

“Faith, Forgiveness, Healing”

Mark 2:1-12

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This passage pops off the page it is so vivid. You can easily picture what is happening, it is so realistically depicted. Sounds like the words of someone who was there, doesn't it? It could be the words of Peter, who witnessed it, and later he told Mark, who wrote it down for this gospel. Indeed, Peter's fingerprints are all over this gospel. It is almost a certainty that it actually took place, just as described. This takes place when the crowd hears that Jesus is “at home.” What would the home of Jesus look like in Capernaum? Probably fairly humble and obviously not too spacious and after this it is in need of a roof repair! Put yourself there in that time and place.

An anxious crowd shows up and packs out the place. Are they turned away? No. They are invited in. Imagine a small crowded room filled to overflowing with folks, shoulder-to-shoulder who had just walked there in the middle-eastern heat and dust, all to hear Jesus give his life-changing teachings. Who is there? The scribes, his followers, townspeople are there. Even the doorway is crowded and they are out the door and lined up on the walkway outside and on the street. And they aren't there for the bar-be-cued chicken! Deodorant was in short supply back then. But, *everybody* wants to be there. *Nobody* is leaving. You get the picture.

As Jesus teaches someone notices an odd sound, a scratching sound coming from where . . . above? Yes, there it is again. A small piece of dried clay from the ceiling bounces off your friend's shoulder. Then another and another. A hole appears in the ceiling. The roof is *opening*? Eager hands from above reach through the hole and start pulling out large hunks of the dried clay and straw that make up the thatching of the roof. Some of the thatching support boards are removed. A large hole is made in the roof and a bed-ridden man on his pallet is lowered down with ropes by his friends and is deposited right in front of Jesus. Now there's something you don't see every day! Room is made as the pallet is lowered to the floor.

Jesus was teaching. We don't know exactly what but it must have been good. It says, “he was speaking the word to them,” that is *God's word*. It was divine, life-giving teaching no one wanted to miss. His teaching is interrupted. How rude! Don't these guys know Jesus is teaching here? Don't they know we want to hear every word? How dare them! What will Jesus do? Does he shout, “Hey, you guys are gonna pay for that hole!” Nope. Does he say, “What is this? Get this

guy outta here!” Nope. Jesus embraces the interruption and perceives it to be an opportunity to do God’s work.

I can tell you that’s not how I often think of interruptions! I usually think of interruptions as distractions from what I think God wants me to do or from something I want to do. I often get kind of self-absorbed in what I am doing so when an interruption comes, it is kind of shocking and unpleasant. One of those “What??!! What is it?” moments. But maybe you *like* being interrupted. Apparently Jesus did not mind.

Jesus knows healing for this paralyzed man is what these friends want and they have faith to get him here. We, and all the people there expected Jesus to say, “Rise, take your mat and go home.” But he doesn’t do that, at least not at first. He does something much more *shocking*. He says, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus perceives the man’s real problem. Even more than his paralysis, his problem is his sin. Is his sin *causing* his paralysis? Maybe, maybe not. We don’t know. Sin *can* be paralyzing, whether it is psychosomatic or not. But it is a minor point. The *main* point is this: he *needs* forgiven, even more than he needs physical healing. So Jesus wisely gives him exactly what he needed the most: forgiveness.

Have you ever prayed for something and God gave you something else you *really* needed, rather than what you *think* you needed? Sometimes that happens. How often I think God got it wrong, when God got it exactly right!

Of course, the scribes jump on this claim of forgiving sins. How can Jesus forgive sins? Only God can do that! Who does he think he is, God Almighty? Yahweh in the flesh? Jesus senses the inner mumblings of the criticism of the scribes, the buzzing of the crowd in amazement. So Jesus asks a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is a question you ask to make a point, or make a statement. Jesus asks “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’? Of course, it is easier to say “Your sins are forgiven,” even if it implies you are claiming to be God incarnate. Anyone can *claim* to be God. To say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk,” would be to show graphically you have the power of God to heal immediately, and that would be astounding. So, to the crowd that would be harder. Jesus continues, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he then turns to the paralyzed man and says, “I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” And he did. And everyone was amazed. So, by healing the man, he also proves he has forgiven his sin as well. If he had done the healing first and the forgiveness of sins second, the forgiveness would have been lost in the shuffle of the excitement of the healing to the crowd.

Jesus proves to all present that *he is God on earth*, because he can forgive sins *and* he has divine power to heal as God does, so his claim to be the “Son of Man” must be true also, which I am sure the scribes did not like either. Who was the Son

of Man? He was an apocalyptic, end-of-days figure, who is God on earth. He shows up in Daniel 7:13-14. The Son of Man is a human, but with divine power, and given divine kingship over all the earth. That's who Jesus was claiming to be!

People ask me, "Do you think these are the end times? What will be a sign it is the end?" The Bible makes it clear that when the Son of Man walks on the earth, that is a sign the end times have started. Has that happened? Yes, about 2000 years ago. So we are literally *living in the end times*. Why do we think the end times will be like 10 years and it's done? No. It's a period of time and it started when the Son of Man, Jesus, came to the earth only 2 short millennia ago, which is not long at all in the entire scheme of things. I think people ask me if this is the end times, because they want to know when there are only a few days or years left so they then get a chance to clean up their act right before God comes. They are mistaken. For any person, as an individual, the end time could be in the next hour, or later today, or next year. None of us knows the time. So, live like you are meeting Jesus today, because *you are*. But now, back to *forgiveness!*

In today's culture, we assume God will forgive us and we often take God's forgiveness for granted, as if it was a light or easy thing. The French philosopher/scientist Voltaire, took God's forgiveness flippantly when he said, "God will forgive me; that's his business." Many modern people think of God's forgiveness the same way, almost as if you never need to ask. Well, go ahead. You can live your life that way if you want, never asking for forgiveness. For the way I want to live my life, I will continue to go ahead and sincerely ask for God's forgiveness for my sins as I become aware of them. I just feel better about it that way!

The scribes were not so flippant about God's forgiveness. They said when Jesus claimed to forgive sins, he was *claiming to be God*. That was blasphemy, a crime punishable by stoning to death. Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. To instantly heal the man was the less important thing to do. The most important is faith, which Jesus sees in this man's friends, if not the man himself, then forgiveness of sins, which of course, unforgiven sin has consequences in this life and the next, and finally, healing. Healing is important, but it follows faith and forgiveness. The Son of Man can do all three at once, which he did here, proving his identity. We humans! We look for the amazing miracle first, and common forgiveness later on somewhere, like it was as easy to get as air, as if it was not an amazing miracle as well.

Voltaire was wrong. Forgiveness of sins is never light or easy. That's what the crucifixion was about. On the cross Jesus paid the price for our sins to be forgiven. And we celebrate that fact every time we get together. Amen.