

## Mark 2:1-12, Jesus Forgives Sin

"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. 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. 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!'"

### I. The Preaching of the Gospel

1. **Jesus at Home** - After preaching throughout Galilee, Jesus returned to Capernaum, the city that served as his home base early in his ministry. Many assume Jesus returned to stay at Peter's house, although there is no certainty in this regard. The Greek uses a phrase which, woodenly translated, means "*in a house*," but idiomatically it means "*at home*," as the ESV renders it.<sup>(1)</sup> Jesus was wherever he normally called home at that time, whether he was staying at Peter's or somewhere else. Jesus had been home for "some days" before word spread of his return. Somehow he had managed to sneak in without fanfare (perhaps at night).

2. **Line Out the Door** - Describing the picture painted by the original language, one NT scholar writes: "...the crowd overflowed into the street, thronging the doorway."<sup>(2)</sup> The doorway was blocked, and, although it is likely that Jesus' preaching could be heard out on the street, there was no direct access to his person. Another NT scholar writes, "...Mark intends us to picture Jesus as 'besieged' inside the house, with the crowd in the narrow street outside listening to his teaching as best they could."<sup>(3)</sup>

3. **Preaching the Word** - As always with Jesus, preaching takes priority over miracle working. "The word" had become a stock phrase in the life of the early church by the time Mark wrote his gospel, being used many times throughout the New Testament. It was shorthand for the gospel of Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, who had come from the Father to reconcile his people to God and to establish the kingdom of heaven. Here Mark applies the term to Jesus' own preaching, which we know from other examples would have concerned "what he had to say of himself and of his kingdom."<sup>(4)</sup> It was a call to believe that the kingdom of God has come near in Jesus, to repent of personal sins and to commit to follow Jesus wherever he goes.

### II. The Response of Faith

#### 1. The Plight of the Paralytic: The Impotence of the Whole Man -

a. **Sin and Disease** - It is important to remember the biblical connection between sin and disease. Although not every disease is traceable to a particular sin, it is clearly because humanity is corrupted by sin that disease exists. The paralytic was a sinner, and so, whether his condition was a punishment for some specific sin or simply the general effects of the Fall, the tragic physical condition is connected with a tragic spiritual condition. NT scholar William Lane touches on some of the biblical evidence of this connection:

"Healing is conditioned by the forgiveness of God and is often the demonstration of that forgiveness (cf. II Chron. 7:14; Ps. 103:3; 147:3; Isa. 19:22; 38:17; 57:18 f.). In a number of texts

'healing' and 'forgiveness' are interchangeable terms (Ps. 41:4, 'heal me, for I have sinned against thee'; Jer. 3:22 and Hos. 14:4, God will 'heal' his people's backsliding). Healing is a gracious movement of God into the sphere of withering and decay which are the tokens of death in a man's life."<sup>(5)</sup>

**b. Physical Paralysis a Picture of Our True Spiritual Condition** - The physical condition of the paralytic was a picture of living death. Helpless, unable to move, the man was completely dependent on the mercy of others to fulfill all his needs. He could contribute nothing to his upkeep. We are not told whether the man was born this way or suffered a tragic injury, but either way, every illusion of self-sufficiency others possess was denied him. In a way, this is a mercy from God. Would that we all saw ourselves as spiritually helpless and dependent upon God as the paralytic was physically. This is often the very purpose God brings tragedy into our lives. Such is the depth of sin, that every support must be knocked out from under us in order to realize that we need God, and that we will never be gods ourselves.

**2. Obstacles to the Object of Faith** - The paralytic had four obstacles between him and Jesus.

1. His sin, which must be atoned for and forgiven.
2. His immobility.
3. The crowd of people around Jesus.
4. The house

1&2. God provided the spiritual sight by which the man recognized his sin and the one in whom it could be found (On the faith of the paralytic, see below). God also provided a group of friends and/or family members that could bring the man to Jesus. We should always thank God for giving us eyes to see and ears to hear the gospel, and for the friends, family, and at times even strangers God used to bring us to Christ.

3. The crowd blocked the way to Jesus. People can be obstacles to faith: Hypocrites who makes a mockery of the faith; skeptics who attack the word of God; heretics sowing confusion with their false teachings; friends and family members who mock a sincere attempt to follow Christ, etc. In this case, people were of course just physically in the way. But true faith, born of the Spirit of God, would not be thus impeded.

4. Typical houses of the day were single-story, one-room buildings with walls made of basalt and mud, and a flat roof made of timbers overlaid with a mattress of thatch covered by a layer of dried mud. The roof was accessible by an outside staircase, and was used for fresh air, drying laundry, eating meals, etc. Obviously the roof was more vulnerable than the rock walls.

**3. Overcoming Faith** - The paralytic was born upon a *krabatton*, a poor man's bedroll, which may have been fastened to a stretcher of some sort. The urgency of the party is highlighted by the use of the historical present: "And they come, bearing to Him a paralytic..."<sup>(6)</sup> They gained access to the roof by means of the staircase and "removed the roof"; literally, they "unroofed the roof," and "dug an opening" through the hardened mud and thatch. There was no time to worry about social conventions, they could come patch the roof later for the homeowner. "Today if you hear his voice" (Psa. 95:7) may have resonated in their hearts; certainly the spirit of it if not the actual words. They would not risk the chance that Jesus might leave to preach elsewhere the next day.

Jesus saw that their faith was real, that they were not like the crowds, hoping only for a healing or a meal. Their hearts had been turned by the Spirit of God; they believed in him and were ready to welcome the reign of God into their hearts.

It may seem curious that Jesus saw "their faith" and not "his faith". But we should not understand this to mean the four men bearing the litter to the exclusion of the paralytic. Calvin writes:

“With regard to the present passage, though Christ is said to have been moved by the faith of others, yet the *paralytic* could not have obtained *the forgiveness of his sins*, if he had no faith of his own. Unworthy persons were often restored by Christ to health of body, as God daily *maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good*, (Matth. V. 45:) but there is no other way in which he is reconciled to us than by faith.”<sup>(7)</sup>

As Christ declared forgiveness, he addressed the man as ‘*teknon*,’ which means ‘child’ or ‘son’. Jesus often used terms of familial endearment in the context of salvation (son, child, daughter, etc.). He recognized the paralytic as a child of God.

### III. The Response of Unbelief

1. **The Hidden Sins of the Heart** - The parallel passage in Luke 5:17 exposes the “scribes” for what they were:

“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.”

Jesus had come to the attention of the religious authorities. These were part of a commission of lawyers sent to observe Jesus and try to catch him saying or doing something with which they could accuse him. A similar commission had been sent to John the Baptist (John 1:19). Though we have seen foreshadowings, this episode officially begins the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities in Mark.

The scribes were correct, that only God has the authority to forgive sins (J. Edwards gives as examples Exo. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 43:25; Mic. 7:18).

“The reason is that in every sin, even in sins committed ostensibly only against one’s neighbor, God is the party most offended. Thus in his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, David, who in one affair breaks three and perhaps four of the Ten Commandments, confesses to God, ‘against you, you only, have I sinned’ (Ps. 51:4).”<sup>(8)</sup>

But the scribes were blind to the truth of Christ’s divine authority, which elsewhere the gospels reveal to be a judgment of God upon the sin-hardened hearts of those Jews who would reject him (Matt. 13:14-15).

#### 2. **Nothing Hidden from His Sight**

Our hearts are always visible to God; he knows all our secrets (Ps. 44:21; Mark 4:22). Everything evil done in God’s sight is an offense to Him, and must be atoned for and confessed. The scribes believed their thoughts were private, but God knew what they were thinking. Christ also knew, ‘*perceiving in his spirit*’, i.e., “what was concealed in their hearts could not be perceived by man, but that Christ by his Divine Spirit knew it thoroughly.”<sup>(9)</sup> He knew the contempt for him in their hearts.<sup>(10)</sup>

Why were the hearts of the scribes so blind and hard? Sharyn Dowd comments:

“The reign of God will not be welcomed by everyone. If the reign of God has drawn near, that means that all other regnant structures are radically relativized and soon to be eliminated. Isaiah had portrayed Yahweh declaring historical war on all the nations in order to establish the eschatological reign of Yahweh in universal peace (Isa. 13-27...). Mark portrays Jesus’ conflicts with power structures in history as signs that the promised reign of God has indeed drawn near. In Isaiah, God’s own people are not exempt from judgment; judgment falls on Jerusalem as surely as on Assyria and Babylon. In order for God to reign, all other powers must abdicate or be defeated, even the powers that claim to represent God. In Mark, not only Rome, but also the Jewish leaders stand to lose when Jesus announces God’s reign, so they oppose Jesus. This is not Christian anti-semitism; it is typical of Israelite prophetic rhetoric.”<sup>(11)</sup>

## IV. Faith Rewarded & Vindicated

### 1. Christ Possesses the Authority

Verse 10 is the first occurrence of Jesus using the title "Son of Man". The phrase is found in many places and can mean several different things. The reason Jesus uses it here, however is that he is referencing a text in Daniel 7 and claiming to fulfill it:

13 "I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a **son of man**,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
14 And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.

Christ is presenting himself through use of this term as the one given the authority to judge and rule the nations by the Ancient of Days.

### 2. Christ Demonstrates the Authority

By healing the paralytic, Christ demonstrated that the man's sins had indeed been forgiven. There is a saying in the Talmud, an ancient collection of rabbinical teaching that states, "No one gets up from his sick-bed until all his sins are forgiven."<sup>(12)</sup>

It is interesting to note the words Jesus uses in the confrontation: "That you may know..." (v. 10). On this phrase Grant Osborne writes:

"'That you might know' may be language borrowed from Moses' confrontation of Pharaoh on behalf of God (Exod. 7:17; 8:10, 12; 10:2), especially Exodus 9:14, where Pharaoh is to know 'that there is none like me [the LORD] in all the earth.' The teachers of the law, like Pharaoh, are at war with God and soon will learn who he (and his Son) really is in essence."<sup>(13)</sup>

Finally, Calvin notes that the healing of the paralytic operated as a *sign* and *seal* of faith in Christ to forgive sins:

“the scribes were offended at Christ for claiming power and *authority to forgive sins*; while Christ intended to confirm and seal that authority by a visible sign.”<sup>(14)</sup>

Let there be no doubt in the mind of any saint that Christ has the authority to forgive sins, and that none for whom Christ died will ever taste wrath or the second death. “It is finished!” (John 19:30)

## Notes

1. Bratcher and Nida. Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark [Helps for Translators], p. 72.
2. Hooker, Morna. The Gospel According to Saint Mark, p. 85.
3. France, R. T. The Gospel of Mark [New International Greek Testament Commentary], p. 122.
4. Alexander, J. A. - The Gospel According to Mark [Thornapple Commentaries], p. 34.
5. Lane, William. The Gospel According to Mark [New International Commentary on the New Testament], p. 94.
6. Wuest, Kenneth S. Wuest's Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament on Mark 2:3.
7. Calvin, John. Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. I, p. 393.
8. Edwards, James R. The Gospel According to Mark [The Pillar New Testament Commentary], p. 78.
9. Calvin, John. Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. I, p. 395.
10. Hooker, Morna. The Gospel According to Saint Mark [Black's New Testament Commentaries], p. 86.
11. Dowd, Sharyn. Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel, pp. 23-34.
12. Hooker, Morna. The Gospel According to Saint Mark [Black's New Testament Commentaries], p. 85.
13. Osborne, Grant R. Mark [Teach the Text Commentary Series], p. 38.
14. Calvin, John. Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. I, p. 392.