

Better to Be Forgiven

Mark 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus was winding down His first ministry tour, He was becoming a rock star in Northern Israel, the region around the Sea of Galilee. He was going from town to town to teach in the synagogues, as that was His mission. But the news of all the wonderful healing miracles He was doing was spreading like wildfire through all the towns. After a while, He could even enter into some of these villages, because they would be so over crowded He couldn't move.

He resorted to just staying outside of town in the desolate places, letting the word spread to the villages, and all the people came out to Him! There, He would teach, and of course, heal all the sick and demon possessed that were brought to Him.

Now that this leg of His preaching tour was coming to an end, He headed to His home base, Capernaum, and the home of Simon, Andrew, James, and John. But of course, there would be no quiet rest for Jesus in Capernaum either. Let's pick up the story in Mark 2:1-12.

TEXT: Mark 2:1-12

*1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.
2 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.*

Predictably, once word gathered that He was home (probably Simon's house), the house filled up to standing room only, and people were waiting outside to get in! (It was the hottest club in town!).

Jesus, knowing why He had come, stuck with His mission. He was preaching the Word to them. These would be the best Bible studies in the history of the world, because the Author of the book was talking about what the Bible said!

*3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.
4 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.*

Our houses have pitched roofs, but the homes in that place and at that time were mostly rectangular shapes with flat roofs that were often used for drying clothes, sitting out on an evening, or processing food. These roofs were accessed often by steps or ladders, so it was no problem for these four men to carry this paralytic up to the roof. Even so, these are five guys who will not take no for an answer! Can't get in? Oh yeah? "We'll get in!"

For all we know, it was the paralytic man who was directing them! "People are getting healed by this holy man! I plan on getting healed myself! Let's go!"

5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, *"Son, your sins are forgiven."*

6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,

7 *"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

8 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?"*

9 *Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed 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 say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."*

12 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!"*

Wow! That was some event. Let's look at it from a number of angles.

First, the Paralytic's Point of View

The guy who was lowered down on the mat in order to gain healing from Jesus was, at first, confronted with the approval of this famous man. No doubt he was heartened to see this Jesus face-to-face, and to know that He was impressed with the effort it took to get him there. Then, Jesus declared, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

The man came for healing. Instead, he receives a declaration of forgiveness. At first glance, we might think he was disappointed that he did not get healed at that moment –and maybe he was. But, on the other hand, what does it feel like to have the Son of God look you in the eye and say to you, "your sins are forgiven?" Did a feeling of peace overtake him? Later, when Jesus turned to the thief next to him on the Cross and declared, "This day, you will be with Me in paradise," I can't help but wonder if, even in his painful situation, he felt the peace that can only come by looking into the eyes of the Son of God Himself and hearing Him tell you that you are approved of.

Even so, the man had come for healing and had not received it. Instead, he received forgiveness of sins. What is the relationship between healing and forgiveness of sins? We'll come back to that after we look at this from the Scribes' point of view.

Second, the Scribes' Point of View

The Scribes had earned that title by studying the Law. They had been tested. Hands had been laid upon them. When people came to the synagogue and taught, the Scribes had the authority to examine, and even correct, their teaching. The ministry of this man, Jesus, was new. He was a local man. He hadn't come from down south in Jerusalem, where all the big-shots came from. He was one of them, a Galilean. They too were curious about what He was teaching and doing.

When He told the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” they were shocked. According to Mark, they didn’t say anything to Jesus. But they were all thinking the same thing, as we saw in verse 7:

“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

They might have been open to the idea that God was with this man, but they were not open to the idea that this man could stand in the place of God! Only God can forgive sins! Furthermore, in that day, the Scribes believed that illnesses like paralysis were the result of sin in the man’s life, or even in his parents’ life if he was born that way. This paralytic, then, was an inferior person from a religious perspective. Jesus declared Him clean of all sins! How offensive!

They were thinking, “Jesus is blaspheming!” That is a very strong accusation that they are making in their minds! Blasphemy meant the death penalty according to their laws!

But they didn’t say anything. Perhaps they were too shocked. Perhaps they felt it would be unpopular to say anything. Imagine their surprise when Jesus looked them in the eye because He had read their minds! He knew what they were thinking, and He had an answer for them. In fact, He put them in their place by healing the man. What were the people thinking when they saw this?

Third, the People’s Point of View

What did the people who were looking on think? Some of them certainly knew the paralyzed man or the men who carried him. Some might have been friends or relatives. For some, these particular Scribes were the ones assigned to their synagogue in their town. Maybe they respected them. Maybe they didn’t. They were confronted with the kind of turmoil Jesus always brought into a situation. They witnessed the power of the status quo, the religious authorities opposing Jesus.

On the other hand, they witnessed Jesus doing undeniably amazing miracles. Jesus was here now, but would He stay? If they chose to get behind Him and He left, where would that leave them with their religious leaders? But, their common sense and their eyes told them that Jesus was doing something good. What would they decide?

How about Simon, Andrew, James and John –they were all new followers of Jesus. They had been on His first ministry tour. Now they are back at home, and Jesus is not getting along with their leaders? What will their parents think? What will their friends think? “What have we gotten ourselves into?”

My friends, make no mistake, **wherever Jesus is preached today, if He is preached as He really was, He is always controversial. He challenges the religiously proud, and He challenges the powers and allegiances in everyone’s life,** including yours. Are you a true follower of Jesus? Will you be? If you will be, you will find the strain He causes you. Family,

friends, and people in power will look at you funny. There is a cost to following Jesus. He is like a wrecking ball in every society and family He invades.

What about looking at this from Jesus's point of view?

Fourth, Jesus' Point of View

Jesus engineered this confrontation with the Scribes so that He could create a teachable moment for all present, and for all people down through the ages. He could have simply healed the man, as He was clearly being asked to do. Instead, He declares, out loud, that his sins were forgiven and left him paralyzed. He knew what the Scribes would think. He knew how He would answer. This was, for Him, a teachable moment –a teachable moment that He personally engineered. He created the controversy Himself.

With this in mind, what are some of the lessons we can learn from this teachable moment?

LESSONS FROM THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

1. Jesus is the Son of God and He has the authority to forgive sins.

Jesus made it clear that this was the lesson He wanted to teach. We see that in the text:

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." (v10,11)

Jesus states that the reason He healed Him was to demonstrate that He had the authority to forgive sins. Jesus is the One who determines who will be forgiven and who will not be forgiven. Not only does Jesus have the authority to forgive sins, but if He doesn't forgive a man's sins, that man will be judged and thrown into eternal punishment. This truth is all over the Bible:

John the Baptist declared this about Jesus before His ministry even began:

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Luk 3:16-17 ESV)

Jesus Himself would declare that He would be the One to determine who was forgiven and who was not, and the stakes were high, as we see in Matthew 25:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire

prepared for the devil and his angels. . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Mat 25:31-46 ESV)

After Jesus returned to Heaven, the apostle Paul would teach the same thing:

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Act 17:30-31 ESV)

Jesus not only has authority to forgive sins, it has been given unto Him by His Father to be the only One who can forgive sins! These scribes were standing a few feet away from the man who take away their sins forever. If they knew who He was, they should have begged Him to forgive them too! And not just them. The entire crowd had heard this lesson! They all should have rushed to Him and begged Him to forgive their sins too!

2. It is better to be forgiven than to be healed.

Many people choose to get mad at God if He doesn't heal them. But Jesus showed that it is better to be forgiven than it is to be healed! He even said to the scribes:

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? (v.9)

For Jesus, it is easier to say, "take up your bed and walk!" Why? Because, as God, He can do anything with physical matter. Mending bones and muscles is nothing to Him. But if He had only healed that man, and had not forgiven him, that man would have died in His sins and gone to Hell.

In order to forgive that man of sins, Jesus would have to do more than heal some bones and ligaments. He would have to offer up Himself on a cross, as a substitute for the man's sins. He was forgiving the man based on what He would do for Him on the Cross when the time came. God demonstrated His great love for the lost sinners of this world by sending His own Son to die in their place, taking their sins upon Himself on their behalf. Jesus would appease the anger of the Father, who has been wronged by Adam's sinful race, by dying on a cross. That is much more difficult than just getting bones to walk!

(In fact, in reality, when Jesus said that He forgave the man, he was also healed. How can that be? Because the reason for sickness and death on the earth is the presence of sin in Adam's race. To be forgiven by God means that when Jesus comes in His Kingdom, and all evil is eradicated, there will be no sickness, forever and ever.

If you could choose between being healed in your body for 40 years of life and then going to Hell, or remaining unable to walk for 40 years and then dancing and running through the Kingdom of God for eternity, which would you choose?).

3. Jesus did miracles to confirm His identity, so that people would believe His words.

The reason for the miracle was to confirm that He had the authority to forgive sins. By doing so, He was proving that His words could be trusted because they came from God.

CONCLUSION

Do you believe the words of God? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and all that He teaches is true? I want to declare to you the good news that Jesus taught us to preach:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Joh 3:16-18 ESV)

Do you understand what is being said here? If you do not believe in Jesus as the Son of God, then you are condemned. There is no way to get your sins forgiven. You might think that you have done good things, or that some other religion might offer you help, but those are all lies. Only Jesus can forgive sins. But if you trust in Jesus, you have eternal life.

It gets better:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13 ESV)

The forgiveness of sins is only the beginning. Once your sins have been taken away by your trusting in Jesus, then your relationship with God is established. You are adopted by God. He becomes your Father, your perfect Father.

Not your Father by birth from a human being, but by the will of God.

The choice is yours. You see Jesus. You will believe or not. Now, if you will receive Him, the message of Jesus is clear:

. . . Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."** (Mar 1:14-15 ESV)

You must repent and believe in this Gospel message that you have heard. Repent means to decide to surrender your life, all of it, fully, to Jesus, right now. From now on, like the men who left their nets to follow Jesus, you leave all, giving up your sins (What are sins? Whatever Jesus says is wrong, even if you don't think it's wrong), and giving up all your dreams, and all your future, for the sake of Jesus. From now on, you are a Jesus follower. Zeal for His name is to consume you. It is as if you have tattooed onto your back, "Jesus or nothing." That is what it means to repent.

Then, believe and trust that God loves you, and that He proved it by sending Jesus to die for your sins. If you do this, you will become a Jesus follower. You will have forgiveness of sins. You will have eternal life, and you will be a son or daughter of God.