

*(Luke 5:18-26) Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."*

Reading this passage gave me cause to wonder at the marvelous way that Christ could jerk the rug out from under His opponents. Telling the paralytic that his sins were forgiven brought forth a storm of protest. And then Jesus asked them the crucial question: "Was it easier to forgive sins or heal this man?" They were not given a chance to answer, but even if they had I don't think that they could have come up with a good one. Perhaps many there doubted his ability to heal. They might have been hooked, and answered him. But He went ahead and healed them man and let him go home whole, to the amazement of the crowd.

After thinking about this for a bit, I realized that Christ had just forgiven a man his sins before His own blood had been shed. How could this be? Does not Hebrews 9:22 state very clearly that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"? This also recalled thoughts of the thief on the cross that Jesus told, "Today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43)." How could Christ forgive sins before He died on the cross?

Looking a little earlier in Hebrews 9 (vv 15-18), we see that God gives the analogy of a last will and testament. Those in close relationship to the testator will inherit a portion of the estate as indeed the children should. So when Christ told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, He was putting that man's name in the will. This will would take effect at the death of Christ.

Everything that Christ did pointed towards His crucifixion, and this is just another example. He couldn't present this lesson without that ever-present knowledge that He would soon bear the sins of all mankind on the cross. We know the agony that He felt in accomplishing it (Acts 2:24), but we also know the joy He felt in saving those He loved so much.

We might also note the timelessness of Christ in understanding this particular event. Christ was there in the beginning with God, helping in the act of creation (John 1). He was before time as we know it, and because time is a created entity, it is all laid out for Him like a map. So in a sense known really only to the Godhead, Christ could consider the act of his crucifixion to have covered all time. The Israelites made use of this in their own forgiveness, and the image of sins being rolled forward each year (Heb 10:3-4).

The writer in Hebrews 10 gives a wonderful account of the benefits of Christ's blood. It's presentation in the Holiest of Holies has been performed once, for all (vs 2, 10). It introduces a new covenant, which will be written into our heart and soul and the very fiber of our being (vs 16). Then we can come into the presence of God with confidence through its cleansing power (vs 19).

This leads up to an idea that most people don't connect with the crucifixion. Because of the closeness to God that our cleansing produces, we ought to work hard to encourage others (vs 25), and build them up into the same position of strength with their Lord. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, it should be with His entire body (1 Cor 11:29) in mind. This includes the earthly body, which is the church. Our communion is not just between ourselves and Christ, but should lead us to embrace each other as well.