

Mark 2:1-12 — Jesus Forgives Sin.

November 11, 2018

Take out your Bibles and turn to Mark 2. This morning, we are going to look at one Jesus' miracles that many of us learned in Sunday School. It is the healing of the paralytic and the guy who needed the major roof repair afterward.

Before we get into the text, I want to begin with a question.

What is the greatest benefit the Christian faith offers the world?

Some people think it is morality. Christians generally lead good lives, moral lives. There are countless stories of Christian morality changing cultures. Another great benefit the Christian faith offers is love. Christians love one another. Christians even love their enemies. Christianity has made the world a more loving place. Still others say the greatest benefit the Christian faith offers the world is social care. Most hospitals were started as Christian works of charity. Most orphanages and organizations that care for the poor, like the Salvation Army, were started as Christian works of charity, not government-run organizations. These are some of the benefits the Christian faith offers the world, but none of these are the greatest benefit.

The greatest benefit benefit the Christian faith brings to the world is forgiveness. That is what makes the Christian faith so different from other religions. The Bible tells us we are all sinners in rebellion against God. We lie. We cheat. We steal. The first word we learn to say as a child is, "No." We are sinners in rebellion against God from the very beginning of our lives. We are hopelessly addicted to our sin. No matter how hard we try to stop our sin, we continue in our sin. The Bible says the just response to our sin is the same

response the devil and demons will receive for their sin, that is an eternity in the Lake of Fire. The Bible says that is not unfair, that is a fair and just response by God because sin is that evil.

The Bible tells us God is just; it also tells us God is incredibly loving and kind. He provided a way for us to escape the eternity of wrath we deserve and to be forgiven of our sins through his son, Jesus. You see, it technically isn't sin that makes us deserving of an eternity in the Lake of Fire. It is unforgiven sin that leads to an eternity in the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is populated with unforgiven sinners. Heaven is populated with forgiven sinners. Forgiveness is what makes the difference with God today and for all eternity. Christianity alone, through Jesus Christ alone, offers us forgiveness. That is why forgiveness is the greatest benefit Christianity offers the world.

The Bible tells us forgiveness comes to us through Jesus.

Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you... Acts 13:38 (ESV)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace... Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)

Forgiveness through Jesus is not just found in the New Testament.

Anticipation of Jesus' coming to pay the price for our sin and provide forgiveness is found in the Old Testament.

...as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12 (ESV)

Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. Isaiah 38:17 (ESV)

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Isaiah 43:25 (ESV)

Our greatest need is forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sin is what God offers to us through Jesus. As a result, nothing is more godlike than when we forgive other people completely and fully, like Jesus forgives us. Nothing is more displeasing to God than to hold a grudge and refuse to forgive.

The story we are looking at this morning is all about forgiveness. Let's read it, then study it together.

Read Mark 2:1-12

Earlier in our study, we learned the first half of Mark is about Jesus revealing his identity as the Son of God. The flow of Mark's argument is that he is proving Jesus is the Son of God by showing his authority over everything. A few weeks ago, we saw Jesus' teaching was different. He didn't teach like the scribes; he taught with authority. Then we saw Jesus cast out a demon by the mere authority of his word. Next, we saw Jesus has authority to cast out disease mere by the power of his word. This began when Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law from a high fever with just a word. Of course, some people might not find that impressive. Many people get over a fever. That is why Mark told us about another of Jesus' healings. Jesus healed a leper instantly and completely by the mere authority of his word. In the ancient world, people understood leprosy. They feared leprosy. It is a devastating disease that disfigures people, causing fingers, toes, hands, feet, ears, teeth and even their noses to rot off their bodies. Luke told us the leper Jesus healed was covered from head to foot with leprous tumors. He was so disfigured he looked like he came from a horror movie. But Jesus, at the authority of his word, instantly and completely healed him. His scaly skin instantly turned smooth. The tumors that covered his body were instantly

gone. His fingers, toes, nose and other parts of his body that were rotted away, which was common for a leper at this stage of the disease, were instantly re-created. It was a healing on the order of the creation itself from Genesis 1 and 2.

If you noticed, Mark was like a teenager with a new stereo that slowly keeps turning the volume louder to see how loud his stereo will go. The farther we get into this Gospel, the more authority we find Jesus' word carries. Each story that shows us the authority of Jesus' word is even greater than the last one.

Today, we will learn more about the authority of Jesus' word. At the authority of Jesus' word, he can even forgive our sin.

This story is full of people, so we will look at it through the different roles people play in the story. First, we will look at the curious crowd. Second, we will look at the believing paralytic. Third, we will look at the forgiving Jesus. Fourth, we will look at the hostile leaders. Fifth, we will return to the astonished crowd.

The Curious Crowd

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. Mark 2:1-2 (ESV)

“When he returned to Capernaum...” Jesus started at Capernaum but was gone for a while and then came back to Capernaum. If you were with us earlier in this series, we learned where Jesus was before this verse. A few weeks ago we studied Jesus' first appearance in Capernaum. He didn't stay long. He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath, cast out a demon, then healed people for the afternoon and evening. The next day Jesus decided to leave Capernaum and travel to the 240 other towns and villages around the Seas of Galilee.

And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” Mark 1:38 (ESV)

So Jesus now returned to Capernaum after his preaching and teaching tour around the Sea of Galilee.

“After some days...” In Greek this is a very broad term. It could refer to a period of weeks. It could refer to a period of months. Jesus’ ministry in the area of Galilee lasted about a year and a half so it was likely a period of several months that he was gone from Capernaum preaching in the synagogues of other towns around the lake where he healed their sick and cast out demons. What was he preaching? Jesus was preaching the message of the kingdom. This means he was calling people to repent and trust in God’s grace for the forgiveness of their sin. As John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus, “Jesus is the lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.” That was Jesus’ message.

Of course, last week we learned the reason Jesus decided to return to Capernaum at this time. Last week, we learned that after Jesus healed the leper that was infested from head to foot with leprosy, things went wrong. Jesus instructed the leper to keep quiet about his healing in Galilee. Jesus told him to be a miracle missionary. He was to go to Jerusalem to offer to the priests the Old Testament sacrifice for the ritual purification of a leper so he would be a witness to them about the incredible miracle Jesus performed and the truth of Jesus’ message. Instead of obeying Jesus, this healed leper did exactly what Jesus told him not to do. He told everybody around Galilee about his healing and never went to Jerusalem to tell the priests. As a result, Jesus’ popularity skyrocketed because people around the Sea of Galilee were amazed by the greatness of this

miracle. Jesus could no longer go into a town around the Sea of Galilee without being crushed by the mob.

But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter. Mark 1:45 (ESV)

At this point, Jesus' ministry around the Sea of Galilee was forced to come to an end. Jesus returned to Capernaum hoping his popularity had cooled down a bit. Jesus entered Capernaum without fanfare. He entered Capernaum in stealth mode. He was undercover. His silent entry didn't last for long. People soon realized he was home.

It was reported that he was at home. This got tricky. Apparently, Jesus had some kind of place he called home in Capernaum. Did Jesus own a house in Capernaum? He might have. I don't know. Scholars believe that he most likely didn't own a home but he made Peter's home his home. We learned a few weeks ago that Peter had a home in Capernaum. Peter was not a poor man. He was a wealthy business man. He had a large home by the standards of the day. He had his mother-in-law living with him. You know it had to be a large home when your mother-in-law lives under the same roof. He had Andrew, his brother, living with him. Archaeology tells us Peter's property was more like a homestead than a home. Peter had the room and was very hospitable. Most likely Jesus was staying at Peter's home in Capernaum.

So many gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. Even though Peter had a big house, it was not a big enough house. When the word spread that Jesus was back, people started coming. Everybody wanted to see and be with Jesus. Everybody wanted to hear Jesus

and hoped to see one of his famous, healing miracles. We have Jesus in the house and as many people as could fit into the home were packed in. They were like sardines. There was no air space. The Capernaum fire marshall was not happy. This was worse than Saturday morning at the Family Diner downtown.

Before we go any farther, it is worth stopping to talk about these crowds that were packed around Jesus. When most of us think about a crowd, we think about success. We associate crowds with popularity. That is not the way Mark described the crowds around Jesus in his Gospel. In Marks' Gospel, the crowds were like rock concert groupies. They were with Jesus to see miracles but very few actually responded with repentance and faith. The crowds came to watch the Jesus show. They didn't come to change their lives. Of course, there were true followers of Christ in the crowd who responded in genuine faith, and we are about to meet one this morning, but they were in the minority. In Mark, the crowds made it difficult for Jesus to teach. The crowds kept people who needed to see Jesus away from him. The crowds forced Jesus to teach from a boat on the Sea of Galilee so he was not crushed.

The healing of this paralytic is also talked about in Luke and Matthew. Luke told us a little more about the crowd. Luke said the Pharisees and teachers of the law were in the crowd. They weren't there to follow Jesus. They came to spy on Jesus and discredit him because they were jealous.

On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Luke 5:17 (ESV)

Pharisees — Who were these guys? Pharisee means separate. This was the group that was into the most strict observance of Judaism. The Pharisees were the fundamentalists, the legalists, and they ended up promoting salvation by observing the law. Pharisees were so focused on keeping laws that they even added to the Old Testament law, providing more and more regulations and taboos. They were people focused on saving themselves by what they did. In that day, there were about 6,000 of them. They were very influential. They began after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylon around the time of Ezra, 400 years before the time of Jesus. So we know Pharisees were scattered in the crowd. They were not there to learn from Jesus. They were there to spy on Jesus and see if they could find a way to destroy him.

Teachers of the law — Who are these guys? These were the theologians of the group. If Pharisees were similar to a super fundamentalistic denomination, the teachers of the laws are similar to seminary professors. They were the big brains. They were the theologians and influential writers of the day. These are the D.A. Carsons, the NT Wrights, and the Eugene Petersons in the time of Jesus. They were also mingled in the crowd to fact-check Jesus. Where did they come from? Some of them were local but most of them were from out of town. They came to Capernaum to Jesus for themselves because they heard about his teaching and his healings. There were ultimately there to discredit him.

In short, Jesus had a tough crowd. Most of the people packed in the house were not there to learn from him. They were there to be critical of him.

They were like the White House press pool. Almost every question that was asked was loaded and designed to trap Jesus.

The Believing Sinner

And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. Mark 2:3–4 (ESV)

According to Matthew 4:24, Jesus healed many paralytics, although this is the only description of a paralytic's healing we have in Mark. The friends of this paralyzed man wanted to bring him to Jesus so the man could be healed, but they couldn't get him to Jesus because the crowd was packed into the building. The crowd would not let them in the door.

Luke described how these guys repeatedly tried to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus but nobody would move. Nobody gave up a seat.

And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd... Luke 5:18–19 (ESV)

What we have was a critical crowd listening to Jesus teach, hoping they could trap him. While the crowd was filled with people interested in being made right with God by keeping the law, none of them were caring and compassionate enough to step back and let the paralytic come to Jesus. Do you realized how incredibly selfish this crowd was? The more I studied them this week, the angrier I became. They knew Jesus healed people. He did that all the time. They knew Jesus could heal this man with just a touch or a word, but all this crowd could think about was themselves and trapping Jesus. They were too selfish to let a cripple be healed by Jesus.

Unfortunately, it is easy for us to be just like this crowd. Let's admit it. It is easy for us to have critical hearts that keep people from Jesus instead of caring hearts that bring people to Jesus. You know how it goes. You leave church irritated. You talk about it in the car on the way home. The air conditioning was too cold. The music was too loud. The preacher talked too long. The coffee was too strong. The cookies were store-bought and not homemade. Critical, critical, critical. We are just like the tough crowd Jesus faced. We are more concerned with being critical than in bringing people to Jesus so they can be healed. Instead of being critical of coffee, it is a better to invite friends out to coffee. Remember the critical crowds keep people from Jesus. The caring friends bring people to Jesus.

Back to our story. The friends of our paralytic were frustrated by the uncaring critical crowd who wouldn't make room at the door for them to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus, so they devised a plan. They watched McGyver so they headed to the roof. In the ancient world, the houses had a staircase on an outside wall that led to a flat roof. These guys were good at geometry so they knew where Jesus was in the room. They went to the spot on the roof that was right above Jesus and began digging.



Roofs in the ancient world were flat. There were tree logs that spanned the top walls of a building. Saplings were placed perpendicular to them. After that, grasses were laid down. Finally mud or

clay was put on the roof. It was pressed flat with a large rolling pin of several hundred pounds called a roof roller. Finally, before the clay baked hard in the sun, in richer homes, clay tiles were put down, making a smooth floor similar to the bathroom tile floors we have today. Luke tells us this was a larger and fancier home because it had these tiles on the roof.

...but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles... Luke 5:19 (ESV)

Personally, I can't help but laugh as I see this scene unfolding in my mind. As a teacher, the last thing you want is a distraction in the crowd. When I am preaching and a child starts screaming in the back row, I'm grateful when the mother takes the child out of the room. I wish you could see what it looks like from the platform when a child is screaming. Every eye starts looking that direction. Some of you even turn your head to give a disapproving look. Everybody is distracted.

If you think it is distracting to have a baby cry when you are teaching, imagine how distracting it was for Jesus to have people digging a hole in the roof over his head when he was teaching. Imagine hearing the prying and pounding of getting the tiles out of the clay. Imagine hearing the shovels dig in the clay. After they were through the clay, they began pulling back the grass and saplings. The whole time the roof was caving in. Sticks and mud were falling on everybody in the room. This took some time. You don't make a 4-by-6 foot hole in five minutes. Picture these fancy religious leaders with their freshly washed robes packed into a room with mud falling on their heads and their freshly washed

clothing. They couldn't get out of the way, because they were packed too tightly inside.

Finally, there were faces peering through the hole. These guys were prepared. They brought rope. No doubt they tied their ropes to the four corners of his bed and began letting him down through the hole in the ceiling. Now it looks like the high-wire act at the circus with the paralytic swinging back and forth in the air over the crowd. Finally, the swinging paralytic that was over the crowd of properly dressed men with dirt on their heads landed safely in front of Jesus. Let's see what happens.

The Forgiving Jesus

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Mark 2:5 (ESV)

Did these guys believe Jesus could heal their paralyzed friend? Of course they did. If they didn't believe it, they wouldn't have dug a hole in the roof. They heard of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law. They met people all over town healed by Jesus. They heard about the hundreds or thousands of people Jesus healed around the lake. It didn't take much faith for them to believe Jesus could heal their paralyzed friend. It was like the faith we have when we go to the hospital for minor surgery. They knock us out with anesthesia but we trust the doctors as they cut us to pieces because they do this all the time. It takes faith but it doesn't take much faith. That is the same kind of faith these guys have for their friend. Jesus healed everybody.

Instead of healing the paralyzed man, which is what they expect, Jesus said this man's sins were forgiven, which is what they didn't expect Jesus to do.

There was a small problem. The Bible tells us the only way to be forgiven of our sins is to repent and place our faith in Jesus to pay for our sins. It looks like the paralyzed man didn't do that, or did he? What was Jesus preaching the whole time he was traveling around Galilee? What was Jesus preaching to the tough crowd in the house that afternoon? He was preaching the good news of the kingdom. Essentially he was preaching that the only way to be made right with God is by faith in God to forgive your sin. Our paralyzed friend heard Jesus' message and put his faith in Jesus' message. He didn't just have faith that Jesus could heal him physically, he had faith that Jesus could forgive his sin and heal him eternally. The critical crowd wasn't truly listening to Jesus' preaching. The paralytic was listening to Jesus preaching. He believed that as John said, "Jesus is the lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world." That is why Jesus told him his sins were forgiven.

The Hostile Leaders

Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." Mark 2:6–11 (ESV)

"He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Here is the funny part. They were right. According to the Old Testament, all sin is ultimately against God. God alone is therefore the only one who can forgive sin.

"Immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, 'Why do you question these things in your

hearts?’’ Now things got funnier. Jesus read their minds. He knew what they were thinking. This makes it interesting because there is only one person who knows what we are thinking. That is God. They are mad that he claims to be able to do something only God can do but then he does something only God can do; he reads their mind. Demons do not know what you are thinking. Satan does not know what you are thinking. Angels do not know what you are thinking. Only God knows what you are thinking.

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”
1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

...for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought...
1 Chronicles 28:9 (ESV)

“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.” Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

...So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind. Ezekiel 11:5 (ESV)

So Jesus gives his critical crowd, that is hoping to trap him, exactly what they were looking for. He claimed to be able to forgive sins, which is something only God can do. In their minds they were charging him with blasphemy, a charge deserving death.

The problem is Jesus read their minds. He knew what they were thinking, which is also something only God can do. Now Jesus proved to them he can forgive sins.

“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — he said to the paralytic —

“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” Jesus said, “Which is easier?” Which is easier? The answer is both are equally hard. A human being cannot forgive sins. A human being also cannot cure a paralytic with a word. Only God can do both of those.

Jesus told him to pick up his bed and go home. Instantly and completely he was healed. Like the leper, this man’s shriveled weak legs and distorted body were fully and completely healed in an instant. He could walk and instantly had enough strength to pick up his bed and carry it out the door.

Put these pieces together. Only God has the ability to read your mind. Only God has the power to heal people miraculously, instantly and completely with just a word. Only God has the authority to forgive sin. If Jesus can heal the sick and read minds, which only God can do, then it means he can also forgive sin, which is also something only God can do.

The Crowd’s Reaction

And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” Mark 2:12 (ESV)

Our paralytic was instantly healed. He picked up his bed and walked out the door in front of everyone. Mark said the result was people were amazed because they never saw anything like this. The crowds came for the Jesus show. They loved the miraculous healing. It was a great show but they missed the whole point of what they saw. Only the paralytic left that day with his sins forgiven because only the paralytic believed Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

Matthew, as well as Luke, told us this same story. I love the way Matthew told us about the reaction of the crowd.

When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. Matthew 9:8 (ESV)

The operative word in that verse is men. They still viewed Jesus as just a man. How could Jesus read their minds if he wasn't God? How could Jesus heal the paralyzed, the lepers and thousand of others with just a word if he wasn't God? How could Jesus forgive the paralytic's sins if he wasn't God? Jesus isn't just a man. He is God.

Conclusion

First, we see the truth about Jesus. Don't be like the critical crowds that saw Jesus as nothing more than a good man, a good teacher, and a source of entertainment. Jesus is much more than that. He is God. As God, he is the only one who can meet our greatest need, which is for forgiveness.

Second, as God, Jesus can forgive your sin with just a word. No matter what you have done, no matter how many times you have fallen back into the same sin, no matter how disgusted you are with yourself when you look in the mirror, Jesus can do what only God can do. When you ask him to forgive you of your sin, he will. Jesus loves you so much he died to forgive your sin. When Jesus forgives your sin, he doesn't just forgive your sin of today but he forgives the sin of your past, present, and even your future! He forgives your sin completely, fully, and instantly. As you stand before him, you are a completely new person in an instant, just like a healed leper or paralytic.

My friends, I beg of you to see Jesus not just as a man. He is God, because he does what only God can do. He offers to give us what we desperately need but only God can provide — forgiveness. Turn to him today and receive it.



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