

"That You May Know that the Son of Man has Power on Earth to Forgive Sins"

Have you ever witnessed someone make an outrageous claim? How did you respond to that claim? You probably responded with doubt and skepticism. You probably wanted to have the person prove their claim. Of course, if the person's claim was something that was not verifiable, then you probably just dismissed the claim altogether.

In our passage for today, Jesus makes a rather bold claim. He claims that he has the power on earth to forgive sins. When Jesus declared that the paralytic's sins were forgiven, he caught everyone's attention. Some responded with faith to Jesus' claim, but many with doubt and skepticism. Such a bold claim, dare I even say, an outrageous claim, demanded some sort of proof. If true, it would suggest that Jesus came with the very authority and power of God himself. And our passage beautifully shows how Christ's claim was vindicated, verified through his miraculous healing of the paralytic.

And yet, understand that ultimately, whether a claim is verifiable or not, is different than whether or not the claim is actually true. Jesus' claim to have the power to forgive sins is true, and would be true, even if he hadn't verified his claim through this miracle in our passage - for he is God himself, come in the flesh. And yet Jesus did verify the truth of his claim. And he would ultimately verify its truth on the cross. This is, of course, a truth that we all need, for we are all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God.

So look with me then at our passage. In Chapter 2 verse 1, we pick up where we left off last week. Last week we saw that after Jesus healed the leper, the leper started telling people everywhere about being healed by Jesus. This resulted in Jesus being overwhelmed with people coming to him, so that he couldn't enter into the city. Before that, we saw that Jesus had left Capernaum for that same reason, because people were overwhelming him looking to be healed, hindering his preaching ministry. And so in Chapter 2 verse 1, we see that after some days, Jesus finally was able to return to Capernaum. And yet, according to verse 2, immediately people heard about Jesus' return and came to him at the house where he was at. And in verse 2, we see Jesus taking advantage of this opportunity and began to preach the word to them.

And so notice the setting. Jesus is at a home in Capernaum. Crowds had gathered from all over to hear from Jesus. There were so many people who had come to hear Jesus, that there was no longer any more room in the house, not even in the doorway. In the crowds, there were even scribes, we see, the learned men of the day, trained experts in the Scriptures, and even they had come out to hear Jesus' teachings.

But in the midst of this large crowd, Mark draws our attention to a single paralytic man and his four faithful friends. They too had heard about Jesus' arrival. Surely they must have heard about the miracles, about the way he was healing people. Surely they must have thought that this was the perfect opportunity for their friend to be healed. We don't know much about the condition of this paralytic man. It appears that he obviously could not walk, as his four friends were carrying him on some sort of cot or bed. And so he was a cripple, lame, needing new legs, so to speak.

And yet when these four tried to bring their crippled friend to Jesus, they ran into a problem. This large crowd was preventing them from getting to Jesus. Most probably would have stopped right there. Most would have either gone home and came back later, or waited things out to see if an opening arose so that they could get closer to Jesus. But not these four. They had an idea. They went up to the top of the roof of the house, and broke into the top of the roof. They made a hole in the roof and lowered the paralytic man down to Jesus who was inside the house.

Now the roof would have probably been a flat roof covered with thatch and mud. It may not have been too difficult to break a hole into it, but please don't misunderstand this as thinking this would have been normal behavior or even acceptable. Just like today, people didn't go around putting holes in other people's roofs. This was clearly a bold move on their part. It shows how determined, maybe even desperate, they were to get their friend to Jesus.

But notice verse 5. Notice how Jesus interprets their action. Jesus saw their action as a demonstration of faith. Here Jesus is preaching away to the people, when all of a sudden, CRASH! Here comes this paralytic man crashing down through the ceiling. Some might have been upset at these men. And yet Jesus has compassion on them, recognizing their faith.

And yet what happens next is surprising. Here we see Jesus make the claim that he has power to forgive sins. Notice that this is a surprising claim. Here is this paralytic, dangling from the ceiling, slowly being lowered down to Jesus. Clearly his friends have brought him here to Jesus for a reason. Clearly the paralytic has come to Jesus to be healed. Jesus even recognizes their faith. And yet, what does Jesus say? What does Jesus do? All eyes are on Jesus at this point. Will he heal this man who came so courageously, maybe even fool-heartily, crashing into this home to see Jesus?

It's at that point where Jesus turns to the man and says "Son, your sins are forgiven you." Surely this is not what the paralytic was expecting to hear. And yet it does raise an interesting question. You see, it was common thinking at the time to assume that someone's physical handicap or a disease was related to a sin someone had personally committed. This kind of thinking was understandable, because the Old Testament even records such instances; for example Miriam became leprous temporarily because she had sinned by speaking against Moses, the servant of the Lord. And so people assumed that this must have been the case in every instance of a person's handicap or physical ailment. For example, in John 9, Jesus' disciples ask him about a man born blind, and they ask, "who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Now in John 9, Jesus actually tells them neither. Jesus debunked this common view in John 9 by saying that people's infirmities aren't always a result of someone's direct personal sin.

And yet clearly, sin and physical ailments are related. Though someone's physical handicap or disease may not be the direct result of someone's personal sin, clearly any physical ailment that we have is a result of living in a sin cursed world. If mankind had never sinned, there would be no suffering. There would be no death. There would be no cursed world where our bodies break down and fail us.

And so Jesus' unexpected declaration to the paralytic here in Mark 2 gives this man what he really needed. Jesus sees his real need. Jesus knows that ultimately, our suffering will only be solved by dealing with the issue of sin. True, forgiveness of sins, in and of itself, wouldn't make the man walk. It wouldn't solve all the difficulties that he had in his life. And yet, what the man really needed was forgiveness of sins. This is true for all of us. Because there is coming a time of judgment, where God will one day judge each man according to his deeds - and

even just one sin is enough to warrant our eternal damnation. In hell, it will not matter if you can walk. Being a paralytic in this world is only the smallest of foretaste of the suffering involved in the eternal fires of hell.

Scripture says all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, Romans 3:23. Sin is man's real problem. This paralytic came to Jesus looking for new legs, but Jesus gave him a new heart. Jesus, seeing their faith, offers this paralytic man the forgiveness of sins. It is this forgiveness of sins that we all need. It is more important than any of our other perceived needs. And it is only found in Jesus.

And yet when Jesus made this surprising claim, that this man's sins were forgiven, it brought forth instant controversy. This was no small claim. And so we see that instantly the scribes who were present began to question this claim. In verse 6 we see that some of the scribes began questioning in their hearts this claim by Jesus. The scribes were charging Jesus with blasphemy in their minds. Realize they asked the right question - they said "who can forgive sins but God alone?" That is why they were thinking this was blasphemous. They believed Jesus had overstepped his bounds as a teacher. They believed he had gone too far. Why? Because they never even began to think that Jesus, might actually be God himself, come in the flesh. Yet, clearly, these scribes knew enough about their Bibles to realize the significance of what Jesus' claim here meant. They recognized that this was a controversial claim - that Jesus in his claim to forgive sins might very well be claiming divine status. And so the scribes concluded in their minds that this was blasphemy.

And don't think this was a light charge in their minds. Maybe today people go around blaspheming God all the time. But in Jesus' day, in the nation of Israel, blasphemy was a crime punishable by death. Leviticus 24:16 mandates this law for the nation of Israel saying, "Anyone who blasphememes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death." Blasphemy, according to the theocratic laws of Israel was to be punished by stoning the person to death. That's what happened to the martyr Stephen in the book of Acts in Acts chapter 7 - he too was charged with blasphemy because of his testimony to Jesus. This charge of blasphemy against Jesus would ultimately be the case that the Sanhedrin would make against him in Mark chapter 14. And so we see here, early in Mark, that the scribes were already beginning to think in their minds that Jesus was committing blasphemy.

Another way to think about the controversial nature of this claim, and why the scribes might have questioned it, is to think back to the Old Testament. Two things stand out. First, it is ultimately God who forgives sins in the Old Testament. We always see forgiveness of sins attributed to God in the Old Testament, not to men. And so the scribes were right on that point. God is the only one with authority to forgive sins (i.e. Ex 34:6-7). Second, we see in the Old Testament, God's provision for the Israelites to seek forgiveness of sins, through the sacrificial system. Leviticus 5, for example, lists in great detail the steps required for someone to make atonement for certain sins. Basically, it required a sacrifice for sin brought to the priest which was then offered up to God, typically a lamb or goat, or if you could not afford a lamb, then two birds. The result of this sacrifice would be that the person's sin would be atoned for and they would be forgiven in the sight of God. And so the Old Testament provided this means to be forgiven, by having a priest offer up a sacrifice on one's behalf.

And so again, think about the scribe's perspective here. The paralytic man did not come here with an offering to atone for sins. Jesus' declaration to the paralytic

here in Mark 2 does not come with any sacrifice being made. And to the scribe's perspective, Jesus was not a priest, at least not a Levitical priest - for Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi.

And yet Jesus' questioned claim would be validated. In verse 8, he perceived that the scribes were debating this in their hearts and he called them on it. He says, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" Calvin points out, that Jesus' recognition of the scribes inner thoughts already begins to answer their question, for only God could know the inner thoughts of man. And yet that is not the basis Jesus gives to validate his claim to be able to forgive sins. Interestingly, Jesus' rebuke of the scribes here seems to suggest that Jesus did not even need to validate this claim. Likely, Jesus thought that the signs he had already been doing, should have already testified to his divine authority. And yet, Jesus proceeds with giving them yet another validation.

Jesus challenges the scribes with this question to them. He says to them, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" Notice that the scribes do not answer Jesus. Well, which is easier? Notice that Jesus asks, which is easier to "say", but of course the ultimate the question is which is easier to "do".

Clearly, it's easier in some sense to say that "your sins are forgiven", than to say "arise, take up your bed and walk," because that demands instant verification. If you tell a cripple to get up and walk, and he can't, then your words are clearly not backed up with action. You see that's the ultimate test. Words, are just words, if they are not backed up with reality. And that's the beauty of Jesus' question here. Which is easier to say? Well it's easier to say something that is not able to be verified. It's easier to make an outrageous claim if no one can prove you wrong.

And yet both of these statements, the claim to forgive sins, and the claim to heal, both require divine power to be enacted. Both can be said lightly, but neither can be accomplished apart from God's power and authority. And so that is exactly what Jesus then proceeds to demonstrate. Verse 10 tells us that Jesus then proceeds to heal the paralytic to demonstrate his divine power, that we "may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins." He speaks those words, "Arise, take up your bed, and go your way to your house," and *immediately* the paralytic rose up! Jesus speaks the words that are harder to say, but in some sense easier to do, to show that he has power not only to speak the words that are easier to say, but ultimately to accomplish that which they claim. Both forgiveness of sins and miraculous healing require divine power. And so Jesus demonstrates his divine power by healing this man, showing that he also has the power to forgive sins. What a marvelous way Jesus' vindicates himself and validates his claim!

Notice the reaction of the crowds to this miracle by Jesus. Verse 12 says that *all* were amazed with the result and that all then glorified God. Mark takes no effort to remove the scribes from this response of amazement. It seems that everyone, the scribes included, was dumbfounded by this miracle of Jesus. They exclaimed, "We have never seen anything like this!" Faced with this clear demonstration of power, everyone, including the scribes, was left in awe.

And yet don't miss who is praised here. Verse 12 says that they all glorified *God*. Jesus executes this miracle and it is God who is praised. What does this tell you about who Jesus is? As I mentioned, both the power to heal and the power to forgive sins, is a power which belongs to God alone. And so the people here

rightly respond by praising and glorifying God. And yet it is in this response, that hopefully many saw the significance. It was Jesus who had healed this man. It was Jesus who had declared his forgiveness of sins. It was Jesus who here showed that indeed this man's sins had been forgiven. All this pointed to who Jesus is - not just a teacher. He is the Son of God who has come in the flesh. God's authority and power is his authority and power because he is God.

And so this miracle validates Jesus' claim by showing his authority. We see his authority in view of his divinity. His miracle points to who he truly is, not just a man, not just a teacher, but God come in the flesh. His authority, therefore, to forgive sins even, is founded in his authority as God himself.

And yet, ultimately, Jesus authority to forgive sins lies in something more than just in his divinity. For in his divinity, Jesus is ultimately constrained. Yes, he is constrained by his divine justice. That is why in the Old Testament, the divine provision for forgiveness of sins required a sacrifice. It required the shedding of blood. It showed that sin against God could not be merely overlooked. It had to be atoned for. Any wrong against God had to be legally satisfied. And yet, ultimately, no number of lambs and goats or birds could atone for man's sins. Not even man, by his own physical death could atone for his sins. Not even his own shed blood would make him right before God. Man had sinned against the almighty maker of heaven and earth. That is a crime above all crimes. Even the smallest infraction upon the almighty God deserves eternal damnation, and yet we all have sinned repeatedly against him in small and large ways.

But the Old Testament sacrifices instituted by God in the nation of Israel offered hope. They looked forward to a better sacrifice offered by a better priest. They looked forward to the one who would come to fully satisfy our debt to God. That is what Jesus did on the cross. On the cross, Jesus bore our sin and shame. His blood was spilt. And because he was the God-man Jesus Christ, his sacrifice was not that of a mere man. For how could one mere man atone for the sins of all God's people? How could his sacrifice satisfy the debts of so many? And yet, because this was the sacrifice of the eternal Son of God, his sacrifice was of infinite worth. His sacrifice was more than sufficient to atone for the sins of all God's chosen people.

And so it was on the cross where Jesus ultimately answers the scribes in our passage. It is on the cross where he ultimately shows his power to forgive sins. It is on the cross where he shows himself to be a better priest than any of the Levites. And it is on the cross where he shows himself to be a better sacrifice than any of the Old Testament provisions. He shows himself to be the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). And it is on the cross, and 3 days later, where he again shows that he has not only the power to forgive sins, but even to overcome any physical ailment, even death itself, through his own resurrection. For he had the power to lay down his life, and even the power to take it up again.

Oh the question that Jesus asked them - "Which is easier"? Surely they must have thought it was easier to pronounce the forgiveness of sins. Surely the scribes must have thought when Jesus first told the paralytic, "your sins are forgiven" - surely they must have thought, "Well, sure you can say that, but if you were really who you claim you would heal this man." They must have at first thought that this was such an easy thing for Jesus to say, such a flippant thing taken lightly - your sins are forgiven. And yet, we know this is not the case, for we have seen Calvary. We have seen the cost. We have witnessed the price. For Jesus to say, your sins are forgiven, Jesus had to go to the cross. He had to suffer and die for that paralytic. *Which is easier?* If they only knew.

Saints of God, if you trust in Christ by faith, he says again to you today, "Your sins are forgiven." As a minister of the gospel on his behalf, I declare to you: All who have placed their faith and hope in Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Brothers and sisters, we need to hear that. We need to hear that week in and week out. This good news of our forgiveness of sins is more important than any physical healing. If we are even to have any hope of our ultimate physical healing in heaven, it will only be if our sins have first been forgiven. Maybe you have forgotten this important truth. Maybe you live your life not really thinking much about your sin and its consequences. Maybe you are content to have heard the gospel and rest in your forgiveness and then not think much about it since then. But our passage today reminds us that our real struggle in life is our sin. Your physical ailments are but a reminder to you that you live in a world affected by sin: others' and your own. Even if you don't recognize your own sin, this is the reality. So may we never forget that we are sinners who need forgiveness. And may we never stop being amazed and glorifying God because Jesus has forgiven us. May we persevere in our faith in him! May we persevere in our praises to him! For we know what our forgiveness cost Jesus. It is no simple thing for Jesus to declare that we are forgiven. And so may we never forget how large our sins are and how much we need Christ and the forgiveness he offers.

And yet, as much as we must not forget that we need the forgiveness of our sins, may we also not stop there. May we not stop at just looking at our own sin and loathing it. May we then turn to Christ. May we look to the cross. You see, the temptation can be to become plagued by guilt. We can say, "Look how bad my sin is," and lose focus on the cross. That is why we need to hear these words every week, "your sins are forgiven you." We need to be assured of the salvation that comes at the cross. We need to be assured that our forgiveness does not rest in our works. We need to be reminded that there is no way to right our wrongs. There is no way for us to satisfy God's standards of justice. So, yes, your sin is that bad. But let your guilt turn to Christ. Do not stay loathing yourself, lest you sin even in your attempts of humility. Instead, the response when you see your sin is to come to Christ in faith and repentance. It is to come to the only one who can offer you the forgiveness of your sins.

And it is in our guilt which has turned toward grace, where we find gratitude spring forth. In our gratitude for our forgiveness which we have in Jesus, may we then live our lives for him. May our gratitude for having our sins forgiven, mean that we live our lives for Jesus! The paralytic came to Jesus to get new legs, but Jesus gave him a new heart as well. We too have been given a new heart, and in a sense we also have been given new legs. For we now have been given God's grace that we too could rise up and walk home. We are now walking anew, walking like we've never done before, walking in the Spirit, toward our true heavenly home. We now walk as pilgrims, walking in step by the Spirit, walking every day one step closer to our true home. Saints of God, walk with Jesus with the new legs and the new heart which he has given you. Amen.

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