

## Mark 2:1-12

### Introduction

We were pondering out loud in our home group last week what it would have been like if Jesus had come in the age of social media. It's not difficult to imagine crowds of people gathering round him and asking for 'Selfies'. At a time when Cristiano Ronaldo has over 670 million followers on Instagram, followed closely by Lionel Messi with over 500 million and Selena Gomez with over 400 million, we can only guess what kind of following Jesus might have attracted as he went around healing the sick and casting out demons. But perhaps that's precisely why Jesus *didn't* come in the age of social media. He wasn't interested in celebrity. He didn't seek out great crowds of followers. Yet even without the benefit of social media, they flocked to him. And for that reason, we were told at the end of chapter 1 that he **could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places**. But even that didn't work. The very next sentence says: **Yet the people still came to him from everywhere**.

This passage we're looking at this morning, is another occasion when Jesus finds himself surrounded by a crowd. He's returned to Capernaum, where he's based himself at the home of Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. And the crowd that has gathered at their home is so large that there's no room left, neither inside the house nor outside the door. Jesus is preaching the word to them. Remember, he said that's why he'd come. That was his priority. He had come to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God and to call people to repent and believe. But then, as he preaches, four men arrive carrying their paralysed friend. Mark has recorded for us what happens next because of what it reveals to us about the authority of Jesus. And what we see first in this story is that Jesus looks beyond our brokenness to our underlying need. That's our first heading.

### Jesus looks beyond our brokenness to our underlying need

Let's read from verse 3. **Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by the four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'**

What stands out for me here is the apparent irrelevance of Jesus' words. These four men are determined to bring their friend to Jesus, no doubt, for healing. When they can't get to him through the crowd, they refuse to give up. They climb up onto the flat roof above Jesus, lifted their friend up, and then dig a hole through the compacted mud and sticks that it was made of.

Mark wants us to picture the scene as, first, debris comes tumbling down. Then, a shaft of light breaks in. And finally, the paralysed man is lowered next to Jesus. We can imagine the sense of expectation as the crowd wait to see what Jesus will do. Mark doesn't tell us how Simon and Andrew reacted as their roof was torn apart. But he wants us to take note of how Jesus reacts. He sees the faith of these four friends, who clearly believe he has power to heal. And in response to their faith, he says to the man, **'Son, your sins are forgiven.'**

And they say, 'What?'

Well, Mark doesn't tell us that, but it makes you wonder.

Have you had one of those conversations with someone when you've realised halfway through that you're both talking about totally different things. You think you're talking about one thing. But after a while it dawns on you that they're talking about something completely different. I wonder if everyone had that sense here. Jesus' words seem completely irrelevant. The friends have come to him for healing. But *he* says, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

What?

Why is he talking about the forgiveness of sins?

Perhaps you've felt that same disconnect as you've read the Bible yourself. You've come to it with a particular burden that's weighing down on you. You've come to it looking for comfort in a time of personal need or crisis. But what you read, instead, is of sin and forgiveness and salvation. It doesn't seem to address your need. There's an apparent disconnect.

It's not that Jesus is missing the point. He isn't. He couldn't possibly have missed the fact that this man wants healing. But he's looking beyond his obvious need to his ultimate need. And that's what the Bible does for us all the time.

The struggles we have and the trials we suffer are all symptoms of life in a broken world. We are all sinners. We can't automatically draw a straight line to connect our sufferings with a particular sin. But, nonetheless, the sickness, disease and death we experience in this life are all the consequence of our sinful condition. They are all a consequence of living in a world that is estranged from its Maker. And the greatest need of each one of us is to have our sin forgiven and our relationship with our Maker restored.

That's what Jesus has come to do. It's not that he doesn't care about the things we suffer. He does care. And he speaks many words of comfort to us in the Bible. He promises his presence with us through our trials, if we seek it. But he is continually pushing us to look beyond our obvious needs to our ultimate need. He's like a doctor, who can see the bruising on the outside, but wants to treat the disease that lies beneath.

It's what you need to understand if you're investigating the Christian faith. Your current circumstances will determine your experience now. But your relationship with God will determine your experience in eternity. Disease and sickness won't take anyone to hell. But sin will. The greatest need you and I have is for our sins to be forgiven and our relationship with God restored. And Jesus claims authority to do just that. We've seen that he looks beyond our brokenness to our underlying need. And secondly, he claims authority to address our underlying need. That's our second heading.

### Jesus claims authority to address our underlying need

Look again at verse 5. **When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'**

To the Jewish mind, physical suffering and God's judgement were connected. The people in the crowd would have understood that suffering is in the world because of our sinful condition. Perhaps this man came to Jesus himself with a sense that he was an object of divine wrath. If so, notice the comfort contained in the very first word Jesus spoke to him. 'Son,' he said. What comfort that single word must have brought to this man. With that one word, he goes from being a child of wrath to being a child of God. That's what Jesus does for all who come to him in faith. He does far more than forgive our sins. He brings about our adoption into God's family. When we come to Jesus in faith, we receive a new identity as sons and daughters of God. The call to follow Jesus is a call to be restored to God. To join his family. To come home. That's what Jesus promises each one of us here, if we will come to him.

But then look at verse 6. **Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'**

That reaction is understandable. Jesus is making a staggering claim. Sin is against God. Therefore, God alone can forgive it.

After the service we'll be serving coffee at the back of church. Imagine that in my rush to get my caffeine fix, I dash to the back and, on the way, stamp on Mena's toe. It would be entirely reasonable if Mena was annoyed with me. She wouldn't be, because she's far too nice. But she could be. And I would say sorry. But then imagine that Emma turns around and says, 'That's okay, Martin. I forgive you.' That wouldn't make sense. It's not Emma's toe I've stamped on but Mena's. Only Mena can say she forgives me.

So, you can see the issue the teachers of the law are struggling with. By claiming to forgive sin, Jesus is claiming authority to do what God alone can do. If he is merely a man, then he has no right to claim such authority. In that case, the teachers of the law are right. He's blaspheming.

But, of course, we, the readers, know Jesus' identity, because Mark has already told us. Remember, we're like the viewers in a series of *The Traitors*. While everyone else is trying to work out who he is, we already know, because we've been told. He is the Lord himself. He is the divine Son, who comes with the Father's authority to do the Father's will. And that changes everything. In Jesus, we meet God in the flesh, who comes to us to bring forgiveness for our sins and make us members of his family. He *speaks* with divine authority because he *possesses* divine authority.

There *is* a solution to our greatest problem. And it's found by coming to Jesus. He alone has authority to forgive our sin. And that means that when he says your sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. If you've put your trust in him, that's what he's done. He's forgiven your sin and brought you into his family.

There may be times when we doubt our forgiveness. We wonder whether God could ever forgive the thing we've done. Perhaps we even struggle to forgive ourselves. But Jesus speaks with divine authority. When he says your sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. And the miracles he performs confirm it. He demonstrates his authority through his actions. And that's our final heading.

### Jesus demonstrates his authority through his actions

Let's read the rest of the passage. Verse 8. **Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk?" But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'**

Whether it's forgiving the man's sin or healing his body, Jesus is equally capable of doing both. But forgiveness is invisible whereas physical healing is not. Jesus can tell the man his sins are forgiven, but there's no visible evidence of it. To look at him, there would be no visible difference. But if he tells him to get up, take his mat and walk, it will soon be very clear to everyone whether Jesus' words have authority or not. In that sense, that is the harder thing to say. So, Jesus tells him to do just that.

This man is a paralytic. His limbs had ceased working. The muscles would have shrivelled. The tendons and ligaments would have lost their elasticity. The bones would have become brittle. There would be no strength in his legs at all. If he was to get up and walk, he would need more than healing. He would need an act of re-creation. But when the Creator himself is standing in front of you, that's not a problem. With just a word, he brought the whole universe into existence. And with just a word, he's able to re-make this man's legs even as he lies on a mat before him.

It's a wonderful moment. The man was carried to Jesus as a paralytic in need of healing, quite probably burdened with a sense of his own sinful condition, and conscious that God's wrath was upon him. But then he feels sensation returning to his numb legs. He can feel muscles and ligaments reforming. Suddenly, he gets the urge to jump to his feet. He gets up, picks up his mat and goes home, his legs restored, the burden of sin lifted and the word 'Son' ringing in his ears.

It's a wonderful picture of the total healing all Christ's people will experience at the end of history, when he returns to recreate all things. To follow Jesus doesn't mean that we are exempt from sickness and suffering. Jesus hasn't promised to deliver us from illness and disease in this life. But he has promised to walk with us through it. And he cares deeply about the brokenness we experience now. He has promised that he will return one day and put right all that's wrong with this world. He will make it new. We will have resurrection bodies. From that day onwards, we will be with him forever in a new heaven and a new earth. There will be no more sickness, or death, or crying, or pain. We will live in a renewed creation and experience God's love and favour for all eternity as members of his glorious kingdom.

This man's healing is a wonderful picture of what the coming of God's kingdom will be like. And it's a clear demonstration of Jesus' authority on earth. The crowd go home amazed and praising God. They had never seen anything like it.

## Conclusion

If you're here to investigate the Christian faith, do you see yet why the message about Jesus is such good news? He has authority to forgive your sins and bring you to God. He can heal you of your greatest disease and give you confident hope for the future. If you *can* see that, then he calls you to repent of your old way of life and believe in him. Will you do that? Please don't put it off. And please do speak to me after the service if you want to know what that involves.

And for those of us who *have* responded to the call of Jesus, we can rejoice in the great assurance we have that our sins are forgiven, and that we have been welcomed as sons and daughters in God's kingdom, through faith in Jesus.

Our job now is to be like the four friends and bring others to Jesus too. Who can you bring?

Let's pray.

Loving Father, thank you for the assurance we have that our sins are forgiven and we are loved as your children, through faith in Jesus. Please deepen our faith in him. Grant faith to those who don't yet believe. And please teach us to rejoice in him as we wait for his return. In his name we pray. Amen.