

“Forgiveness of Sins and Healing of Illnesses” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

Psalm 53:1–5, Luke 5:17–26

① 【Faith is the act of continually seeking Christ】

When word spread that Jesus was in a certain house, a large crowd gathered, so much so that there was hardly any room left even at the doorway. As Jesus was speaking and healing the sick, some men came carrying a man who had been paralyzed on a mat. But since they couldn't get him inside because of the crowd, they climbed onto the roof, removed some tiles to make an opening, and lowered the man down on his mat. Seeing their faith, Jesus said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20). Why did He say “Your sins are forgiven” only to this man, and not to the other sick people? I think the clue lies in the phrase, “Jesus saw their faith.” It says He saw their faith, yet they hadn't said a word. What Jesus saw was their actions—their determination to get close to Him at all costs, actions that went beyond what others would consider reasonable. They must have believed that no one but Jesus could heal him. What we learn from this is that faith is the act of desperately seeking Jesus. No matter how much you say you believe with your mouth, it cannot be called faith without action. “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17).

The Bible tells of people who desperately sought Jesus. The Canaanite woman followed Him, crying out, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” The blind man Bartimaeus kept crying out even after being rebuked. The woman suffering from a hemorrhage risked her life to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. The blind man was told, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” (Mark 10:52), and the woman was told, “Daughter, be well; your faith has saved you.” (Matthew 9:22). It was because of their desperate actions that they were told they had been “saved.”

●I was born in Ina City, Nagano Prefecture, and I'm a country boy. My home is surrounded by rice paddies and farm fields. One day on my way home from elementary school, as I was walking with my friends along a dirt path through a field, I spotted the tip of a beautiful, polished green stone peeking out of the ground. Thinking it might be a whetstone, I picked it up—only to discover it was a polished stone axe from the Jōmon period. From that moment on, I became captivated by archaeology. I began to take great pleasure in unearthing the treasures hidden in the earth.

In the same way, Jesus is hidden within the Gospels and within the traditions of the Church. The Bible and the prayer book are like a field where treasure is hidden. Those who do not give up but dig deeply, those who seek, and those who call upon the Lord's name again and again will find the treasure that is Christ. God asks us

to make such an effort. God is hidden and wants us to seek Him. God hides Himself in order to find those who truly need Him. As it is written, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7), and “Seek my face” (Psalm 28:8).

② [Forgiveness of Sins and Healing of Illnesses]

This man with a stroke had come to be healed of his illness. Yet instead of healing his illness, Jesus declared that his sins were forgiven. Why was that? The church places great importance on this order because forgiveness of sins is more important than healing from illness. Many people come to church seeking “healing.” However, what the church offers is “salvation.” Healing and salvation are different. Healing is worldly and temporary. No matter how many times a person is healed of one illness, they will eventually fall ill with another, and ultimately die without being healed. Healing has its limits. Salvation, however, is eternal. If sin is separation from God, then salvation is returning to God. Unless one learns to live with God, no matter how much physical illness is healed, his soul remains dead. However, those who live with God will never die eternally, even if their physical illnesses are not healed. What Jesus desires is not healing but salvation. “If the Lord is near, people will live.” (Isaiah 38:16)

③ [The healing of the sick is a sign of humanity's resurrection]

When the teachers of the law who were there heard Jesus declare that sins could be forgiven, they thought, “Who is this man who blasphemes? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Luke 5:22). Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? I will show you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Healing a disease is easy, but forgiving sins—that is, restoring a relationship with God and bringing about a new believer—is incredibly difficult. Of the ten people whom Jesus healed of severe leprosy, only one returned to express his faith. Even among those who left a cult, only one out of ten became a believer. No matter how many illnesses are healed, people do not believe in God. Miracles do not produce believers. However, Jesus healed the sick here and created believers in order to teach that He is the One who has the authority to forgive sins—that is, that He is God. When He told the man with paralysis, “Get up, pick up your mat, and go home,” the man stood up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God.

It says, “Everyone was amazed and began to praise God. And they were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen amazing things today’” (Luke 5:26). The reason the people were struck with awe was not simply because a sickness had been healed. After all, they had seen many sick people healed before. Rather, it was because they saw the manifestation of God—that is, His glory. It means they saw God appear on earth, forgiving people’s sins and restoring them from death to life. Let

us call it a sense of awe at the fact that heaven—that God Himself—was right there among them. That is the nature of their amazement and praise.

The healing of this sick man was performed as a symbol of the resurrection of humanity. The phrase “Get up” is synonymous with “be resurrected.” When Jesus commanded this sick man, “Get up and walk,” it was the same as saying, “Be resurrected and walk.” Jesus resurrected this man in a spiritual sense. This is nothing to be surprised about. Paul also says, “Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above” (Colossians 3:1). This is because resurrection begins in this world from the moment we are united with Christ. During baptism, as a pastor, I declare, “Your sins are forgiven.” But where, exactly, is the proof that sins have been forgiven? It is the fact that Christ was resurrected. The resurrection is the only sign. The Bible also states, “No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:39–40). Why is the resurrection proof that sins have been forgiven? The Bible teaches that where there is sin, there is death. This is because sin and death are one and the same. Conversely, where there is no death, there is no sin. Christ became one with you, bore your sins, and died once—but He was resurrected. Therefore, your sins have already been removed.

●At “Shinai-so,” a facility operated by the United Church of Christ in Japan, there was a pastor named Takejiro Doai. He often used the word “joyful.” He said things like this: “There are truths you cannot understand until you grow older. Recently, I’ve come to a firm conviction: Heaven is not a place we go to, but something that comes to us. The Lord Jesus also teaches us to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come.’ ... Death is not an eternal sleep, but a temporary slumber until we are eventually resurrected by Christ.”

Christ came into this world to become one with you. Christ Himself is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not you who ascended to heaven, but the Kingdom of Heaven that came down to you. This is so that you may become immortal. Therefore, let us rejoice greatly. Because Christ has risen, your sins have been taken away. Because Christ has risen, your death has come to an end. Because Christ has risen, love and life now reign within you. Let us celebrate the end of death and rejoice in the beginning of life.