



Mark 2:1-12
Jesus Forgives Sins

Summary: People are drawn to Jesus' message and miracles, but both point to His ultimate purpose: forgiveness of sin.

This might be an odd way to begin a sermon, but I want you to imagine your best friend – hopefully not your imaginary friend, but an actual human being. Someone close to you, someone you care about – could be your spouse. Picture that person.

How far could you carry them? Physically carry them. If they could not move themselves, or help you in any way – how far could you carry them? No wheel chair. Just them on a mat or a frame. How far could you go? OK, now what if you had three more people to help – maybe one on each corner of the mat or frame. Now how far could you go? I'm talking distance – blocks or miles.

Could you navigate stairs? Up a flight of stairs? This person you love can't help you – it's you and three other people doing all the work. Could you lower them from a roof to the ground on that mat or frame, after navigating stairs and carrying them over distance?

It's the kind of thing we can laugh about when everyone is fine and healthy. But what if it's real? What happens when your friend really needs you? Things get serious quick.

And suddenly you find the will, desire, and strength to do things you never imagined you could do. So, imagine your friend is paralyzed, immobile. But you hear there's this guy who could help him, heal him, literally work a miracle. What would you be willing to do for your friend? That's exactly what we'll see this morning as we turn to Scripture – four friends who go to extraordinary lengths to bring a man to Jesus hoping for a miracle.

Now, spoiler alert – they do get the miracle. But a lot more happens along the way - people are confused and astounded by Jesus and His handling of the situation.

Read with me:

Mark 2:1 And again He entered Capernaum after *some* days, and it was heard that He was in the house. 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive *them*, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.

Remember Jesus has been out on a speaking tour traveling through cities in the region of Galilee announcing the good news of the kingdom of God – this new thing that God was doing, and how people could be part of it. And now He’s returned to His home base in the city of Capernaum – a fishing town located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Well, when word gets out that He’s back in town, people gather to hear Him teach, to listen to what He has to say. And so many people gathered that there was no room for anyone else to come in.

I want you to notice that. People gathered to hear Jesus teach. They wanted to know what He had to say. I believe the same thing is true today. I believe that you are here because you want to know what Jesus has to say.

In fact, right here in the front of my Bible is a note I made almost fifteen years ago shortly after God called me to pastor this church. It says: I am going to begin with the fundamental assumption that these people, be they believers or not, want to know about Jesus and the Bible, and I will try to teach them.

I believe you showed up this morning because you want to hear Jesus’ message. You might have questions. You might need comfort. There might be all kinds of other things going on, but I believe you came this morning because you want to know what God has to say. And so, I spend half my week preparing for this moment when I get to present His message to you. I assume you’re hungry and I believe this message from God will satisfy like nothing else.

Because of that, I also want to encourage you personally: you have the words of eternal life. You have direct access to the Scriptures. You have a written copy of the message that people were crowding in to hear. Remember that.

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Cherish that. Thank God for that. And be courageous and confident with it. People are looking for the message of Jesus, and you have it! Don't be afraid to share it, in love.

So, people came to hear the message of Jesus, but they also came because of His miracles. When it comes to God, some people have questions, others need favors. Remember, Jesus has been healing people of illness and injuries and word is getting around about His very evident power to heal, to drive out demons, and to cleanse lepers. So here is where we circle back to the question, how far could you carry your friend?

Mark 2:3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men*. 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

We have no idea how long or how far they traveled. Maybe they used a cart to cover part of the distance. But they've finally found Jesus, the one who could do something about their friend and of course, there's a line. They've got something important to deal with and they're stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic.

What do you do if Jesus needs to leave before you can get to Him? How long is this going to take? So, they start looking for other options. And these four men who have already brought their friend this far determine they didn't come all this way for nothing.

Now you know every group of friends has the one who thinks a little different than the rest, well, someone has this idea – I don't know, maybe he had seen Mission Impossible... *we could always try the roof.*



Homes at this time often had flat roofs you could access by stairs outside – the roof was like an extension of the house – a place where you could sit or even sleep when it was hot, you might store things up things, and you needed regular access to make repairs. The whole thing would be supported by beams that were laid across the tops of the walls and then you would put down some branches between those, cover all that with a combination of mud and ash and

straw, and sometimes, tiles cut from stone which Luke mentions in his version of this story.

In other words, if you wanted to force your way in from the top it wasn't going to be too difficult. So, these men did just that. And personally, I wonder what was going through the mind of the guy on the stretcher – is he fully on board with this? Or is he like, hey guys, you're not going to drop me, right? Are you sure there's not a window we could use, or maybe catch this Jesus guy on His way out?

I also wonder what's it's like to be someone in the room as you hear something happening above you and then as dirt and debris start falling on you – you wonder, what's going on?!?! Until suddenly you see someone coming down from the roof. And you're thinking the same thing he is – don't drop that guy on me. But,

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

Now, can you imagine the awkwardness of this moment? These guys have totally crashed the party. Derailed what was happening. Vandalized someone's home, completely interrupted what Jesus was doing and saying, all because they hoped Jesus would heal their friend. And Jesus looks at the man and says, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

Can you picture them looking down from the edges of the hole in the roof, seeing what's happening below, including the mess they've made, and they hear Jesus say, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

You can imagine them pointing to his legs. Like, what about the legs?!?! That's why we came. What can you do for his legs?

But here is where we learn that there's more going on – religious leaders from across Israel have come to hear what Jesus is saying. Again, drawing on Luke's record of these events we learn that they had come from across Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem – so think, Virginia, Maryland, and the District – representatives of the religious establishment from all these places have come to hear Jesus' message and see what He's doing.

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6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Here’s what you need to know. These scribes are religious scholars. They know the Bible – they teach it and help people apply it. And they know what everyone knows – only God can forgive sins.

I remember many years ago, when I was on Active Duty with the Marine Corps, and a friend of mine – out of nowhere tells me – you know I don’t believe all that confess your sins to the priest stuff. I figure if I mess up, I should talk straight to God. He was a casual Catholic and he knew I was ‘religious’ so he brought it up. I’m sure many of you have had similar, awkward, out of the blue conversations. But the point is, my friend John knew – the priest can’t forgive my sins – only God can do that, so let me go straight to Him.

Well, here you have Jesus telling this man his sins are forgiven. The religious scribes know, that’s blasphemy. You could be put to death for that. And Jesus has just done it publicly – right in front of everyone. What is He thinking?

8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?”

Jesus knew what the scribes were thinking. He sees and knows what is happening inside us regardless of what we let out. Listen to

Psalm 139:1 O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.
2 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You understand my thought afar off.
3 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
And are acquainted with all my ways.
4 For *there is* not a word on my tongue,
But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

God knows what you're going to say before you even say it. He knows what you're thinking. Jesus knows the real you more than you even know yourself. He's actually using this moment with the paralytic to make a larger point.

9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, '*Your sins are forgiven you,*' or to say, '*Arise, take up your bed and walk*'?

He's forcing the scribes into a corner, forcing them toward a decision point. This is all building to something else. He asks them – what's easier to do – tell the man your *sins are forgiven* or tell him *rise up and walk*? And the obvious answer is: it's easier to tell the man *your sins are forgiven* because it's an unprovable claim in the moment. How do you know someone's sins are forgiven or not – there's no measurement for that, nothing you can observe, nothing objective and verifiable. How can you know it really happened?

It's much harder to say *rise up, take your bed and walk* because you can see the response to that immediately – it is measurable and verifiable. It either worked or it did not so it's harder to say.

10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" —He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw *anything* like this!"

The guy is pumped, he's up and walking – and if you think about what had to happen from an anatomy and physiology standpoint it will blow your mind – atrophied muscles and tight tendons need to flex and move and support weight and balance – instantly. It is amazing. But now there's a problem. If Jesus can say rise up, you're healed, what about that whole thing where He said your sins are forgiven? Well obviously, He's saying both are true. I can heal your body, but I can also cleanse your soul. Remember, the main point of Jesus' miracles was to authenticate His message.

So, let's talk about why all of this matters. I have three main things I would like to draw to your attention. Three things we learn from this situation.

1. Jesus transforms lives. These men were right to bring their friend to Jesus. He received the physical healing he wanted and the spiritual healing he needed, his life was transformed, all with no copay or forms to fill out.

Before meeting Jesus, this man had a bleak future. He wasn't going to get better with a few more appointments at physical therapy because there wasn't any. He wasn't going to get a new brace or one of those motorized wheelchairs because they hadn't been invented yet. There were no handicapped parking spaces. No Americans with Disabilities Act. His injury made almost everything about his life worse and there was no hope of a better future. Until he heard of Jesus.

Now, I haven't seen someone healed of paralysis (yet), but I have seen lives completely transformed through the power of the gospel. I have seen people set free from addictions – to alcohol, to drugs, to pornography. I've seen personalities transformed – hard, angry people become soft and tender.

Early in our marriage Madeleine and I attended a small church in a small town – the kind of place no one has ever heard of. But there was a life transforming ministry there, the kind of place where people who had problems with drugs and alcohol could go – often by court order due to an arrest. You could either enter the residential program and try to get your life together or do your time in jail.

So, every time we went to church, these guys (and later, gals) from the House of Luke were there. Sitting in the front row. White guys, Latinos, Black men, all sorts – often with tattoos covering their arms and necks – former gang-bangers and washouts – all there because they needed to be set free from what Roy, one of the overseers called “their stinking thinking.” They had found freedom in Christ and now they would worship the God who had set them free and study the message and meaning of the Scriptures. Many of them had a contagious joy because they had been born again, set free from the things that destroyed them.

How many of you have seen similar things? Some of you saw the movie Jesus Revolution that's out in theaters now. It shows you stuff just like this happening back in the 70's. Lives completely, radically, and permanently altered, new endings written, new possibilities opened for people, all because

they had an encounter with Jesus. Today there are stories of a spiritual awakening birthed in Asbury a few weeks ago spreading slowly across the nation and around the globe as people are transformed by the message of Jesus. Now, again, no one that I know of has been healed of paralysis in all that, but it brings me to my second point of why these events in Capernaum matter for us today. It's because:

2. Jesus has different priorities. When this man and his four friends came to Jesus what were they hoping for? Physical healing. And what was the first thing Jesus said? Your sins are forgiven. Which, as we noted, probably felt disappointing at first. That's nice Jesus, but I'd really like to walk...*but would you?*

Let me ask a really, really, hard question here. If Jesus had only forgiven the man's sin and had not healed his legs, would that be a loss? Would that be a disappointment? If you could only have one or the other, which would you choose? If you're honest, you know it's a struggle to say, isn't it? Because part of you recognizes the value of forgiveness, but there's also a really big, really vocal, really present part of you that says – I hate my situation and I want out.

I understand. It makes total sense. If Jesus just heals your legs, if Jesus just restores your marriage, if Jesus just wipes out the cancer, if Jesus just solves whatever problem you're facing, *it will feel like a win in the short term*. It will feel good. But the feeling will run out. Because the truth is, the paralytic man eventually grew old. He lost his muscle tone and definition again. It's possible that arthritis set in. Maybe he blew out his knee a few years later. What then?

Friends, I really need you to think about this. One reason we're not so desperate for miracles today and perhaps one reason why we don't see more of them, is because of all the incredible advances we have made in modern medicine. From technology to pharmacology to discoveries of pathology – or how diseases work - we understand so much and we can fix so much – it's stunning. It's really, truly marvelous.

But do you know what happens to all the people that receive this amazing medical treatment? They die. Every single one of them. Illness, injury, pain, and death still come for us all. And what then?

Friends, what do you really want most in life? Functioning legs or forgiveness of sin? Mobility or Innocence? Do you want your problems solved or the presence of God?

Now that's not always fair – sometimes you can have both. In fact, this man got both. But first He received forgiveness. Was that enough? Was the healing of his legs a bonus after the cleansing of his soul? Or was it the other way around - the healing was important and the forgiveness was nice to have too? What's the priority in your book?

Here's something to consider: the affliction you experience, the thing in your life that needs healing, might actually be a blessing if it pushes you to Christ. If this man had never experienced paralysis, it is entirely possible he would have gone on for the rest of his life and never met Jesus. His need pushed him toward the Savior. If the need had not existed, would there ever have been a meeting with Jesus? Last week I told you there is no real lasting change in our lives without a crisis.

Whatever situation you want to see change in your life, it most likely will not change until things come to a crisis and you turn to Jesus with desperate faith to discover a compassionate Christ. You might see adjustment without crisis, but you probably won't see transformation.

So, what if your problem, your need, the thing you feel most acutely, is there to help push you to Jesus in order to discover what you really need?

According to [Psalm 119:71](#) *It was good for me to be afflicted so that I could learn your statutes.*

There's a cause and effect. We might not ever ask for the cause, don't want the cause, but sometimes it's the best way to gain the desired effect. Let every trial in your life point you to Jesus and healing in your soul. Look at every situation where you need a miracle and ask: how can this strengthen my spirit while I wait for help? Which brings me to my final point.

3. Jesus will work with whatever you've got. When you read through the Scriptures you find people coming to Jesus with all kinds of motives and yet He rarely turns people away. These men came looking for healing. There's

nothing said about repentance or remorse. In fact, if you just pull back and look at this from another angle – they're kind of selfish and rude about the whole thing. While our attention is fixed on the guy who's walking out of there on his own two feet and the bombshell Jesus dropped about forgiving sin, someone is going – um, there's a hole in my roof – who's fixing that? Jesus? I've got a man-shaped hole in my roof that only God can fill. Do you mind forgiving my ceiling or whatever You need to do to make it whole again?

These men came to Jesus looking for less than what He knew they needed. They weren't thinking in spiritual terms. But he didn't chastise them. Didn't lecture them. He gave them something better than even knew to ask for, and then did what they wanted as well.

God is rich in mercy. He is kind. He is full of grace. If you come to Him with messed up motives, He'll still find a way to work with it. So come to Him and tell about all the stuff that hurts in your life. Tell Him about all the stuff you think needs fixing. And let Him minister to you. Let Him tell you that He sees you. He hears you. He cares about you. And let Him do whatever He wants to do about it.

And point your friends to Jesus too. Bring your friends to Jesus. Carry your friends to Jesus. And then, let Him take it from there.

You don't have to fix your spouse. You don't have to fix your friend. You don't have to solve their problems. Carry them to Jesus. It's still work. It's still hard. Remember what it would be like to actually carry them. And then navigate the stairs, and then dig through the roof, and then lower them down. Sometimes there is sweat involved. Sometimes there is effort. And sometimes, it might feel like you're doing it all under enemy fire on the spiritual battlefield of life. But you don't have to be the medic, or the doctor, or the trauma surgeon, you're just the battle buddy who carries them to Christ and He'll take it from there. He'll work with whatever you've got.

So, here's what I hope you'll be thinking about this afternoon and for the rest of week – here's what I hope really sticks with you. Two questions:

First - What do you really need from Jesus today? Some people are drawn to Jesus' message, and some are drawn to His miracles, but both point to His

ultimate purpose: the forgiveness of sin and new life for the soul. What are you asking Jesus for, and what are you thanking Him for today? Is it all about the physical aspects of life, or do you understand the importance of deeper things? Which of your needs does Jesus want to meet first? And do you understand why?

Second - Who can you carry to Jesus? Now notice, they didn't put their friend in a headlock and drag him to Jesus. They didn't nag him to Jesus. They carried him – they put in time, effort, and sweat because they loved their friend and they had faith in Jesus. I know some of you are already praying for friends, family, and other people you know. Don't give up. Do you remember when Jesus met the woman at the well? After their conversation she went into town and told people, come, meet someone who told me everything I've ever done. She shared her testimony. She shared what she was learning. And as a result other people came to see for themselves. Look for opportunities to do the same thing. To share what you've experienced from Jesus and pray, pray, pray, that they would come to the point where they're ready to say, could you take me to Him too?

Some people are drawn to Jesus by His message, some are drawn by His miracles, but everyone ultimately needs Him to forgive their sins. We need Him to solve our problems, but also to cleanse our souls. He's able and He is willing. Will you come to Him today?

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Mark 2:1-12 Jesus Forgives Sins

Summary: People are drawn to Jesus' message and miracles, but both point to His ultimate purpose: forgiveness of sin.

- When was the last time you were in the ER? How did you get there, and why did you go?
- Has there been a time when someone carried you to Jesus? Has there been a time when you carried someone else? What was that like? What was the final outcome?
- What are some reasons why people might be attracted to the message of Jesus?
- What are some reasons why people might be attracted to His miracles?
- Which drew you? Which do you need today?
- Whose faith did Jesus observe? What does that mean for the people you're trying to help today?
- Why is it so hard to answer the question, which would you rather have? Your situation solved, or your sins forgiven?
- Review Psalm 139 – what about God knowing you with this degree of intimacy and awareness is intimidating? What is comforting?
- When/where have you seen a bad situation push someone to Christ? How could a 'tragedy' be redeemed by God for your greater good? What other examples can you think of where God used something 'bad' to accomplish something great?
- Who received the glory for this healing (vs 12)? Why is that important?
- Who do you know that needs to be carried to Jesus today, whether in person or in prayer?