

AUTHORITY OVER MAN'S GREATEST NEED

Mark 2:1-12

If you were to go around and interview people, asking them what they believe man's greatest need is, I imagine you'd have quite a wide range of responses. What is man's greatest need? Is it love? Justice? External and internal peace? Physical or mental health? Basic sustenance such as food and water? Longevity of life? Is it purpose and fulfillment? If you just think about it for a bit, you'll soon come to the conclusion as a believer that really, it's none of these things. Many of them, in fact, are just by-products of one greater need. In order to understand what man needs most, you have to think about man's greatest problem is and it's his sin. Because man is lost in his sin and separated from God and is destined to suffer God's wrath for that sin, man's greatest need then is to have his sin forgiven by God, and so be saved from that separation and wrath. So we could say, man's greatest need is that he needs to be forgiven of his sin. If we don't ever know perfect mental or physical health, if we don't even ever know great love from those around us in this life, if we don't even ever have the basic necessities to live like bread and water but if we have the forgiveness of God for our sins, then we will have our greatest need met. Everything else really pales in comparison to the need for divine forgiveness of sins. What our text in Mark reveals today is that man's need for forgiveness is greater than any physical ailment and it's only found in Jesus Christ.

Let's turn our attention now to a familiar story from Mark 2:1-12.

"When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus, seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak this way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." And he got up and immediately picked up the and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

Every story writer knows that every good story has some basic elements in it: A setting, a set of characters, a plot, a theme and a conflict and a conclusion. And I couldn't help but think of today's text in those terms because planned or not, they're all there. It's not as if it's some fictional story Mark made up – this is a real story that really happened, in a real place, in a real point in history, with real people. But I want to look at it in consideration of those basic story elements. First, we look at the setting.

I. THE SETTING (VV. 1-2)

As we come to the beginning of Mark chapter 2, we find ourselves back in **Capernaum** again, likely at Peter and Andrew's house. Jesus and the disciples have been gone for quite a while, **several days** it says in verse 1, ministering in the various synagogues and in the area of Galilee – Galilee being the territory in northern Israel – and He preaching the Word, casting out demons and healing the various diseases of the people that came to Him. This entire area had seen the Great Light of Christ by now that Isaiah prophesied about (Is. 9:2; Mt. 4:16). And He was doing an

extremely great amount of ministry there but also finding time **often to slip away into wilderness to pray**, according to Luke 5:16. I think His life at this time could be described as praying and ministering, praying and ministering. Isolation, crowds. Isolation, crowds. With the Father, then with the people.

It's been very busy. But now it says that He is at "**home**". During His Galilean ministry, He stayed often enough at the city of **Capernaum** for it to be considered His home. And you'd think that since He's home, He would find time to rest and relax and hang out a little bit and recuperate from it all, but **Mark, writing with the purpose of showing us the Servant-nature of Christ**, just keeps thrusting into His busy life in ministry, even in a place where'd He'd already ministered to the whole town previously. As soon as it was heard that He was at **home, it says, many gathered together** around Him as He **spoke the Word of God to them** (v. 2). There was so many people that it says there was **no room even near the door**. In other words, the place is jam-packed, tickets are sold out, even the 'Standing Room Only' is full. Wherever Jesus went, that's the way it was. He drew large crowds because the people wanted to hear Him speak the word and to be healed by Him (Lk. 5:15). His teaching was no one else's and they'd never seen anyone healing like this before – healing that was so immediate and so complete every time (2:12). People were amazed.

That is the setting. Next, let's look at the characters.

II. **THE CHARACTERS (VV. 1-3, 6)**

As far as the characters go, Luke reveals to us that it was more than just common folk of Capernaum that were gathering around Jesus at this time because word was getting out about Him. You've got the crowds consisting of people from all over the place. You've obviously got the disciples there who are watching and learning from their Teacher. But then verse 6 mentions the scribes, and Luke complements the passage giving us more detail, by saying that Pharisees were also there.

A. **Jesus & the Disciples (v. 1)**

B. **Crowds from all over the place (v. 2)**

C. **Scribes and Pharisees (v. 6; Luke 5:17)**

Because of His rise to popularity and the following He was generating, the head religious honchos such as the Pharisees and scribes had come from all over in Galilee and Judea and even as far as Jerusalem, a 3 day's journey (35 hour hike as a crow flies and that's going through Samaria, which we know they probably didn't). They came to sit and listen to Jesus and observe Him. Notice I didn't say learn from Him because as we'll see, most of them really weren't that interested in learning, they were interested in criticizing and finding anything they can to accuse Him of heresy. They were more like an investigating committee waiting for Him to slip-up. He wouldn't take part in their hypocritical religious games that went way beyond Scripture so naturally, He clashed with them and this is the first clash we see in the book of Mark. I find it interesting that verse 6 says they were sitting while there was no standing room left. They had probably been given some sort of special treatment, probably a front-row seat. These guys weren't servants. They wanted power and significance and enjoyed special treatment or special recognition in a proud sense.

And in contrast to these religious leaders who don't have a hair or thread out of place, you've got what I like to call the motley crew – not the band from the 80's – but this rough, unorganized bunch of five men, who aren't exactly as orthodox as the religious Pharisees. Mark just calls them "they". And "they" came. Four men and a paralytic.

D. **The motley crew (v. 3)**

These guys are the guys that I want to be friends with out of this story. They've got remarkable love for their paralytic friend (it's not easy carrying a full grown man around), they've got persistence, and they're creative. These guys come carrying their paralyzed friend on a pallet. This carrying device is also described as a mat and as a mattress or Luke 5:24, a stretcher. I'll just refer to it as a makeshift stretcher. And this is where the plot begins.

III. **THE PLOT. (VV. 4-5)**

Because these guys were late getting there and the crowd was so thick, they found themselves in a predicament about how to get their friend close to Jesus. A lot of houses back then though would have had stairs on the outside leading up to a flat roof that was made of earthen materials and so after a little collaborating, what this unorthodox bunch decides to do is to go up on this rooftop and they start to digging a hole in the roof! Now, what you should know about the structure of these roofs is that they're not like our roofs. The roof of this house would have had some sort of **large main beams** and in-between the main beams they had a layer of smaller branches acting as **crossmembers**; and on top of that there would have been some type of grassy **thatching** made of palms or reeds or thistles; and then a thick layer of mud and then tiles on top of the mud. Some of these roofs, they say, were two feet thick and had so much mud/earth that they would grow grass on them – kind of like an old Nebraska sod house. So from now on, whenever you see a sod house, just think of Mark chapter 2! This house though, according to Luke 5:19, had tiles on top of that.

But you can picture them as they just start ripping up and pulling back the roof of this house with their bare hands while Jesus is teaching. If you think a crying baby or a cell phone is distracting, just imagine sitting there and bits of the roof begin to fall on your nice church clothes and a beam of sunlight pokes through and then a hole big enough to fit a person through. It would have been quite the sight. It says, "they removed the roof above Him" and dropped the man right in front of Jesus. And I don't know how you feel about this but I find it quite comical – Jesus probably had to stop teaching at some point and start smiling – maybe even laughing. And the paralytic probably had an awkward, sheepish smile that said, "Sorry to interrupt, but this can't wait." I say that because Jesus doesn't rebuke them one bit. But now imagine the look on the Pharisees' faces – probably not so smiley are they? They probably have the look of disgust on their face and frustrated to no end. If it is was me or you sitting there, I'm afraid we'd be more like the Pharisees, thinking, "Can't this wait until after the service?" Or if we were the four men, I bet most of us would've waited – but not this motley crew! They cut to the chase. And I think they teach us a lot that I've summed up in this principle, and it's that we should be a little more daring in doing ministry.

❖ **Have a daring ministry.**

To be daring is to be adventurous and somewhat bold. That's what I think of when I think of these guys that Jesus doesn't rebuke. It wasn't at all normal in this culture to just go ripping the roof off someone else's house – no one ever did that before – but they did. **They dared to be creative**, to say least. They also **dared to love this friend of theirs enough to do whatever it took to get him close to Jesus**. We could be more daring, more bold, in our approach to see others draw near to Jesus. They also **dared to be persistent**. Just because one door closed didn't mean they gave up. They looked for another open door. Just because God closes one door in your life doesn't mean you should cease looking for His next door. They also **dared to do the difficult**. They didn't stop at some obstruction. They kept going. They maintained the vision and kept pressing on. One of the most honorable things in this life is watching other believers continue to serve the Lord, maintain the vision, year after year, through difficulty after difficulty. That speaks volumes. They also **dared to sacrifice**. This hole in the roof had to cost someone. Maybe they paid for it to be fixed later or

maybe they told the owner as they were ripping it open, “Don’t worry, we’ll fix it later!” – one way or another it cost them. Lastly, they **dared to believe Jesus** – that He is who He says He is and could do what He said He could – enough so that they acted on it. In other words, they had faith that works. Jesus said He could see their faith in Him by their action. That’s a good question for us to ask ourselves: **Can people see our faith?** Is our faith active?

What happens next thought is breaking into the theme of the whole account – the big reason the story is retold by Mark. Verse 5 – “And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” So far in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus has demonstrated He has authority over Satan in the wilderness, authority over demons, and authority over disease. Now what do we see He has authority over? We see He has authority to forgive sins – man’s greatest need!

IV. **THE THEME – JESUS HAS AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS. (VV. 5-11)**

Again, man’s greatest need is not that he needs bread and water, or to feel loved or to feel inner peace, or even that he needs to find a sense of purpose or fulfillment in life, though that too, is very important. There’s a lot things about Christianity that are extremely important for us in our lives, but the greatest and most important produce of the gospel is that by believing in Christ, we’re simply forgiven of our sin debt to God. Only when we are forgiven of our sin can salvation be credited to our account. We need forgiveness of sins more than we need anything else. And that’s why the gospel has to remain our number one priority.

Because of our sin against a holy God, we must be forgiven in order to go to heaven and in order to draw near to God now in this life. And that’s the good news of the gospel – God became a man and lived the perfect life that we couldn’t to die a death that we deserve! Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death,” – that what we deserve – BUT, it continues, “the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “God gave His Son for us, in our place so that whoever believes in Him, won’t perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

And this message, Paul says, should remain our main responsibility. Our main responsibility is not a social gospel and social justice. It’s the gospel of salvation. Men need to hear the good news of Jesus Christ because faith comes by hearing and how will they hear without a preacher, Romans says? We have been given this ministry to tell people the good news. In 2 Corinthians 5:18 he says, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

❖ **Our ministry is to share the good news of forgiveness offered in Christ.**

And you can’t assume that just because someone goes to church, they understand the gospel. From personal experience, I can tell you it’s possible to go to church Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and never understand the incredible forgiveness in the gospel message – that you can have all of your past, present and future sins completely paid for and forgiven? Growing up in church, I always thought forgiveness was a temporary thing. If I confess my sins to the priest and am absolved of my sin, I was good to go – but then as soon as I sinned again, I thought I lost salvation all over again and had to go and confess it again. Saved, then unsaved. Saved, then unsaved. Look: True and authentic, biblical Christianity doesn’t work that way. It’s not saved this minute and not saved

the next. Once you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior who died for your sins, you're saved and always saved. It's not based on your performance but on what Christ did. That's the good news of the gospel. The Gospel is that whoever trusts/believes/has faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin because of what He did for them on the cross, has eternal life. If you have placed your faith in Christ, you have been **TOTALLY FORGIVEN FOR ALL OF YOUR PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE SINS ON A JUDICIAL BASIS**. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." When it comes to verses like this, because of how one of my Bible school professors taught us, I like to think of what the Bible sometimes doesn't say. Notice what it doesn't say: It doesn't say, In Him, you may have or might have redemption. You might have to wait to find out. It doesn't say we may or may not have forgiveness of sin. It says we have it! Presently, in our possession, we have been forgiven. That's what the Bible says and taking God at His Word is not arrogant – it is faith – believing – trusting.

I have been enjoying Psalm 103 this week in accordance with this passage. "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him, as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." How high are the heavens above the earth? As far as we know, the universe has no ending and that's how great His lovingkindness is towards those in Christ. And how far is the east from the west? So far has He removed our transgressions from us. He remembers we are dust. If you struggle with the thought that God maybe hasn't forgiven you, would you consider memorizing Psalm 103:10-14 this week? Meditate on it. Ephesians 1:7 too. The paralytic on this day came to know the forgiveness of his sins that day. For the rest of his life he would never forget those words, "Son, your sins are forgiven." What freeing words to a sinner!

But not everyone thinks so... to the legalists sitting there, those words caused some sparks to fly.

V. **THE CONFLICT (VV. 6-11)**

After hearing this the religious leaders were reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" And they're right! But Jesus isn't any other man is He? He's God! Just from the text we see several proofs of that:

1. **He forgave this man's sin.**

That's something that's impossible for any man do. But for Jesus it was easy. When Jesus says, which is easier to say, "Son, your sins are forgiven" or "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home"? it's not in just in the sense that the first phrase is shorter than the second by number of words or even how it's pronounced. It's a matter of ability, because only God is able to forgive sin. It was just as easy for Him to forgive as to heal. The question though is really a double-edged sword to their argument because if they said, "Get up, take up your mat, and go home" (physically healing) was easier, then in their minds they would still hit another road block because to them, physical healing and spiritual healing went hand in hand. To them, it's as if the same thing. Disease was often viewed together as consequences for sin and the OT at times does speak of it in that language. Psalm 103 again, but in verses 2-3 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity and heals all your diseases." So healing to them was always predicated on God's forgiveness. This is why in John 9:2 the disciples question Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" And

Jesus says neither. It's not the result of sin but so that God might be displayed in him. But either way you answer Jesus's question, Jesus is proven to be God.

Another thing He did was He just read their minds.

2. He just read their minds.

He knew in His spirit what they were reasoning in their hearts without them even saying it and He spoke it with confidence. He didn't sense it or feel it. He literally knew what they were thinking and only God can do that.

3. He called Himself the 'Son of Man'.

This term was certainly less confrontational than Son of God or Messiah, but in their prophetic minds, you know they were going back to OT references for the 'Son of Man'. Daniel 7:13-14. It's describing the One who will usher in the Messianic Kingdom at the Second Coming, at the end of the Great Tribulation, and who is it that ushers in this Kingdom? "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a **Son of Man** was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him [the Son of Man] was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed." Imagine now, a man on earth who is preaching the Kingdom is at hand and has been doing all of the things that the prophets spoke He would do, who is calling Himself the Son of Man. All of the proof was undeniable. He is Son of Man. That Kingdom, by the way, is postponed until His future coming after the Great Tribulation.

The fourth and final thing He does is He heals the man from a condition that has no treatments. No man can heal this one.

4. He had authority over this man's paralysis.

It was an instantaneous and immediate miracle that spoke for itself. It didn't need anyone to confirm it. "He got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this." And all his friends, it's been said, were shouting, "Yahoo!" as they climbed off the roof to go and meet him. What we need to notice, that if we read too fast we will miss it: **the physical healing only comes after the spiritual healing. Jesus thought the spiritual need of forgiveness was greater than this paralytic's need for physical healing.** And now the physical healing become proof of the spiritual healing. "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." And that's exactly what the man did.

The conclusion then, is fairly simple:

VI. THE CONCLUSION (V. 12)

The moral of this familiar story is this: Jesus is able to grant forgiveness of sins, man's greatest need, because of what He did through His death, burial and resurrection. Everyone who has trusted in Him is forgiven of their sins. And this morning, I dare you to go and tell others about that they can have their greatest need met. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Daringly share with others the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ.