

Mark 2:1-12
June 4, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Our opening text for today's study is a very familiar storyline. The word is out that Jesus has the power to heal people, and four friends of a paralytic go to GREAT lengths to present their paralytic friend to Jesus because they had complete FAITH Jesus would be able to heal him. The crowd was so big around Jesus that these friends made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

Q: Do we have such faith in Jesus to do ANYTHING and everything we possibly can to bring our friends to Jesus? Have we ever done something as crazy and socially unacceptable as removing someone's roof to bring a friend to Jesus? Is there something we're not doing because we deem it to be unacceptable to society, even though we know it would help get someone into Jesus's presence? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about friendship from what these men did for the paralytic? [Let people engage.]

Transition: You will notice that in this chapter each event centers on a controversy between Jesus and the spiritual leaders. There is a controversy about Jesus's forgiving sins, about Jesus choosing sinners, about fasting, and about the Sabbath. *I just greased the wheel on the first story because the Pharisees are going to take issue with Jesus stating to the paralytic "your sins are forgiven" – in addition to healing the paralytic.* Let's look at the key quarrels that the religious leaders focused on when attacking Jesus and observe how Jesus responds to each of the controversies He faced. Let's begin.

BOOK:

Jesus Heals a Paralytic

2 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?" 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in

full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

It's one thing to have authority over the natural world, but it's an entirely different thing to have authority over the spiritual world – and especially the authority over people's hearts. And yet the point of this passage is that Jesus is God and therefore has the authority and power to forgive sin, which is the heart of His mission because it's our greatest need and it brings Him great glory.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 114)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

With amazing speed, the news spread that a miracle-working Teacher had come to Capernaum; and wherever our Lord went, great crowds gathered. They wanted to see Him heal the sick and cast out demons. Had they been interested in His message of the Gospel, these multitudes would have been an encouragement to Jesus; but He knew that most of them were shallow in their thinking and blind to their own needs. Often the Lord found it necessary to leave the city and go out into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:15–16). Every servant of God should follow His example and take time away from people in order to meet the Father and be refreshed and revitalized through prayer.

Now the time had come for Jesus to demonstrate to the people what His ministry was all about. After all, He had come to do much more than relieve the afflictions of the sick and the demonized. Those miracles were wonderful, but there was something greater for the people to experience—they could enter into the kingdom of God! They needed to understand the spiritual lessons that lay behind the physical miracles He was performing.

In this section, our Lord makes it clear that He came to bring to all who would trust Him three wonderful gifts: forgiveness (Mark 2:1–12), fulfillment (Mark 2:13–22), and freedom (Mark 2:23–3:12).

Forgiveness (Mark 2:1–12)

Whether this event took place in His own house (“He was at home,” NASB), or Peter’s house, is not made clear. Since hospitality is one of the basic laws of the East, the people of Capernaum did not wait for an invitation but simply came to the house in droves. This meant that some of the truly needy people could not get close enough to Jesus to receive His help. However, four friends of a palsied man decided to lower their friend through the roof, trusting that Jesus would heal him; and Jesus did. This miracle of healing gave our Lord the opportunity to teach an important lesson about forgiveness.

Consider this scene through the eyes of the Lord Jesus. When He *looked up*, He saw the four men on the roof with their sick friend. Houses had flat roofs which were usually accessible by means of an outside stairway. It would not be difficult to remove the tiles, laths, and grass that comprised the roof and make an opening large enough to fit their friend through on his mat.

We must admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us as “fishers of men.” For one thing, they were deeply concerned about their friend and wanted to see him helped. They had the faith to believe that Jesus could and would meet his need. They did not simply “pray about it,” but they put some feet to their prayers; and they did not permit the difficult circumstances to discourage them. They worked together and dared to do something different, and Jesus rewarded their efforts. How easy it would have been for them to say, “Well, there is no sense trying to get to Jesus today! Maybe we can come back tomorrow.”

When our Lord *looked down*, He saw the palsied man lying on his mat; and immediately Jesus went to the heart of the man’s problem—sin. Not all sickness is caused by sin (see John 9:1–3), but evidently this man’s condition was the result of his disobedience to God. Even before He healed the man’s body, Jesus spoke peace to the man’s heart and announced that his sins

were forgiven! Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need; it costs the greatest price; and it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results.

Then Jesus *looked around* and saw the critics who had come to spy on Him (see Luke 5:17). These religious leaders certainly had every right to investigate the ministry of this new teacher, since the religious life of the nation was under their supervision (Deut. 13). But they should have come with open minds and hearts, seeking truth, instead of with critical minds, seeking heresy. Some of the negative attitude that had been present in Judea (John 4:1–4) had now invaded Galilee, and this was the beginning of the official opposition that ultimately led to our Lord's arrest and death. He was now so popular that the Jewish leaders dared not ignore Him. In fact, they must have arrived early for the meeting, because they were right at the scene of action! Or perhaps Jesus graciously gave them front row seats.

When the Lord *looked within*, He saw the critical spirit in their hearts and knew that they were accusing Him of blasphemy. After all, only God *can* forgive sins; and Jesus had just told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. Jesus was claiming to be God!

But the next instant, He *proved* Himself to be God by reading their hearts and telling them what they were thinking (see John 2:25; Heb. 3:13). Since they wanted to “reason” about things, He gave them something to ponder: Which is easier, to heal the man or to tell him he is forgiven? Obviously, it is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven!” *because nobody can prove whether or not the forgiveness really took place*. So, to back up His words, Jesus immediately healed the man and sent him home. The healing of the man's body was but an illustration and demonstration of the healing of his soul (Ps. 103:3). The scribes and Pharisees, of course, could neither heal the man nor forgive his sins; so they were caught in their own trap and condemned by their own thoughts.

Jesus affirmed His deity not only by forgiving the man's sins and healing his body, but also by applying to Himself the title “Son of man.” This title is used fourteen times in Mark's Gospel, and twelve of these references are found after Mark 8:29 when Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ of God (Mark 2:10, 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26, 34; 14:21, 41, 62). It was definitely a messianic title (Dan. 7:13–14) and the Jews would have interpreted it that way. Jesus used this title about eighty times in the Gospels.

Suppose the religious leaders had opened their hearts to the truth that day, what could they have learned? For one thing, they could have learned that sin is like sickness and that forgiveness is like having your health restored. This was not a new truth, for the Old Testament Scriptures had said the same thing (Ps. 103:3; Isa. 1:5–6, 16–20); but now it had been demonstrated before their very eyes. They also could have learned that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is indeed the Savior with authority to forgive sins—and their own sins could have been forgiven! What an opportunity they missed when they came to the meeting with a critical spirit instead of with a repentant heart!

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 112-113) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. THE HEALING OF A PARALYTIC MAN AND FORGIVENESS (2:1–12) (Matt. 9:1–8; Luke 5:17–26)

2:1–2. **A few days later when Jesus returned to Capernaum** (cf. 1:21), it was reported that **He** was at **home** (probably Peter's house; cf. 1:29). In the freedom of Jewish custom **many**

uninvited people crowded into the house and around **the door**, thus preventing access. Jesus was speaking (*elalei*) **the Word** (cf. 1:14–15; 4:14, 33) **to them**.

2:3–4. Four **men** brought a **paralytic** (paralyzed man) **on a mat** (poor man’s “bed,” KJV), hoping to **get him to Jesus**. But **they could not ... because of the crowd**. Like many Palestinian dwellings, this house probably had an outside stairway leading to a flat **roof**. So the men went onto the roof. **After digging through it** (a composite of grass, clay, clay tiles, and laths), **they made an opening ... above Jesus** and **lowered the paralyzed man** before Him (probably using fishing ropes that lay at hand).

2:5. **Jesus** viewed the determined effort of the four as visible evidence of **their faith** in His power to heal this man. He did not rebuke this interruption to His teaching but unexpectedly told **the paralytic, Son** (an affectionate term), **your sins are forgiven**.

In the Old Testament disease and death were viewed as the consequences of man’s sinful condition, and healing was predicated on God’s forgiveness (e.g., 2 Chron. 7:14; Pss. 41:4; 103:3; 147:3; Isa. 19:22; 38:16–17; Jer. 3:22; Hosea 14:4). This does not mean there is a corresponding sin for each occurrence of sickness (cf. Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3). Jesus simply showed that this man’s physical condition had a basic spiritual cause.

2:6–7. The **teachers of the Law** (lit., “scribes”; cf. 1:22; Luke 5:17) who were present were offended by Jesus’ veiled pronouncement. Only God **can forgive sins** (cf. Ex. 34:6–9; Pss. 103:3; 130:4; Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 48:11; Dan. 9:9). In the Old Testament forgiveness of sins was never attributed to the Messiah. The scribes regarded such **talk by this fellow** (contemptuous tone) as a pretentious affront to God’s power and authority, blasphemy against **God**, a serious offense punishable by death from stoning (Lev. 24:15–16). In fact such a charge became the basis for a formal condemnation later (cf. Mark 14:61–64).

2:8–9. **Immediately** (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) **Jesus** perceived **in His spirit** (inwardly; cf. 14:38) their hostile thoughts **and He** confronted them directly with pointed counterquestions (a rhetorical device in Rabbinic debate; cf. 3:4; 11:30; 12:37).

The scribes expected a physical healing, but Jesus pronounced the man’s **sins ... forgiven**. They probably thought that a pronouncement of forgiveness was **easier** than one of healing because healing was visible and immediately verifiable.

2:10. This verse presents an interpretive problem due to the awkward change of addressee in the verse’s middle. Jesus seemed to be addressing the scribes (v. 10a) but there is an abrupt break in the verse after which He addressed **the paralytic**. Another problem in light of the overall emphasis of Mark is the public use of the title **Son of Man** by Jesus in the presence of unbelieving hearers so early in His ministry (cf. 9:9; 10:33). Apart from 2:10 and 28, this title does not occur in Mark’s account until after Peter’s confession (8:29). After that it occurs 12 times and is crucial to Jesus’ self-disclosure *to His disciples* (cf. 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [twice], 41, 62; see comments on 8:31).

In light of these difficulties 2:10a is probably a parenthetical, editorial comment by Mark (cf. similarly, vv. 15c, 28; 7:3–4, 19; 13:14). He inserted it into the narrative to explain the significance of this event for his readers: that Jesus as the risen Son of Man **has authority** (*exousian*, the right and power) **on earth to forgive sins**, something the scribes did not fully recognize. Only here in the Gospels is the forgiveness of sins attributed to the Son of Man.

This view contributes to the literary unity of the passage: forgiveness is declared (2:5), questioned (vv. 6–9), validated (v. 11), and recognized (v. 12). The initial words in verse 10, **But that you may know**, could thus be translated, “Now you (Mark’s readers) should know that...” The last clause signals the end of Mark’s comment and a return to the incident itself.

2:11–12. Jesus commanded the paralytic to **get up** (a test of his faith), **take his mat, and go home** (demand of obedience). The man was enabled to do this immediately (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) **in full view of them all**, including Jesus’ critics. They were forced to recognize that the man had received God’s forgiveness. This showed the character of salvation Jesus brought, namely, healing whole persons. **Everyone** (probably including the scribes) was **amazed** (*existasthai*, lit., “out of their minds”; cf. 3:21; 5:42; 6:51) and **praised** (ascribed glory to) **God** because of Jesus’ display of supernatural power.

Leavell, L.P. (1972). *Mark*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (pp. 619-621). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Criticism (Mark 2:1–3:6)

The passage—In chapter 2 through 3:6 we see the criticism of Jesus growing among the scribes and Pharisees. They were critical because he forgave sin. It was their belief that no one could forgive sin save God only. Since they did not acknowledge Jesus as God, they judged his actions to be blasphemy. In Old Testament times those guilty of blasphemy were sentenced to die by stoning.

There was widespread belief in those days that physical maladies were a result of sin. The friends of Job thought him to be guilty of gross sin because he suffered so. It naturally followed in their thinking that restoration depended upon forgiveness. Perhaps it was for this reason that Jesus first forgave the sin of a victim of palsy (2:1–12). The Pharisees had no way of knowing whether or not the man’s sins were actually forgiven. The man knew, but Jesus provided the proof in commanding him to take his bed and carry it out.

In 2:13–17 we find the call of Matthew. It has been pointed out that he left everything except his quill. His sacrifice was greater initially than that of the fishermen apostles, for he could not return to this political position of tax-collector.

The Pharisees were horrified when Jesus went into the home of a despised publican to eat a meal. Jesus made no effort to defend these people and their sin, but stated their need. Publicans had plenty of money. Their problems were not economic. Adequate financial resources, however, cannot solve the problems of personal sin. These were spiritually sick and needed the Great Physician.

In 2:18–22, Jesus is criticized for refusing to fast. The only fast prescribed in the Torah was on the Day of Atonement. The oral tradition had developed so far beyond the Torah that every Monday and Thursday were designated as fast days. Jesus did not approve fasting for fasting’s sake. It is not necessarily a mark of piety because the calendar indicates it is time to fast. This practice becomes meaningful when transcendent values are given priority, causing mundane, lesser things to fade into insignificance.

It is likely that 2:19–20 reveal the shadow of the cross falling upon Jesus. He referred to himself as the bridegroom, and pointed to a time when he would not be with them.

In 2:21–22 Jesus showed the incompatibility between the Jewish system and Christianity. The Jewish system, like an old garment, had served over a long period of time. The Christian faith is not an appendage to be sewn on an old garment. Ritual forms, ritual sacrifices, and special days are outward expressions only. The Christian faith, like new wine, cannot be contained in the vehicle of the old system.

In 2:23 through 3:6 we find two criticisms centering in sabbath regulations. Jewish leaders had reduced their sabbath laws to a total of thirty-four. Under each of these thirty-four laws there were six divisions!

The feeling of some Jews toward the Sabbath was so strong that they would not defend themselves on the sabbath. Military enemies, knowing this about the Jews, sometimes attacked on the sabbath, knowing the Jews would not resist.

The Pharisees' concept of faith centered in the word "ritual." As long as they did the right thing at the right time, they felt themselves to be orthodox and acceptable to God. Jesus taught that man's highest expression of faith was not in ritual but in service. The sabbath as an institution should not receive top priority. The sabbath was made for man, not vice versa.

The conflict in 3:1–6 stems from the same source. Their beliefs were so distorted that they held institutions to be of greater worth than persons. In verse 4 Jesus asked a question, which if they had answered honestly, would have condemned them. Jesus called the man into the center of the crowd, and in the presence of all healed his withered hand.

In 3:6 we find the strange coalition of Pharisees and Herodians. Here and in Mark 12:13 are the only two references to this party. These politically oriented people were supporters of Herod the Great. Though he was half-Jew, he had an appointment from the Romans that gave him authority in that part of the Roman Empire. The Herodians wanted one of Herod's descendents in that position once more, that they might reap the benefits of a good working relationship with Rome.

Special points—The word which Jesus spoke in 2:2 was the gospel. It included his own identity and the fulfilment of the messianic promise.

Fasting has validity today when associated with supreme values. When preoccupied over the illness of a loved one, fasting comes easily. When we are wrapped up in spiritual concerns, the thought of food is secondary. Fasting today should be Christ honoring, not for promotion of self.

Truth for today—In the emphasis on forgiveness in 2:1–12, we must keep in mind the obligation both to forgive and receive forgiveness. These are equally difficult.

The incident in 2:15 f. points up an aspect of Christian responsibility. We are responsible to those considered to be outcasts from society. They are sometimes well-to-do, like these publicans, as well as the economically disadvantaged.

In 2:21–22 Jesus sounded a relevant warning. We can be so wrapped up in the system that we lose sight of our purpose. We must remember that there is never any finality in the system or the methods. There is finality in our message, but the new wine will not long be contained in old wineskins. The wineskins of method are easily antiquated. We must remain willing to let the system go, but preserve the new wine at all costs.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 2:1-12. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.