

Through the Roof

Mark 2:1-12

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It's not uncommon in our society today for someone to say that they feel "triggered" by certain things. When people started using the word in this way, it originally referred to things that would trigger an episode in a person with PTSD or identifying things that made a person with an addiction want to begin the addiction cycle again. The idea was to identify triggers so they could avoid them until they learned how to deal with them appropriately.

Today people use the word indiscriminately (as is the case many with psychological terms). Now, being "triggered" just means that you get mad when people do certain things. It's really a way to avoid taking responsibility for your actions, and passing the blame to someone else for "triggering" you.

If the story we are going to read this morning were to happen today, the Pharisees might say that Jesus' actions triggered them. They would claim that their immense zeal for God resulted in them getting angry when Jesus committed blasphemy. The amazing thing is that the Pharisees probably would have felt quite justified in their anger toward Jesus—even though they were the ones in the wrong.

As we look at a famous account of one Jesus' miracles this morning, I hope we can come with fresh eyes, and see some of the lessons we can learn from the friends, the religious leaders, and Jesus.

The Friends

This morning we look at the healing of a paralyzed man from Mark chapter 2. We see the basics of the story in the first five verses,

When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. ² Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, ³ four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. ⁴ They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. ⁵ Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:1-5, NLT)

If you recall, last week we talked about how Jesus had become so popular that He wasn't able to carry out ministry in the towns, because the crowds became too large. But He had to have a home base, and for Jesus, it seems that was Capernaum. We assume He didn't have a home of His own there (since He later talks about how foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head), but that He stayed with some friends there. Since it seems like Peter's mother-in-law was

healed in Capernaum, it's possible that Peter lived in Capernaum, and Jesus made Peter's home his home base. We can't be sure, but it's possible.

Whatever the case may have been, Jesus returns to Capernaum and it doesn't take long for the news of His return to spread throughout the town. And, as expected, there was suddenly a large crowd at the house where He was staying. People crowded inside, and once there was no more room inside, people started crowding around outside, presumably trying to at least hear Jesus, even if they couldn't see Him. I imagine that if Capernaum's fire marshal had come by, he would have told them this was a violation of the fire code!

Jesus did what He usually did—He started preaching God's word to them. But Jesus had become popular not just as a teacher, but also as a healer. So it is no surprise that some people heard of Jesus' return to Capernaum and came for healing.

Mark tells us that while Jesus was preaching, four men arrived, carrying another man, who was paralyzed, on a mat. Right off the bat, we can see something about these men—they are good friends who care dearly about their friend (or family member). It would have been easy for them to simply ignore their paralyzed friend and dismiss him as a burden, but that's not what they did. When they heard that Jesus, the healer, was in town, they decided to take their paralyzed friend to Jesus, believing that He would be able to heal him.

Unfortunately, because it probably took them a while to get everyone together and their friend loaded up on the mat, and because they surely moved more slowly than everyone else, by the time they got there, there was no way to get close to Jesus. The crowd was so thick that there was no way they could just push their way through. I imagine the poor man was crestfallen, his hopes of being healed dashed.

But then someone hatched a plan. I wonder what the conversation leading up to this decision was like. Whose idea was it to climb up on the roof, dig a hole, and lower the man through it? Did the man come up with it? One of the four friends? I wonder how long it took to convince them all to go along with it. The Bible doesn't tell us these things, but it does tell us they dug a hole in the roof and lowered the man on ropes down to Jesus.

It is hard for us not to hear this story with modern ears. We can hardly imagine someone having the audacity to cut a hole in our roof and lower someone into the house, no matter who was there! That would be an incredibly destructive thing to do and it would show great disrespect to the homeowner.

But things would have been different in Capernaum at this time. Their houses were constructed very differently than ours are today. The walls would have mostly been made of stone, and maybe some mortar holding things together. The roof would have been constructed with pieces of wood running across the span between the walls, with probably a few feet between each one. Across these wooden beams they would have

laid sticks and thatching, and then the top layer would have been dirt. Sometimes there were stones laid across the beams before the dirt was put on top (which may have been the case in this house, since Luke says they dug through the tiles in the roof). The dirt on top actually would grow grass during the summer months.

Many houses had stairs on the outside to reach the roof, and it was not uncommon for people to use the roof of the house as another place to sit or to store things. So, it is not completely crazy that these men were able to get on the roof, and it wasn't nearly as destructive as we might think for them to have dug a hole in the roof. It would have been easily repaired, and such repairs had to be carried out with some regularity anyway.

Nonetheless, these men showed a relentless desire to get their friend in front of Jesus. I hope you see in their actions the amount of faith they had that Jesus could heal this man. If they didn't really believe that Jesus could bring healing, they wouldn't have gone to such extreme lengths, but like the man with leprosy last week, they had absolute confidence that if they could just get their friend in front of Jesus, He could heal him. So they did whatever it took to get him to Jesus.

I wonder what the atmosphere was like inside as it became clear someone was digging through the roof. Surely there must have been dirt and dust falling for a bit, and I suspect it quickly drew everyone's attention. As they lowered the man through the roof before Jesus, the crowd had no choice but to get out of the way. Soon enough, the man was on the floor in front of Jesus, and there were surely four eager faces looking down through the hole they'd just made. Everyone was waiting to see what would happen next—including the religious leaders who had also come to see what was happening. They all wondered what Jesus would do.

Jesus' response was not what anyone expected. They expected Jesus might do something to heal the man and they would see him get up and walk. But instead, Jesus simply said, "My child, your sins are forgiven." I don't think anyone saw that coming! But the story wasn't over yet—in fact, it was just getting started.

The Response

When Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven, there was not only surprise, but genuine shock from people as they wrestled with the weight of these words. Mark tells us what happened next,

⁶ But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ⁷ "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"

⁸ Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? ⁹ Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? ¹⁰ So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, ¹¹ "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" ¹² And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!" (Mark 2:6-12, NLT)

The religious leaders who were gathered (Luke tells us they were teachers of religious law and Pharisees) were not impressed by Jesus' words. They were triggered! They were incensed at what Jesus was saying, because if they understood Jesus correctly, He was claiming that He had the authority to forgive this man's sins. No man can simply declare that another man has had his sins forgiven by God—only God can do that!

The religious leaders likely made these assessments quickly. It probably didn't take the others in the crowd long to go through the same line of reasoning. It sure sounded like Jesus was making a claim to be able to forgive sins, and thus claiming to be God. The logic of the religious leaders had been correct to this point—only God can forgive sins. But their conclusion—that this declaration was blasphemy—was wrong.

Admittedly, if anyone other than Jesus had made this declaration, that conclusion would have been correct. But Jesus actually is God, so Him claiming to be God was not blasphemy at all.

What is funny about this story is that the religious leaders didn't say anything! I wonder why that was. It's possible that they were afraid the crowds would turn on them, or maybe they were biding their time, trying to build a case against Him. Regardless, it seems that despite their anger, they remained silent.

Jesus, however, knew what they were thinking. He knew they were angry and believed He had just committed blasphemy. In fact, I think that's probably why Jesus said what He did! I suspect Jesus was not the only one who knew that these religious leaders were thinking. I imagine their thoughts were written all over their faces.

Jesus goes directly after the question they were all asking: how can anyone but God claim to forgive sins? His response is somewhat confusing.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question: which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or pick up your mat and walk? Both seem pretty tough to me! You can say either one with relative ease—but actually doing what you're saying is something entirely different! But forgiveness of sins doesn't have any readily visible evidence that it has happened. Someone can say your sins are forgiven, but we don't really have any way of knowing whether they've done what they've said. But if someone claims to heal someone by telling them to get up and walk, we'll be able to see in pretty short order whether they have really been healed or not.

Regardless, He tells them that He will prove that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He tells the man to get up and walk, and he does! The crowd is amazed—I suspect not only with the miracle, but also with the fact that Jesus was claiming to be able to forgive sins!

How did Jesus healing the man prove that He could forgive sins? There's a couple of possibilities. The first is that in the Jewish mind, this kind of sickness was a result of sin,

and so before a person could be healed, their sin must be forgiven. So, if Jesus was able to heal the man, it would mean that his sin had indeed been forgiven.

The second way of looking at this is that if Jesus was a true prophet of God, then what He said must come true. And a true prophet would be dependent upon God to work through him. So if Jesus claimed to forgive sins (which the religious leaders thought was blasphemy), and then He immediately healed the man's sickness, it would be proof that He had power from God. If He had blasphemed God in His previous statement, we would not expect God to work through Him to bring healing to this man.

Whatever the case may be, Jesus does an incredible miracle in front of a huge crowd. The religious leaders in attendance still said nothing. What could they say!? There was no response they could give that would invalidate what everyone had just seen happen right in front of them.

So, did the religious leaders believe Jesus after this? We aren't told. My fear is that their hearts were so hard, that they refused to believe—concluding there must be some other explanation for what they saw. We do know that later religious leaders (who could have been the same people or different people) claimed that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan. They were grasping at any explanation that didn't require them to change their minds. Sadly, that attitude is more common than we might care to admit. We sometimes imagine that we have everything figured out, and we will reject anything that doesn't fit into our neat little belief system. That's the same problem the religious leaders had—we must be careful not to do the same.

Conclusions

This passage records another of Jesus' miracles, but if that's all we see, then we miss the point of the story. This story is recorded not only because it's a tremendous miracle, but it is also intended to challenge us and encourage us. As such, there are several lessons I think we can draw.

First, we must always be willing to admit we are wrong. The religious leaders were so convinced they had everything figured out that they were unwilling to see that the Messiah they had been waiting for was right in front of them! They had hardened their hearts and were unwilling to see anything other than what they wanted to see.

Far too often, religious people believe they've got all the answers, that we've got everything figured out. That can even happen as we read the Bible. We see things God says that are intended to correct our worldview, but because it doesn't match up with what we have already decided to be true, we find some other explanation that enables us to persist in what we already believe. We must be willing to admit when we are wrong, both with others, and especially with the Lord. We must remain soft before the Lord, recognizing that He is still teaching, correcting, and leading us.

Second, what people need most is forgiveness. The four men who brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus were most concerned about making sure he was able to walk

out of the house when they left. I doubt they gave much thought to his sin, or even their own. Jesus, however, saw what they did not—what each of us needs the most is forgiveness of our sins.

We think we need a bigger income, a better spouse, the right opportunity, a change in circumstances, a more enjoyable job, and many other things. But our greatest need is to be right with God. Jesus alone can provide that.

It is not wrong for us to pray for God to heal physical infirmities or to change circumstances, but our comfort is not nearly as important as our standing before God. God desires to bring complete healing to us—and that starts with us being forgiven. Similarly, when we pray for others, our most ardent prayers should be for people to come to Jesus for forgiveness, because any other healing is worthless without it. A paralyzed man may be able to walk again, but if he hasn't been forgiven through Jesus, then he's no better off than he was before.

Third, we should do whatever it takes to bring our friends to Jesus. The four men in this story were undeterred, because they truly believed Jesus could heal their friend. As such, they were willing to do whatever it took to bring the man to meet Him. Here's the question that should haunt us—do we have that kind of faith? Do we really believe Jesus can offer our friends and loved ones the healing they truly need? If we do, then we will show a similar dedication and drive as these men. If that drive and urgency is absent, what does it say about our faith in Jesus to heal and forgive?

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What are you willing to do to bring your friends or family to Jesus? Would you be willing to have a difficult conversation if you knew it could save them? Would you be willing to spend time loving and serving them in order to help them come to Jesus? Would you be willing to be inconvenienced and spend years ministering to someone if you knew they would eventually find forgiveness? These are the kinds of questions that should drive and center us. They are also questions that often convict us. We are often unwilling to make any kind of sacrifice to tell others about Jesus. The hard question we must ask is why? Do we not believe people need Him? Do we not believe it's real? Do we not believe He can truly save us?

This passage should remind us that more than anything else, people need Jesus. He alone can offer the forgiveness we need. If we truly believe that, we will come to Him asking for forgiveness. And if we truly believe it, we will also do whatever it takes to bring others to meet Him as well.

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