

Mark 2:1-12

1/28/2024

I've always found my Dad's work experience deeply fascinating. He's a psycho-therapist. He specializes in substance abuse and emotional trauma. One thing my Dad often will say to me is this: "People typically don't want to get better, they want to feel better." For example, a client may suffer from horrible social anxiety. When my Dad treats them, he will usually attempt to provide different types of therapy- exposure therapy, talk therapy, and the like. It's slow. It's a process that requires sacrifice, work, and patience. Many times, the patient will say, "Enough of this, can't you just give me a pill to feel better?" The problem is that pills and medication may alleviate the symptoms, but they don't heal the illness. If you just take pills, you may feel better for a bit, but you won't get better.

According to the Bible, we are all like this, at least to a degree. We all have our problems- physical, emotional, and so on, and Jesus loves you enough to address the real issue, not just alleviate the symptoms. Today, Jesus shows us that **Only Forgiveness Can Truly Heal**. And the way he communicates this is deeply fascinating. In the first part of this narrative, he gives **1. The Answer**, in the second part, he offers **2. The Question**.

1. The Answer.

After Jesus has traveled around Galilee, he returns to Capernaum, possibly to his own house there- and everyone finds out. They fill and surround his house, and Jesus teaches them like he's been doing throughout his ministry. While he's teaching, a man who's paralyzed and unable to walk is carried on a mat by four of his friends to get healed by Jesus. But no one is willing to surrender their spot or even pay attention to him. So they get desperate. They climb to the roof and, literally in the Greek, "unroof the roof." The typical roof during that time would have consisted of dirt, clay, tile, and any other material that they could use, and would be supported by wooden beams. They destroyed the roof and dug a hole so that they could lower the man down. Imagine this. If that were to happen right now, we would stop everything that we're doing, I would stop talking, and we would all be watching. The tension was palpable. How would Jesus react to someone destroying this roof? Would he heal this man? Could he? With everyone dead silent, watching what Jesus would do, Jesus walks over to this crippled man lying before him and says, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Put yourself in the shoes of that man. How would you respond? You break through a roof and are lowered down because you are that desperate- you can fix a roof, you can't just "fix" your legs, and the thing you want most desperately is to walk, if you could just be able to walk, you'd finally be happy, and the man who has the ability to grant that comes up to you and says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." I think I'd likely say, "Great. Thank you. That's wonderful. But I have a more important problem for you to handle." And Jesus is saying to this man and us, "*No you don't.*"

The paralyzed man thought that if he was just able to walk, then he'd be happy. But he was wrong. He'd be happy for a few weeks, but then some other discontent would replace his desire to walk, and he'd be unhappy again. I'm sure a lot of you think that if you just had *something*, then you'd be happy. If you just lived somewhere else, then you'd be happy. If you just had a better job, a nicer home, a better relationship with your family, a better body, a better resume, a better retirement fund,

then you'd be happy. I'm sure you have plenty of problems, and that if your health, your job, your grades, your career were healed by Jesus, you'd be happy- but only for a while. Then, I guarantee it, you'd need something else. How do I know that? Who are the people in our society who have what we all crave? Who are the most wealthy, most famous, most loved, most respected, most beautiful, most successful people? Who are the ones that have realized their, and our dreams? Celebrities! Famous actors and actresses, athletes, business tycoons, CEO's, influencers. They are the ones who have actually gotten the fame and fortune that we all want out of life. And do you know the most common denominator between those people? They are typically miserable. Don't just take it from me. Cynthia Heimel was a writer in New York who worked with celebrities and young actors and actresses like Sylvester Stalone and Bruce Willis. She's not a Christian, but hear what she has to say: *"I pity celebrities, no I really do – Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, and Barbara Streisand, were once perfectly pleasant human beings. But now their wrath is awful. I think when God wants to play a really rotten practical joke on you he grants you your deepest wish and then laughs merrily when you realize you want to kill yourself. You see... they worked, they pushed and the morning after each of them became famous they wanted to take an overdose. Because that giant thing they were striving for, that fame thing that was going to make everything OK, that was going to make their lives bearable, that was going to provide them with personal fulfillment and happiness had happened and they were still them. The disillusionment turned them howling and insufferable."* Jim Carrey, famous actor and comedian, says it like this: *"I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."* What Jesus is saying here is this: "I'm not going to pull the cruel prank on you. I'm not going to alleviate your symptoms." I'm going to heal your deepest, darkest, most pervasive, most basic illness. Not your legs, your soul." My friends, your real problem isn't your money or career or relationships. It's that your sins have made you unworthy of a holy God, and what you need most desperately is for him to say, "I forgive you."

Ironically, that's actually what the man needed. It was commonly believed among these people, and the Pharisees regularly taught this, that if you were sick, paralyzed, blind, or had something bad happen to you, it means that God was punishing you for something. This man knew he was a sinner, and desperately needed, more than to walk, that God heard his prayers and loved him. When Jesus said "Son, your sins are forgiven," he wasn't just saying, "I love you enough to give you what you need, just just what you think you need," but also, "I'm not angry with you. I'm not punishing you. I love you. Your sins are forgiven." That's the answer that man, and all of us, desperately need, and he's given it to us.

2. The Question. Jesus gives us the answer- the forgiveness of our sins, **but how can he do that?** The funny thing is, when Jesus forgives this man's sins, and the biblical experts think to themselves, "That's blasphemy! You are claiming an authority and power that belongs to God alone! Only he can forgive sins," *they aren't wrong*. If we are having a council meeting, and president Dan Miller were to suddenly tackle Michael Jahnz to the floor for no good reason (this is hypothetical, it would never happen), and I were to then go to Dan and say, "Dan, you are forgiven," what would Michael say? "No he's not! You don't have the right to forgive him, you weren't the one he tackled!" It's true. You can only forgive when

you were the one sinned against. So what is Jesus claiming? He's saying that all sins are ultimately against him- because he is the creator and lawgiver of the Universe, and when human beings break his law and sin, they are acting in rebellion and disobedience to him. That is exactly what Jesus is claiming, and he reads the minds of the teachers and asks them one of the most brilliant questions ever asked: "What is easier? To say, 'your sins are forgiven' or to heal this man?" Let's wrestle with this. What is actually easier for Jesus to do? Immediately, we would say that it's easier to forgive this man's sins- especially because it doesn't require any actual proof, whereas if he were to say, "Get up, grab your mat, and walk," and it didn't happen, Jesus would be exposed as a fraud right away if it didn't happen. In that sense, it's easier for Jesus to forgive sins than to heal.

But let's look a bit deeper. Who's the one talking? We need to remember that the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament are the same God. The God that sent the flood to destroy humanity, who rained fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, who sent the ten plagues to dismantle Egypt, who swallowed people up in the ground when they rebelled, who would cause immediate death to whoever simply touched the Ark of the Covenant, the God who demanded holiness and sacrifice and taught that there could be **no** forgiveness without blood and sacrifice- that God, is the same God teaching and healing in Capernaum. How on earth could he forgive this man's, or anyone's sins? How can a holy God truly and fully forgive sins and not punish sinners? How can Jesus honestly look this man in the face, call him his son, and tell him his sins are forgiven and still be a holy God who punishes evil with nothing less than eternal death? *Jesus would have to be punished instead.* Which is easier? Jesus could easily heal his legs. But in order to truly forgive this man's sins, he would have to go the cross and suffer the excruciating pain, torture, shame, violence, and eternal death that this and every broken human being deserves. And as Jesus saw this man, had compassion on this man, and proclaimed forgiveness to this man, he knew exactly what he would have to suffer in order to make his forgiveness truly healing. That's the answer. That's what that man, and all of us, truly desire.

I'll end with this thought. Jesus proves that he has that authority by then healing this man in front of all of them and shows that he truly is who he claims to be- not just a teacher, prophet, healer, philanthropist, preacher, or example, but a Savior who heals your deepest wound and forgives your sins at the price of his own life. And what he says to the religious leaders is also striking for this reason: he refers to himself as the Son of Man. What exactly is he saying about himself when he calls himself the Son of Man? Well, "Son of Man" is a semitic way of saying "human being"- son of a man, therefore, a man. But he doesn't just say *a* Son of Man, but *the* Son of Man. What's he saying? Years later, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans make this point: All it took to fracture God's perfect creation and infect all humans with sin and brokenness and evil was one man- Adam- he became sinful and passed down that sinfulness to all of us and because of him we are guilty. But if it only took one man to do that, how much more could one holy, perfect Man who wasn't simply a man, but the God of the Universe become a Man who redeems us through his death? When Adam and Eve infected themselves with sin, all of us were forever infected with sin, so that even if we achieved every earthly happiness, we'd still be howling and insufferable. But God promised that a descendant of Adam and Eve, a son of Man, would come and heal the sin-sick souls of all people. Jesus is that Son of man, and he has forgiven you, and therefore, healed you. Amen.