

The story is told about a dirt-poor farmer in East Texas who discovered a large deposit of oil and gas under his land. He went from dirt poor to filthy rich in a quick hurry. One day he traveled to New York to meet with a high-powered stockbroker. The broker took the farm boy to Wall St. to show him the eight city blocks that mark the center of the financial universe. As they walked along the street the farmer suddenly stopped and said, “Wait.” He slowly moved toward a planter then quickly reached in and pulled out a cricket. The broker said, “That’s amazing. How could you possibly hear a cricket with all this city noise?” The farmer dug into his pocket and pulled out a handful of loose change. He said, “Watch this.” He dropped the coins on the sidewalk, and everyone stopped to look. He said, **“See. What you hear depends on what you have been trained to listen for.”**

Jesus is training His disciples to listen – to listen to the groans of a broken world as well as to listen to the voice of the only One who has the solution to our pain and suffering. Let’s turn to Mark 2 and meet the characters in this story.

The Crowd...2:1-2. Jesus is clearly growing in popularity. In 1:28 we read, “Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.” Chapter 1 ends with the healing of a leper who “went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.” Several days later, Jesus I back in Capernaum, His home away from home, where “many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.” At this crowded Home Bible Study all the usual suspects were there – the curious, the uncertain, the desperate, the skeptics, and, of course, the opposition. We’ll meet them in a moment.

The Stretcher-Bearers...2:3-4. Four unnamed men, obviously friends of a paralyzed man, will not be prevented from getting their friend in front of Jesus. Since they can’t get in the room, they carry the man up on the roof and begin to do a little unplanned renovation. Who does this? Who tears up a house to get a friend in front of Jesus? Jesus tells us who does this in v. 5, “Jesus, seeing their faith...” These are not just good friends, they are men of faith. They are counting on Jesus to heal their friend and they will stop at nothing to get him there. Let me ask you a question. Can you name four people who love you enough to help you when you can’t get up off your mat? Who are they? Can you name them?

The Paralytic...v. 5. “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Say what? One friend says to another, “What did He say? ‘Your sins are forgiven?’ Oh man, we went to all this trouble and Jesus isn’t going to heal him?” Jesus’ words are unexpected because we have it all backwards. **We are more concerned with temporary pain than we are with eternal suffering.** We not only have a hearing problem but we have a vision problem. We can’t see beyond the here and now. So, as

long as the man is physically healed, mission accomplished right? Wrong. He may be healed in the here and now but what about the future condition of this man? He may be out of immediate pain but what about the suffering to come if he is separated from God for eternity?

I work for an organization that is dedicated to eliminating as much human suffering as possible. Our Mercy Ships hospital ships perform free surgeries for many of the people this world prefers not to think about. We can return sight to the blind. We can return dignity to the deformed. But the question I often ask our volunteers is, “then what?” Those bodies may be repaired but they still have an expiration date. Don’t focus on short-term pain and ignore long-term suffering.

Jesus sees past this man’s immediate problem to his deepest need. Conventional wisdom says our greatest need is _____? Education, health care, jobs, money? Jesus says our deepest need is to be reconciled to God. No one is truly free until they know their sins are forgiven. You may think, “What sins can a paralytic do, anyway?” Jesus understood, of course, that the deadliest sins—resentment, arrogance, judgmentalism, lovelessness—are ones we can commit without lifting a finger. The only solution is forgiveness.

The Opposition... vv. 6-7. The Pharisees in the crowd charge Jesus with blasphemy. This will not be the last time. “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” ⁶² And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” ⁶³ And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need? ⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death.” Mk. 14:61-64

They were right you know. Anyone claiming to be God is blaspheming...unless of course it is God who claims to be God! You may have heard a skeptic say, “Well, Jesus never claimed to be God.” Keep this story in your back pocket. “No one can forgive sin but God.” If Jesus claims to forgive this man’s sin then what is He saying? This is another unmistakable claim to deity. The religious leaders are correct when they ask, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” The answer, “No one.” Only “the Son of Man” has the authority to forgive sin.

Jesus... vv. 8-12. Jesus asked the Scribes a simple question, “Which is easier to say...” Of course, it is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven” than to say, “You are healed. Get up and walk.” There is no proof for the former and the latter will be easily demonstrated. The title, “Son of Man” is found 81x in the gospels. Jesus reaches back into the OT (Daniel 7:13-14) and stakes His claim to the divine heavenly figure who will receive an everlasting kingdom.

What does this passage tell us about Jesus? After all, that is Mark’s purpose.

1. Jesus is our ultimate friend. In fact, Jesus was called “friend of sinners.” This may sound like a nice title, but it was intended as an insult. “Sinners” was code for those who did not follow the strict rules of the Pharisees. In judging “sinners” the Pharisees were blind to their own sin. A Pharisee says man’s biggest problem is “them.” Jesus says my biggest problem is me. That is why Jesus was more comfortable around pimps and prostitutes than he was around Scribes and Pharisees. They didn’t pretend to be perfect. Jesus never condoned sin, but He loved people enough to see past their flaws and listen to their groans. The very next story in Mark’s gospel we find Him at a party at Matthew’s house surrounded by Matthew’s sketchy friends.

We need friends, people who will listen and support us and do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This man represents all of us. We are the Fellowship of the Mat. We are all disabled. We sit on our mats paralyzed by fear – fear of God, fear of man, fear of the future. The man on the mat didn’t have much going for him. But he had friends, amazing friends.

Recently, someone posted on FB part of a letter from a recovering alcoholic to author Philip Yancey. “When I’m late to church, people turn around and stare at me with frowns of disapproval. I get the clear message that I’m not as responsible as they are. When I’m late to AA, the meeting comes to a halt, and everyone jumps up to welcome me. They realize that my lateness may be a sign that I almost didn’t make it. When I show up, it proves that my desperate need for them (my friends) won out over my desperate need for alcohol.”

The four men on the roof aren’t the only friends in the story. Jesus is a “friend that sticks closer than a brother.”

2. Jesus is our ultimate authority. He is in charge. Jesus came preaching about a kingdom, the Kingdom of God, a place where there is no sickness and there is no sin. Now He is beginning to demonstrate the fact that He is the King of that Kingdom. And the King is in charge. Jesus is our ultimate authority. The One who has authority over every atom and molecule on this planet has authority to forgive your sin. It is not our bodies alone that need healing, it is our souls. Our physical defects are temporary, just the visible manifestation of our spiritual defects which have much longer term implications. That is why we groan. It is not just arthritis that makes us groan, it is guilt and shame. It is not just when we stub our toe on the bed frame that we groan, but it is when we stub our ego on our own personal failures that we groan.

What you hear is what you have been trained to listen for. This week when you are talking to people at home or at work, listen for the groans and get them to Jesus. If you haven’t yet set your alarm for 8:24, it’s not too late. Tell someone who is groaning this week, “Our church is praying every day at 8:24 and I would like to pray for you. How can I pray for you?” And then listen!

FOLLOW

JESUS THROUGH THE BOOK OF MARK

PART 1: FOLLOW THE PERSON OF JESUS



THE CROWD

“And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.”

MARK 2:1-2

THE STRETCHER-BEARERS

3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

MARK 2:3-4

THE PARALYTIC

5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

MARK 2:5

THE OPPOSITION

6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

MARK 2:6-7

“‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ And Jesus said, ‘I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.’ And the high priest tore his garments and said, ‘What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?’ And they all condemned him as deserving death.”

MARK 14:61-64

JESUS

8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” 12 And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

MARK 2:8-12

JESUS IS OUR ULTIMATE FRIEND.

JESUS IS OUR ULTIMATE AUTHORITY.