

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
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Mark 2:1-12 “Who Can Meet Our Deepest Needs?”

Intro. In chapter one of Mark we read about Jesus healing a man from his leprosy. After this amazing miracle Mark 1:45 tells us, “...Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction.” As Jesus toured Galilee, teaching, preaching, and healing, He was attracting very large crowds everywhere He went, even in remote areas. There was something special about Jesus.

Today we will learn about an event that took place when He returned to Capernaum (Mk. 2:1). It was probably winter at this time, for Jesus was teaching in a house¹ rather than outdoors. Now the house that day was packed with people. Included in the audience were several types of people. No doubt the disciples and friends of Jesus were present, with a genuine interest in the truth. Also, there must have been people who were merely burning with curiosity, hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle. But Luke’s account focuses our attention on still another group, consisting of strait-laced Pharisees and like-minded law teachers (5:17). They seem to have been filled with envy, probably deeply disturbed about the large crowds Jesus was attracting. They were looking for some opportunity to criticize. Finally, we will read of 4 men bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus.

Now the *main* focus of my text is not the faith of the paralyzed man and his helpers, and not even the miracle that Jesus performed. 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. So our focus today is rather upon the forgiveness that Jesus offers, and what that says about who Jesus really is.

Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. Do you realize that forgiveness of sin is your greatest need today? It brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results. You may have a financial need, but that is not as important as your need for forgiveness. You may have a physical need, but your greatest need is for God to forgive you of your sin. After all, the Bible says, “The soul that sins shall die” and “The wages of sin is death.” The unforgiven soul endures the anguish and stress of guilt in this life and the pain and agony of hell in the next life.

This morning I want you to see that Jesus Christ is the One that can forgive you of your sins. Jesus’ authority to forgive is the most distinctive message Christianity has to proclaim. The word “forgive” means to send away, or to leave behind. It means to separate or remove our sins from us. The prophet Micah said that God is willing to take our sins and send them away from us into the deepest ocean, never to be remembered again (Mic. 7:19; cf. Psa. 103:12²; Jer. 31:34b³). In those days, once something was dropped into the ocean far from shore, it was irretrievable. Even so, when God forgives sin, those sins are gone forever. Every person here can leave this building today forgiven and free from the burden and guilt of sin. So let’s look into this passage together and allow God to speak to our hearts.

Now one main truth from our text that confronts us is this:

¹ Possibly Peter’s house, for chapter 1 indicates that Peter’s house was there in Capernaum.

² “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

³ “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

I. WE ALL HAVE NEEDS

The man who was brought to Jesus had at least two basic needs in his life. He illustrates the fact that:

A. We Have Physical Needs – In v.3 we read, “Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.” He had some type of paralysis. It could have been the result of an injury, a birth defect, or perhaps a stroke. It’s apparent in this man’s case that he had a severe paralysis. In that day, most people in that condition had to beg for a living. Of course, one of the most difficult realities of this problem is the fact that so often paralysis is irreversible. Even today, modern science is typically unable to cure this problem.

You or a loved one may be dealing with a sickness or injury that makes life difficult. My wife is dealing with some inflammatory sickness that on two occasions has led to acute kidney failure. Such problems are an all-too-common reality in this sin-cursed world.

You might think that this was his main problem, but notice he also illustrates the fact that:

B. We Have Spiritual Needs - This man probably accepted the common Jewish teaching that sickness or injury was due to personal sin. Did they not learn anything from the book of Job?⁴ This lent itself to confirm the Jewish teachers in their own self-righteousness. After all, if sickness and disease is due to personal sin, then it is logical to believe that good health is a sign of being right with God. But they fail to consider the fact that God often delays His judgment. Therefore, many people enjoy a false security and therefore do not sense a need for the forgiveness that Jesus offers because everything seems to be going okay.

But now, getting back to this man’s problem, perhaps he was distressed that, because of his sin, he could *not* be healed. At times, there *is* a relationship between a sinful lifestyle and disease or injury. When you sow sin, you reap the consequences, though often later in life (Gal. 6:7-8). So the paralytic not only suffered from the disease itself but also the stigma that accompanied it and from an overwhelming sense that he was sinful and responsible for his illness. But whether this was the case, or whether he just *believed* this was the case, what this man needed most was an assurance that his sins had been forgiven. For without that, he would have a hard time believing that he could be healed.⁵

How can you know that I am on target regarding this man’s spiritual need? Notice what Jesus said in v.5, “Son, your sins are forgiven⁶ you.” The modern reader is typically surprised that these were the first words spoken to a man who appeared to be desperate for physical healing. Yet the Lord knows the heart and knew what this man needed. In a wonderful way, the Lord comforted and encouraged one who was fearfully conscious of his sickness and sin. If Jesus had said or done nothing else, that should have been enough to make the man joyful. David wrote, “Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). Jesus therefore spoke to the conscience before He touched the bodily ailment, and met the

⁴ One Rabbi based his belief regarding the connection between sickness and sin on Ps. 103:3, “Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.”

⁵ John MacArthur even states, “I believe without any doubt that the paralytic came to Jesus primarily because of his sin, not his sickness.”

⁶ This is the first reference to forgiveness in the Gospel of Mark.

sufferer's deepest need first. He also thus proclaimed that the cleansing of the soul was even more important than the healing of the body.⁷

We have the same need for forgiveness today. What you need more than anything else is a consciousness that you are right with God, that all of your sins have been forgiven. Guilt will gnaw away at your inner strength. I would fear death if I lacked an assurance that my sins were forgiven. Someone has said, "If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist. But since our greatest need was forgiveness, God sent us a Savior."

So this man illustrates the fact that we have physical needs, and we especially have spiritual needs. Now let us consider:

II. HOW OUR NEEDS CAN BE MET

Let let's consider how this man's needs could be met. For example, how can *we* be forgiven of our sins? Many seem to think that you can be forgiven by "making up" for your wrong doings. That's what we do in human relationships. When a friend or spouse is mad at us, we try to win their favor back with gifts, words, or thoughtful deeds. And we think that is all we need to do with God. You sin on Saturday night and make it all okay by coming to church on Sunday morning, putting money in the offering plate, and going through prescribed religious rituals. Or you do some good works. Perhaps you reform and turn over a new leaf in life. That sometimes works in human relationships, but not with God. I can tell you, based on the authority of God's Word, that forgiveness of sin from God does not come that way. Instead, you need to come to Jesus. He is the One who died for your sins, and you can be forgiven only by your faith in Him.

Yet this paralyzed man couldn't get to Jesus on his own. Likewise, since people are sinners by nature, we are not able to come to Jesus on our own. The Bible says, "There is none who seeks after God" (Rom. 3:11). We need both God's initiative and the help and prayers of Christians to find forgiveness in Christ. So based on this text we see that:

A. We Need Friends Who Will Bring Us to Jesus – Again, we read in v.3, "Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men." Mark tells us that there were four men who brought this man to Jesus. They were probably friends and relatives of the man. This man would not have been forgiven and healed had it not been for these four friends or relatives who brought him to Jesus.

We must admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us as "fishers of men." First of all,

1. We Need Friends Who Believe in Jesus - Notice that Jesus "saw" *their* faith (v.5). Whose faith? It was the faith of these four men. How can you "see" faith? After all, faith in something that's intangible. Jesus could "see" their faith because true faith always shows itself in action, in works (Jas. 2:20). If you truly believe the weatherman, you will dress accordingly. These men were demonstrating their faith in Jesus by going to so much trouble to secure healing. So they believed that if they could just get this man to Jesus, no matter how difficult, He would

⁷ Jesus had declared that kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15), and He may be intentionally fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 33:22-24, "...The LORD [is] our King; He will save us);... And the inhabitant will not say, 'I am sick'; The people who dwell in it [will be] forgiven [their] iniquity."

heal him.

Can Jesus “see” your faith today? What we need in the church today are stretcher-bearers—men and women with that kind of faith to go out and bring in the unsaved, so they can hear the gospel. Wouldn't it be exciting if most of our church classrooms and sanctuaries were packed with people? Yet there are many people today who are spiritually paralyzed with sin and indifference. A great many people are not going to come into church where the gospel is preached unless you and I bring them in. If we are not trying to get people to Jesus, it says something about our *lack of faith* in Jesus to forgive sin and change lives.

2. We Need Friends Who Care about Us - They had heard that Jesus was in town and wanted to get the paralytic to Jesus. We ought to care enough about people to lead them to Jesus! But times have changed. There was a time when people would pray at church altars and weep in concern for lost loved ones. I don't see much of that anymore. We either don't believe that people are really lost and on their way to a devil's hell, or we just don't care.

If you go to Fredericksburg Battlefield Park, you will see a statue dedicated to the memory Richard Rowland Kirkland. During the Battle of Fredericksburg on Dec. 13, 1862, Kirkland's South Carolina unit formed behind the Stone Wall at the base of Marye's Heights. The Union forces kept attacking in wave after wave, but no one even reached the stone wall. After a day of severe fighting, the scene shifted from severe fighting to tremendous suffering.

Daylight on the 14th revealed a ghastly scene to the Confederates behind the Stone Wall. About 8,000 Union soldiers had been shot in front of the wall and many of them remained where they had fallen. As hours went by without food, water or medical treatment, the suffering of the survivors increased. Nearby soldiers from both sides listened to the painful cries and pleas for help. Many were crying out for water. While the suffering emotionally moved many, none dared face almost certain death to provide help in the open field.

At some point in the day, Kirkland could no longer bear listening to the pleas, so he walked over to the home of Martha Stevens. He went upstairs and told General Joseph Kershaw, his brigade commander, that he would like to try and help the wounded Union soldiers. The surprised general at first refused the request, but he later relented. Kirkland gathered all the canteens he could carry and filled them at the nearby water well. Then, at extreme risk to himself, he ventured out to help the Federal soldiers to give them water and warm clothing. The General anxiously watched Kirkland for hours on his errand of Christ-like mercy. Later, Kirkland was called The Angel of Marye's Heights.

Even so, we need to be like Kirkland, and “rescue the perishing, care for the dying.” Souls are lost without Christ, and we need to bring to them the water of life.

We also see from our text that:

3. We Need Friends Who Are Persistent - They arrived at the house where Jesus was teaching, and the Gospel of Luke (5:18) indicates that they kept trying to get into the house, but couldn't. Large crowds were both inside and outside the house. The people were standing in the doorways. They were sitting packed in the windows. And no one would yield his or her spot.

Since the crowd was too tightly packed, they looked for another way to get the man to Jesus. Even so, you are not going to get people to church and to Jesus without some effort and persistence. If you are going to get a friend to come with you to Sunday School and church, you will probably need to ask the same person several times, or you will need to ask several people until you get *someone* to agree. And then, you may need to do what these men did, and personally bring them to Jesus. Likewise, you will probably need to share the gospel several times before a person will become a Christian.

4. We Need Friends Who Will Use Creative Means to Bring Us to Jesus - They were not easily swayed from their task by the large, unyielding crowd. Now more than likely the house had an outside stairway to the relatively flat roof,⁸ which was often used as a kind of deck for relaxation and conversation, and so the men carried their friend up the narrow stairway to the roof. The roof was composed of beams laid from wall to wall, probably about 18 inches apart. The beams would be overlaid with tree branches,⁹ or something similar, and on top of that layer clay would be spread and allowed to dry. Then, as Luke states, there were tiles on top of that which could be walked on.¹⁰ So as Luke states, they removed a few tiles, and Mark tells us they dug through several inches of hard clay, and began to lower the man into the room below. I'm sure the meeting came to a sudden halt while this was going on. The owner of the house might have gotten upset about the hole in his roof! But our Lord must have looked at them and smiled.

When I was in high school, I was going down the wrong path in life. I am so glad that I had some Christian friends who reached out to me and helped bring me back to Jesus! One of the first times that I went to their church was the night that they showed the movie, "A Thief in the Night." That movie got my attention! Then I started going to other Sunday night services with great singing and preaching from God's Word. I would imagine that the majority of people in this room came to Christ through the influence of others.

Can you think of some creative ways to get people to come to church, or get them to Jesus outside of church? I want to commend you for having Vacation Bible School, which is a great way to get children and their parents in to hear about Jesus. Perhaps invite a couple to church and offer to give them a meal afterwards.

Now all of this indicates another characteristic of these men:

B. We Must Exercise Our Own Faith – Eph. 2:8 and many other Scripture teach that we are saved by faith alone. So I believe that in the inmost heart of the paralytic was a faith in Christ. How do I know? He may have enlisted the help of these 4 men because of his own faith in Jesus. Furthermore, I question if the man would have let his friends lower him somewhat dangerously through the roof if he had not faith. Also, the evidence of the man's faith can be seen in the fact that Christ would not have pronounced forgiveness to the man if he did not have his own faith.

Furthermore, we see evidence of his faith after Christ commanded him to rise up and walk. If he did not have faith in the Word of Christ that his sins were forgiven, he would have not even tried to walk. True faith leads to obedience.

Of course, for you to be forgiven of all your sins, you will mostly likely need someone who cares enough about you to either bring you to church, or personally tell you about Jesus. Then, the Bible says that we are saved by faith in Jesus, and not by our works. So do you believe in Jesus? Have you put your faith in Jesus? Well, to help you make that decision, let see last of all:

III. THE PROOF THAT CHRIST CAN MEET OUR NEEDS

I am calling upon you to put your faith in Jesus Christ. But I am not asking you to

⁸ The roof was slanted only slightly to allow rainwater to run off.

⁹ Archaeological evidence in Capernaum reveals that the houses were made of rough basalt without mortar, and they could not support more than a thatch roof (Garland, p.93).

¹⁰ A railing of at least 3 feet surrounded the roof, thus providing a floor and added lounging area.

exercise blind faith. I want to give you evidence that Jesus is worthy of your trust. You see, faith is only as good as the object of your faith.

For example, let's say you have a great financial need. If you do not come up with \$10,000 you are going to lose your house and your car. And suppose a caring person says to you, "I will give you the \$10,000 you need." Will you put your faith in that person and report to your family and the lenders that you will have the money by next Monday? Well, it depends on your faith in that person. But even if you do have faith in that person, your faith is only as good as that person's word, *and* that person's ability to come up with the money. Even so, only a great person is worthy of our faith to grant forgiveness of sin and a new life.

Now in vv.5 & 10 Jesus clearly claims the authority to forgive sin. We all need forgiveness. *Does* Jesus have the authority to forgive sin? Can you trust Him? Well, the scribes and Pharisees rightly understood the implication of His claim. They said in the last of v.7, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" So they accused Him of blasphemy. Indeed, only God can forgive sin, since Psa. 51:4 says that all sin is directed ultimately against God. And Isaiah 43:25 says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions...." So to deflect the charge of blasphemy, Jesus needed to back up His claim by demonstrating that He *is* God's Son, and therefore has the authority to forgive sin. This is one of the few occasions where Jesus performed a miracle in the face of unbelief to prove His deity. I see two proofs of His deity here:

A. He Demonstrates That He Is All-Knowing – Notice in v.8 that "Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves...." (See also 8:16; 12:15). Had He not been the Son of God, He would not have been able to penetrate so deeply into their "secret" thoughts. Several times in the gospel accounts we see evidence of Jesus ability to know what people were thinking. In John 2:25 it says: "[Jesus]... had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." This is an attribute of deity. 1 Chron. 28:9 says, "...for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts." So Jesus did what only God can do.

Since I'm not God, I don't know what is going through your mind right now. You may be thinking about what you are going to do after the service is over, including what you're going to have for lunch. Some may be listening to me with a critical and unbelieving attitude. I'm sure many are listening with interest in God's Word! Only God knows exactly what you're thinking right now.

B. He Demonstrates That He Is All-Powerful - In response to them, He asked a penetrating question in v.9, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" If you consider His question from the perspective of *doing*, then both are equally impossible. Only God could do either. From the perspective of "*saying*", it is easier to *say*, "Your sins are forgiven you" than "rise and walk." Why? It is because the latter may be put to an immediate and obvious test.¹¹ But the onlooker does not know whether sins are forgiven or not. Jesus will say in essence, "I will do the *visible* impossibility, and then I leave you to judge whether I can do the invisible one or not." Furthermore, their own theology told them that the One who could heal diseases could forgive sin, for that they taught that healing cannot come without forgiveness.

Imagine the scene. The paralytic's four friends were looking down through the big hole in the roof, the people were listening, and the scribes and Pharisees were unable to respond. So

¹¹ In fact, it was a test of a true prophet (Deuteronomy 18:22).

Jesus said in v.10, “But that you may know that the Son of Man¹² has power¹³ on earth to forgive sins....” He then said in v.11, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Having said this, notice what happened. In v.12 Mark reports, “Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all....” He got up, rolled up his bed, tucked it under his arm and walked! This time the crowd made way for his departure with amazement and celebration. There was divine power in the Word of Christ. When he got outside, you can image the excitement when he met his four buddies running and tripping down the stairs! What power they had experienced! Not only did Jesus have the power to heal that man’s disease, He had the power to forgive sin - and still does.

What I have just read to you is the eyewitness account recorded by 3 different gospel writers. This really happened. And if Jesus manifested God’s omniscience and God’s omnipotence, then you can be sure that He can indeed forgive sin, change your life, and give you eternal life. In fact, Jesus proved that He has been sent to bring forgiveness to a sinful world.

There is one other important basis for Jesus being able to forgive sin. It takes more than a pronouncement. Jesus died on the cross, not for His sins, but for the sins of others. Now God can justly forgive sin, for our sin has been paid for (cf. Rom. 3:25-26). So in light of His healing power, and in light of His sacrificial death for your sin:

IV. WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE?

Well let’s see how the people in the story responded. After this great miracle it says in the last of v.12, “so that all¹⁴ were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” So in addition to the response of amazement and giving glory to God, we see two other responses that can still take place today:

A. Unbelief – While the Pharisees and Scribes probably were amazed along with everyone else, some of them almost certainly refused to believe in Christ, regardless of the facts. What an opportunity they missed when they came to the meeting with a critical spirit instead of with a repentant heart!

Could there be some here today who arrived with a critical, unbelieving heart? When I first started going to a Baptist church, that’s the way I was. But by the grace of God, He changed by heart and attitude. Don’t let a critical spirit cause you to miss the opportunity to be forgiven of your sins.

However, many responded with:

B. Belief in Christ to the Glory of God - This miracle should have led everyone past the point of amazement to faith in Christ. For the Pharisees taught that a man could not be healed until he is forgiven. So His healing proved His authority to forgive! The complaints of the Pharisees had recoiled on them and left them speechless.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Who in human history has done what

¹² This title that Jesus uses of Himself normally emphasizes His humanity. But here, it may reflect the prophecy of Daniel 7:13.

¹³ Lit. “authority” (ἐξουσία)

¹⁴ The question is, “Who does ‘all’ and ‘they’ refer to here?” Hendriksen states, “This ‘all’ is very general, and does not mean that the scornful and faultfinding scribes suddenly experienced a genuine change of heart and mind.” Certainly all, including the scribes and Pharisees were seized with amazement, but few, if any of them, glorified God.

Jesus did? He healed the sick, calmed the storms, and even raised the dead!

I believe we need to learn a lesson about faith from the paralyzed man. Christ commanded him to walk, and he trusted Christ to help him obey His command. The man believed that He who had so ordered would also enable him to obey the order. That is an important lesson for us. Christ does not give you a command to do the impossible without also giving you the power to accomplish the command. Christ commands you to repent, believe in Him, and be saved. Step out and trust in Him to give you the strength to obey His voice today! You may say, “I can’t give up my old life. I don’t think I can live the Christian life. I don’t want to be a hypocrite.” But Christ says, “You must”, and with His command He will give the ability to obey His command if you will only trust Him.

Conclusion: Here we see that Jesus Christ is the only One who can forgive your sins. Won’t you believe in Him today? And Jesus says, “Follow Me.” One of the first ways you can follow Jesus is by walking down this church isle and express your willingness to make a confession of faith in Jesus and follow Him in baptism. Do it today!

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2023; David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Virtus E. Gideon, *Luke: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Power of Jesus: Study Notes on Matthew 8:1-9:8, 18-35* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 7 & 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Charles H. Spurgeon, *12 Sermons on Repentance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973 reprint), 79 [25G.51]; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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