

## COVENANT — JESUS CHRIST

*Jesus Forgave Sins*

### LESSON 03

**MARCH 22, 2026**

#### **LESSON TEXT**

Mark 2:1–8

#### **FOCUS VERSES**

Mark 2:5–7

**<sup>5</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.**

**<sup>6</sup>But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,**

**<sup>7</sup>Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?**

#### **TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT**

Jesus identified Himself as the Christ by forgiving sins.

#### **MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT**

I will commit to understanding the core message of Jesus' life.

#### **COVENANT CONTEXT**

Each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) contribute something special to the story of Jesus. In a previous lesson from the Gospel of John, Jesus surprised a city in Samaria when He declared He was the Messiah. In this lesson from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus angered His audience when He forgave a man's sins, proving He was more than a messiah sent from God; He is Almighty God incarnate willing to forgive and save us.

#### **TEACHING OUTLINE**

**Icebreaker:** What makes for a good story? What makes for a good storyteller?

**Teacher Tip:** Connect the group's answers to this fascinating, plot-twisting account in the Gospel of Mark.

**Lesson Connection:** Share the Lesson Connection.

##### I. JESUS' HEALING MINISTRY

###### A. Tearing Off the Roof

**DISCUSS:** *What is the most audacious action you have ever undertaken in faith?*

###### B. Your Sins Are Forgiven

###### C. I will prioritize my eternal destiny over my temporary problems.

**DISCUSS:** *If you have witnessed a healing or some other notable miracle, how did it impact your*

*faith?*

## II. WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

- A. Jesus Subverted the Scribes
- B. How Could Jesus Forgive Sins? **(V)**
- C. I will preach the power of Jesus to forgive sins.

***DISCUSS:** How can we effectively preach, by word or deed, the forgiveness Jesus so graciously grants?*

## III. TAKE YOUR MAT AND GO

- A. Jesus Revealed Himself to the Scribes; the Scribes Revealed Their Hearts to Jesus
- B. Jesus Healed the Man

***DISCUSS:** Why do you think Jesus forgave the man's sins before He healed his body? What would you have thought if you were in the crowd?*

- C. I will submit to Jesus to transform me both spiritually and physically.

***DISCUSS:** Have you been able to see yourself in God's story? Perhaps more to the point, are you willing to submit to His plan for your life?*

### **Internalizing the Message (I)**

#### ***PRAYER FOCUS***

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- To prioritize eternal matters over temporal ones
- To see Jesus for who He is, not just who we think He is

#### ***LESSON CONNECTION***

There's a story—it may not be true, but it is a story nonetheless—about two golfers standing at a tee box waiting to tee off. A two-lane road ran alongside the tee box, and just before they teed off, a funeral procession wound its way past. One of the golfers turned toward the long line of cars, removed his hat, and placed it over his heart as a sign of respect for the funeral procession. After the last car disappeared into the distance, the other golfer commented on his friend's respectful actions. “Well,” the first golfer replied, “it was the least I could do seeing as I was married to her for forty years.”

This story illustrates a common plotline used in jokes. This particular joke is short, so it is easy to see the elements in its plotline. It follows one of the well-worn paths for jokes. According to freelance writer Zoe Dumas, “at its most stripped down, a joke consists of a setup establishing the context and a punch line—the clever, often unexpected climax.” Good comedians are able to take the raw material of a joke and, because they understand the process, work until they have their timing perfect. They set up the punch line because they understand that if the punch line is blown, the joke falls flat.

The Bible too has a plotline, much more developed and complex than any joke. Running throughout the Bible is a meta-narrative, or a big story. We sometimes refer to it as “God's big story.” Like any long and complex story, the

biblical narrative contains a number of movements or subplots. This year we have been looking at the big story through the big story of covenant.

Today's lesson is another episode in the most important of covenants, the new covenant. The story of the new covenant starts in the Old Testament with hints, shadows, and prophecies. The New Testament starts out with a twist. Instead of one narrative account of the life of Jesus the Messiah, it contains four. The first three roughly cover the same material, and the fourth Gospel (John) has a different focus. Unlike Matthew and Luke, which have extended infancy narratives about Jesus' birth, the Gospel of Mark from which we get today's lesson, jumps right into the action. By the fourteenth verse of chapter one, Mark begins the story of the active ministry of Jesus: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15). The Book of Luke does not get to this until almost halfway through chapter four (Luke 4:16-19).

In today's lesson we will follow the plotline of the story we know best as "The Faith of the Four Friends" to see what it reveals to us about Jesus. Plots typically have five movements: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Exposition sets the scene. Rising action introduces the conflict or conflicts. The climax is where the tension in the story has reached its peak. Falling action is the section where the story begins to resolve itself. The resolution is another word for the conclusion.

## ***BIBLE LESSON***

### **I. JESUS' HEALING MINISTRY**

The Christian version of the Old Testament ends with the Book of Malachi. In many ways it is a fitting conclusion to the Old Testament story. The Israelites had returned from captivity and rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem; however, their hearts were not at home with Jehovah. But Malachi offered hope. He promised the Day of the Lord was coming. On that "day" the Messiah would turn their hearts back to Him. The word "day" is in quotations because it is not referring to a literal twenty-four-hour day. In fact, as New Testament writers offered more insight on this "day," it becomes clear it is not even referring to a consecutive time period. There is a break between the first and second coming of the Messiah, and the Old Testament prophets did reveal the nuances of the "day." When we read the promise of Malachi 4:2, "The Sun of righteousness [shall] arise with healing in his wings," we can better understand why the writers of the Gospels placed such an emphasis on the healing ministry of Jesus.

#### **A. Tearing Off the Roof**

The Gospel of Mark jumps right into the action. In chapter one, we read of Jesus casting out an unclean spirit from a man while Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. Then He healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a would-be fatal fever. Jesus' fame quickly spread throughout Galilee. Soon "all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils" sought out Jesus (Mark 1:32). He "healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils" (Mark 1:34).

Chapter one closes with Jesus touching and cleansing a leper. In some ways, the cleansing of a leper is an odd

choice of words. We would be inclined to say “the healing of a leper.” But for Jews, leprosy was an unclean disease that caused the infected to live outside of society. It was a vivid reminder to the Jewish people of how sin both estranged them from Jehovah and destroyed their very lives. If we were plotting the storyline, this would be pegged as rising action in one of the many subplots that build toward the ultimate climax, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Word of the miracles and healings of Jesus spread throughout Galilee and the surrounding area. As today’s lesson begins, Jesus had just returned home where He had been staying in the fishing village of Capernaum. A large group pressed themselves into the house to hear what He had to say. In King James Version language: “And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them” (Mark 2:2).

Four men arrived carrying their friend who was paralyzed. They had heard of the many healings Jesus performed, and they believed if they could get their friend to Jesus, He would heal him also. However, no one was willing to make room for them. Perhaps out of frustration, but certainly with determination, they climbed the outdoor stairs to the flat rooftop of the residence. Then in an act of audacious faith, they began to peel away the roofing material until they had opened a hole big enough to lower their friend into the room where Jesus was preaching. The Bible leaves us to imagine the reaction of Jesus and the gathered crowd to this unexpected event. The Bible does tell us Jesus was impressed by their faith.

***DISCUSS:** What is the most audacious action you have ever undertaken in faith?*

## **B. Your Sins Are Forgiven**

What happened next would certainly qualify as a plot twist. Everyone was waiting with bated breath to see how Jesus would respond to the faith of the four friends. Members of the crowd were probably already thinking about how they were going to tell this story when they returned home. Instead, Jesus wound up His pitching arm and threw a proverbial curveball. He looked at the unnamed, diseased man and announced with authority mixed with compassion: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5). You could almost hear a pin drop, except for the collective chins hitting their chests. They had not seen this script before. It was not how they imagined the story would go, and not without reason. This appears to be the first time Jesus specifically talked of His ability to forgive sins. They knew Him as a healer and a miracle worker, but this was new. This moved the conversation from the physical to the spiritual—from the temporal to the eternal.

## **C. I will prioritize my eternal destiny over my temporary problems.**

Although God had called His creation good, when sin entered into the world, it left a deep stain across life. God had placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, which was filled with goodness. However, God warned Adam if he ate of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, death would begin its relentless assault on his life.

From that day to this, sickness has been part of the human experience. God’s good creation suffered from the pollution caused by sin. What we see became temporal, bounded by time. Sin brought decay and death. Occasionally God has allowed the end time to intrude on the present, and He has reversed the progress of illness to bring

healing—sometimes in a miracle moment and sometimes gradually. Throughout the Bible, but especially in the Gospels, God would miraculously heal human sicknesses. Nowhere is this more prominent in the Bible than during the ministry of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark certainly starts this way.

But as wonderful and miraculous as healings are, they are only temporary. Death's grip may be loosened, but it never lets go. Eventually, or at least until the Rapture, death will claim everyone. But all is not lost. The Messiah came to free us from the curse of sin. He offers the promise of eternal life. We should focus principally on our eternal destiny. The salvation of our souls is eternally more valuable than even the healing of our bodies.

***DISCUSS:** If you have witnessed a healing or some other notable miracle, how did it impact your faith?*

## **II. WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?**

In Mark 2 we read of the first resistance Jesus experienced, aside from some resistance from the demons who were not pleased with Jesus for releasing people they had bound. This resistance theme will play out across the gospel story.

### **A. Jesus Subverted the Scribes**

Let's meet some of the first people to resist Jesus' messianic claims: the scribes. It is often hard for us to imagine a world without digital copies or, at the very least, a world without printing presses. However, during the life of Jesus, printing presses and copy machines were the stuff of science fiction, if indeed that genre of fiction existed. Instead, a guild of men arose who were given to making hand copies of the biblical text. They were trained to notice the finest details and were prized for their ability to make near-perfect copies. As a side benefit, the scribes became experts in the Torah. People consulted them for legal matters and interpretation of Scripture. They had stature in the community. So, when they heard Jesus forgive the sins of the man who was sick, they silently questioned who He thought He was. After all, only God could forgive sins. They had read and studied that truth in the scrolls. They did not know Jesus was setting up a teaching moment, and their suspicion of Him would further make His point.

### **B. How Could Jesus Forgive Sins?**

Although this narrative is not far into the Gospel of Mark, it marks (no pun intended) a key turning point in the story of Jesus. It is the climax of an early subplot. Crowds had been quick to follow Jesus, the miracle worker. They were not sure exactly who He was, but it seemed likely He came from God because He was not only healing people but also casting out demons. Now He boldly forgave a man's sins.

The scribes thought Jesus' startling words were blasphemy because they knew only God Himself had the power to forgive sins. It is God who is wronged by sin. While there may be collateral damage, at its root all sin is against God. King David understood this fact when seeking forgiveness for his despicable acts of adultery and murder. In Psalm 51:4 David humbly repented to God: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." The very nature of forgiveness makes it impossible for a person who was not wronged to forgive for another. Only the wronged individual has the power to forgive. When Jesus forgave the sins of the man sick with palsy, Jesus was making a claim to deity. Jesus was claiming to be Almighty God.

### **C. I will preach the power of Jesus to forgive sins.**

Although we cannot forgive sins for another, we can preach or proclaim that Jesus has provided forgiveness for sin. He has come to reconcile the world to Himself. He paid the price to purchase our freedom. Our mission is to boldly let the world know, both with our words and by our actions, that He desires to extend that forgiveness to all who seek Him.

*DISCUSS: How can we effectively preach, by word or deed, the forgiveness Jesus so graciously grants?*

### **III. TAKE YOUR MAT AND GO**

Often the only way we can know about an internal change in a person's life is to observe the person's external behavior. James said it this way: "Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18). In this story, Jesus followed this pattern.

#### **A. Jesus Revealed Himself to the Scribes; the Scribes Revealed Their Hearts to Jesus**

Earlier in this passage, the writer allowed us to peek in on the thoughts of the scribes. They were scandalized by Jesus' claim to forgive sins. However, they kept their thoughts to themselves. Maybe their skepticism showed on their faces. But "Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves" (Mark 2:8). And He called them on it: "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (Mark 2:9). Then Jesus pushed a little further as if to give voice to their suspicions. Only God can forgive sins. Full stop.

#### **B. Jesus Healed the Man**

After His bold claim to be able to forgive sins, Jesus punctuated this assertion by healing the man who was sick with palsy. The four friends had acted in faith when they moved Heaven and Earth—well, roof and ceiling—to get their sick friend to Jesus. Jesus responded to their faith and then some. He physically healed the man, but He also forgave the man's sins. Jesus made him whole. He then insisted the man pick up his bed—a reminder of his sickness—and return home a whole man. Ultimately this is what God wants for each of us. He wants to touch us physically and spiritually so we can live life more fully. He wants to make us whole.

*DISCUSS: Why do you think Jesus forgave the man's sins before He healed his body? What would you have thought if you were in the crowd?*

### **C. I will submit to Jesus to transform me both spiritually and physically.**

The Bible is a record of "God's big story." As we work our way through the interwoven stories, we can begin to see the story He is wanting to tell. But the Bible is not just a piece of great literature or a fascinating historical account. God wants each of us to find our place in His story. He is asking us to submit to His plan to transform us both spiritually and physically.

*DISCUSS: Have you been able to see yourself in God's story? Perhaps more to the point, are you willing*

*to submit to His plan for your life?*

**Teacher Option:** *Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how this account in Mark is all about Jesus' primary mission: to seek and save the lost.*

### **INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE**

**(I)** If you are of a certain age, you will probably be able to close your eyes and bring to mind the iconic radio voice of Paul Harvey and his signature line: “And now you know the rest of the story.” For decades Harvey hosted a syndicated radio program that reached most of North America. In each episode he would tell a story, sometimes a well-known story, but more often an obscure one. He was a great storyteller and could pull an audience into his story. He would build the story to its expected climax and then just before the end, he would flip the script and tell the story behind the story. Often it caused listeners to see it all in another light and helped them realize there is almost always “the rest of the story.”

The story in today's lesson is best remembered because of the astounding faith of the four friends. A good storyteller can make the audience feel the dirt and debris fall on their shoulders as they peer curiously up at the ceiling. You can see the wonder in their eyes as the man sick with palsy is lowered into the middle of the room. It is so dramatic that we often miss the rest of the story. Mark included this account in his Gospel to point out that Jesus was the Messiah. He was God manifest in the flesh. We often miss the drama of the moment because we already believe Jesus is the Son of Man.

Perhaps today we need to let the wonder of the story surprise us again. Maybe we need to reflect on a deeper level at the marvel of His coming to live among us—at His great desire to reconcile the world, including you, to Himself. He wants you to let Him write the rest of His story in your life.