



# A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: APRIL 2024

by Lee Shipp

## CONDEMNING JESUS

*"Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee..." Matthew 9:2.*

When God speaks, it is not a conversation; it is not a mere declaration; it is an irresistible happening, a force you cannot reckon with. As Jesus illustrates with the religious teachers when He asks, "what is easier for me to say, your sins are forgiven or to rise, take up your bed, and walk?"

The religious authorities were stunned by a man who claimed such power. They wondered, "Who is this who can speak and sins are forgiven, or that disabled people can walk?" So, Jesus lays out the undeniable evidence of His power; He does it; He heals the man and forgives his sins. Because He wanted them to know that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sin, He commands the paraplegic to walk.

Why are the religious infuriated by Jesus' desire to forgive sin? It was common for people to forgive each other, so what is the issue with Jesus? The problem lies in expressing the "power to forgive sin." Jesus is not simply saying, "I forgive you." He is not merely saying that I will cancel your debt. He is removing the stain and the damage sin caused. He illustrates this power by the ability to heal the man from the damage paralysis has caused.

When Jesus said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." He was making a declaration that only God had the power to create. Jesus was sending this man's sins away, much like a husband divorcing his wife. Jesus was breaking the legal rights sin had on this man.

As with sin, Jesus was not simply saying you are forgiven – but the transformational effect of forgiveness happened. The relationship between the sinner and the offended was restored. The consequences set in motion because of sin were destroyed and disannulled.

No doubt, word spread quickly that Jesus has the power to forgive sin. Undoubtedly, many sinners

needing forgiveness would find their way to Jesus. The sinners would find in Jesus a refuge and hope—someone with real power to help them. The desperately sick had found the physician who could heal them.

## GO LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS

The religious do not like what is happening. They do not understand why Jesus favors sinners. "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" they asked His disciples. When Jesus heard them, He responded: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Unfortunately, they did not learn what Jesus meant. Some time passes, and Jesus is again dealing with the religious scowl. He turns to them and says, "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7).

What did Jesus want them to learn? Whatever it was, it would have resulted in them not condemning the guiltless. Jesus was the only one without guilt. They condemned Jesus because He, who was without sin, wanted to show mercy to those who were sinners. The religious were condemning Jesus for His desire to rescue those who had no hope. Jesus is revealing to the religious that God's heart has always been bent toward mercy. God delights in mercy and longs to deliver the sinner. Jesus came into the world for sinners.

## WHAT KIND OF SINNER DID JESUS COME FOR?

What kind of sinner did Jesus come for? The sick kind! The desperately sick. The kind that cannot help themselves, the kind that needs a doctor. I found the word "sinners" to be quite interesting. In this passage, it means those devoted to sin, SLAVES TO sin, pre-eminently sinful, especially wicked; specifically, THOSE WHO ARE OBVIOUSLY EVIL, CRIMINAL, IMMORAL, ADDICTED – OBVIOUSLY disease-ridden and **CONTAMINATED**.

I love this use of the word "sin," for it perfectly describes us. Who can help us but Jesus? Jesus is the doctor who came into the world to heal those who were desperately destroying their lives. And what do religious people do to Jesus' ministry of healing? They condemned the guiltless man without sin because He showed sinners mercy.

The religious couldn't even see how sick they were; they were so sick, and they couldn't even see it; all they could see was the disease of the sinners around them. This is still true today. People cannot see how sick they are. We think we are so healthy; we believe we are okay, but we

are so sick, and we do not even know it. The religious have such animosity towards sinners as though they are infectious. Their attitude toward the sick is unlike Jesus, who is reaching out to them with the cure for their disease.

Who would condemn a doctor curing a man dying of a disease? Who could condemn a doctor for allowing only sick patients to visit him? What person would look down upon a doctor who had the cure for a disease and wanted to help all that he could? Any doctor who had a cure for a disease and refused to use it on those who were sick would be looked upon as cruel and unethical. So why would the religious condemn Jesus, who had the cure for sin and the ability to heal sinners? Would Jesus not be cruel if He turned sinners away?

### **GOD JOYFULLY FORGIVES**

Not only does God have the cure for sinners, but He also loves sinners. His heart rejoices in their healing. Jesus signifies the joy that fills heaven over one sinner who repents. Heaven is more excited about the one sinner coming home than the ninety-nine religious people who always remain in their place.

Notice how Jesus describes Himself when He finds the rebel sheep: "He layeth it on His shoulders, rejoicing." Then, when He gets the rebel home, He gathers His neighbors together so He can rejoice with him that He found the lost sheep. Jesus says distinctly this is the type of joy heaven experiences every time a sinner repents, "*... likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance*" (Luke 15:7). Maybe churches in America would experience a lot more sincere and lasting joy if more sinners were repenting, than a lot of religious people just gathering and "being religiously faithful." Jesus said, "*...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth*" (Luke 15:10).

And then there is the Prodigal Son story. This story features the actual response of our heavenly Father when a sinner turns from the lifestyle that is wearing him out. The prodigal lived for sin. He devoured sin. Sin devoured him. Nobody forced him into this lifestyle that robbed him of everything. He destroyed his life, lost his fortune, and embarrassed his family name. In similar conditions, most people would seek to end their lives. However, the prodigal believed his Father would make a way for him.

He set off for home. And the Father ran to meet him when he was still a long way off. The Father is so happy to receive His son that there is nothing

but love and acceptance. There are no words of disgust, no words of condemnation, no accusations, and no skepticism – all of that will come from the religious son who is always "religiously faithful" and doesn't know that he needs a doctor. But the religious scowl doesn't stop the party. They still celebrated the cure. The dead son was now alive. The lost son was found, and the Father would celebrate, dance, and have a feast. If the religious cannot handle this kind of mercy, they can wait outside!

### **YOU CAN GO HOME**

You can come home. If you have ruined your life, if you have embarrassed your family, if you consider suicide as the only solution for someone as broken and contaminated as you – WAIT! There is a doctor who has the POWER TO FORGIVE SIN! Yes! He still does. He is still in business. He still loves sinners. Heaven is waiting with bated breath to break out into a frenzy of joyful celebration, music, and dancing if you would cry out to God.

The prodigal son came to himself. He realized his life was a disaster. He was far from where he belonged. He was out of the relationship with his Father. But he could go home. He didn't have to stay in the pit. He could leave. And he did. He left. He went home, and you can too.

The Father is waiting for you. The physician has the cure and will gladly give it to you. He will give you mercy. You don't have to live like this anymore. You can pour the contents of the bottle down the sink. You can do it. You can break off the relationship that is sucking the life out of you. You don't have to be addicted anymore; there is an answer.

If He said it to one, He said it to all: "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest." Jesus said "come unto Me, all who are exhausted, desperately trying to keep their lives afloat, feeling as though they are sinking into the darkness of addiction. Come to Me. All of you who are overwhelmed with the weight of life, bills, family conflict, demands, guilt, shame ... come to Me. I will in no wise cast you out."