts desire was to be free of that.

And friends if you are affected in a similar way, you’ll know it, the Holy Spirit will make it clear to you – you’re won’t be wondering if you’ve got a cold because God is punishing you for lying last week. No, you know that you’ve got ulcers because you’ve hated someone so much for all these years that it’s eating you from the inside out.

You know the guilt from what you did so long ago is now driving you to drink, or causing you to put on weight, or wearing down your immune system so that you catch anything, and you desire to be free it because you know it’s holding you back.

No doubt this paralyzed man wanted to be free – to be able walk once again, free to earn a living, free from needing help, free to help others instead.

But the sins of his past prevented him from doing that. He was paralyzed physically – and I think after some time of being physical paralyzed he was also emotionally and spiritually paralyzed as well.

Friend that can happen to us too – when our past catches up to us and prevents us from moving forward, and our faith stagnates - we become mired down in emotional and spiritual bondage, unable to even seek the help that might set us free.

So notice in the story that it’s the man’s friends who must bring him to Jesus, and when Jesus sees *their* faith – he forgives the man. The man in the story does nothing.

Other people who come to Jesus for healing speak to him, they say “Lord if you are willing you can heal me, Lord just say the word and my daughter will be healed”

But he does nothing – his physical inability is an indication of his emotional and spiritual inability; he is just there – lying on a mat.

Maybe that's where we are as well. Completely paralyzed by hatred, anger, bitterness, or shame that we can't even think about approaching someone like Jesus, we don't want to, because He's so good and we're so not.

So we need our friends to bring us to Jesus, because Jesus can set us free, and Jesus will set us free –even when we are unable to ask him. We don't need to because our friends can ask him for us.

Again that is what James 5 is speaking about – is anyone sick, call the elders to come and pray for them. They ask Jesus on your behalf – and the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. They can bring you to Jesus attention.

And Jesus takes one look at the man and he can see what the problem is – so He says “Take heart” speaking to this man's

inner condition, and then “your sins are forgiven” speaking to his past.

Jesus sets him free from his past – healing his present condition through forgiveness.

And friends regardless of where you are this morning – maybe you're already free from your past, I don't know- but if you remember one thing from this message remember this...

Forgiveness is the engine which drives your faith.

If you desire to grow in your relationship with Christ, if you want to experience him meeting the desires of your heart, or if you just need to be free from your past – then know this “Your sins are forgiven!”

Take heart, cheer up, and be encouraged friends – our sins are forgiven. Jesus says so. So get up! And move forward in life... in the power of that forgiveness.

I want to leave you with two quotes about how to live in forgiveness

“A person rests in the forgiveness of sins when one’s thought of God does not remind you of your sins, but rather of the fact that they have been forgiven! So that what has happened in the past is not a remembrance of how badly they acted, but of how much they’ve been forgiven.” Soren Kierkegaard

“Forgiveness of sins closes the past and opens a new future”  
Joachim Gnilka

Amen.