

## ***THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC***

**Mark 2:1-12**

**September 24, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

Most of you know the moniker that was given to Elvis Presley, “The King of Rock & Roll.” Growing up in Memphis, I got used to the stories of people flocking to Graceland, the home of Elvis, most noticeably to celebrate the anniversary of his death, which occurred on August 16, 1977. During this week, Elvis Presley Boulevard is literally shut down. People come from around the globe to mourn the death of “The King” and see the place where it all began. I recall an interview with one woman from England who had sold her home in order to have the funds to make her one time pilgrimage to Graceland.

I can only imagine what it was like when Elvis was alive. I have heard stories of people hiding out around the mansion to catch sight of when Elvis was at home. When it was known that he was at home, the word quickly spread and people would literally swarm the gate, hoping to get a glimpse of him, either around the mansion or simply departing in his Cadillac. When Elvis was home, the crowds gathered.

In our text this morning, we have a similar occasion. Although the people did not fully understand the majesty of Jesus, they had seen or heard of the events surrounding Him. He had preached and taught in their synagogues. He had cast out demons and healed the sick among them. Because of the unbridled zeal of the crowds, Jesus was forced to leave Capernaum for a time to maintain His purpose for coming, which was first and foremost to preach (1:38). The people did not yet understand that the miracles He performed were to verify both His person and His word. They had not yet connected the dots that when Jesus proclaimed, “The kingdom of God is at hand” (1:15) that He was proclaiming that He Himself was the very embodiment of the kingdom. They remained ignorant of the truth that this kingdom is spiritual, not political. So their concept of Messiah was incorrect. While He did come to deliver them from bondage, it was not from the oppression and bondage of Rome, but from the guilt and bondage of sin and the judgment of God. So these miracles were done in order to visibly demonstrate and verify His majesty.

Our text opens with another of the many mob scenes we find when Jesus was present. The people had heard that the King had returned. **“When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. <sup>2</sup> And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door.”** The curious crowds had gathered. And while Jesus **“was speaking the word to them”** an interesting event takes place. Jesus’ words on this occasion would have been the same as He proclaimed when He first came to them, the same words that He had previously taught in their synagogue, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). What we see in this story is that *the greatest need in a person’s life is to be forgiven of sin.*

### **I. The Faith of Friends (2:3-4)**

Last week we looked at the story of the leper (1:40-45). There we noted that there were only two characters mentioned, the leper and Jesus. While the implication is that there was a crowd on this occasion, there is an element of privacy in the story of the leper. That is not the case in our story this morning, where we are told that as Jesus was proclaiming the Word in His house, **“They came.”** We are not sure who **“they”** were, but what we do know is that four men in this

group demonstrate their friendship to a particular man. We see their confidence, much like the confidence of the leper, that Jesus, if He was willing, could heal their friend. So they bring the man to Jesus. There are two things we note about the faith of this man's friends.

### **1. The need of the man (v. 3a)**

The only thing that we know of this man was that he was **“a paralytic.”** Much like the leper, this man had a need. However, while the leper was able to bring himself to Jesus, this man was unable to walk. He needed help. From the events that transpire, we can assume that the man knew what was going on. He was not an unwilling accomplice in the story but a willing participant. While we do not know the cause or the length of this man's paralysis, we do know that he, like the leper, was helpless and desperate. Therefore, presumably upon the suggestion of these men, the paralytic agrees to let them carry him to Jesus, his only hope for healing.

But while the paralytic certainly recognized his need, it is the friends' recognition of his need that catches our attention here. As we will see in a moment, while they, like the crowds, did not know his greatest need, they at least were cognizant of the fact that this man was physically helpless on his own to come to Jesus. They too had a confidence that Jesus was the man's only hope. They saw his need, and they took action.

Derek Thomas calls this text **“a text about missions. This is a story about four men, at least four men, who are bringing someone else to Jesus. That's what missions is, bringing people to know and understand and comprehend and to exercise faith in Jesus Christ.”**<sup>1</sup> Just like the men in this story see the need of a friend, we too must notice the needs of others. Again, while they did not recognize his greatest need, which would be revealed to them shortly, we do know the greatest need of others. People need the Lord, not just in the sense of physical blessings, but most importantly for forgiveness of sins. That is our calling as believers – to carry the gospel to those that the Lord brings us into contact with each and every day. We are called to bring others to Jesus. We do this in a number of ways. We befriend them, we ask them to come to church, we give them things to read and sermons to listen to, we invite them to our homes and to fellowship with other believers, all with the hope of ultimately sharing the gospel with them. But it all begins by recognizing their need, their greatest need. You see, unlike the paralytic, they may not recognize their need. But like the paralytic, they are unable to come on their own. And so, in the words of Derek Thomas, we bring people to know and understand and comprehend and exercise faith in Jesus Christ. That's what it is to fulfill the Great Commission, **“As you are going, make disciples”** (Matt. 28:19).

This often takes great effort, which is the second thing we notice about the faith of this man's friends.

### **2. The determination of the friends (vv. 3b-4)**

One thing that we certainly notice in this story is the perseverance of these four men. First of all, they **“carried”** him on a stretcher. This was no small feat. We are not told how far they had to carry this man, but most of you know that dead weight often seems heavier than it actually is. And the farther you carry a weight, the heavier it seems to become. Even with four men holding onto the four corners of the stretcher and balancing the weight, it was still a tremendous undertaking. But it was an undertaking that they joyfully accepted.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Thomas, [http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek's SERMONS/Mark/03amark.htm](http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/sermons/Derek's%20SERMONS/Mark/03amark.htm)

Then, in v. 4, when they arrive at Jesus' house, the crowd was so great that **“they were unable to get”** to Jesus. The crowd literally blocked the way and there was no apparent way for them to get their friend to Jesus.

Isn't this often the case in our work of the ministry? Have you ever noticed the obstacles that often come up once you have determined to share Christ with someone? These might be obstacles from within, of our own making, or obstacles from without, things beyond our control, much like the crowd gathered outside Jesus' house. But regardless of the source of the obstacle, there are often hindrances to our work of the ministry. However, we must expect opposition when we share the gospel because there is a spiritual battle taking place and the enemy will use whatever they have at their disposal to hinder our efforts. This is where faith is so important. We might even call these obstacles tests of our faith. How we respond in these situations reveals how great our burden really is.

How did these men respond to this apparent obstacle? We would have expected them to be discouraged, having brought the man this far only to find no apparent way to complete their mission. But they were not at all discouraged. Look at v. 4, **“They removed the roof above Him”** and **“they dug an opening.”** You want to talk about boldness and determination! How many of us would be audacious enough to carry this man up on the roof of someone else's home and dig a hole? Now this was not quite as difficult as it might seem. Houses in that day were constructed with flat roofs. The roofs were made of dirt, clay, and thatch that was pressed together and laid across wooden beams. There was then a thin glaze of clay spread on top to seal it from rain. There would also have been stairs on the side of the house leading up to the roof to provide easy access. People often spent a good deal of time on the roof of their home, enjoying a nap in the cool of the evening. So to remove the roof and to dig a hole would not take a great amount of effort, especially by these men, who evidently had some physique as demonstrated by their toting the man across town and carrying him up on the roof.

But this does not minimize their determination. We have got to picture this – they destroyed Jesus' house! They dug a hole in His roof. The crowd was no obstacle to them. They were on a mission and nothing or no one could deter them. *They simply turned the apparent obstacle of the crowd into an opportunity to further prove their faithfulness.* Then, having dug the hole in the roof, **“they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.”** Again, we need to picture this. Jesus is sitting there, **“speaking the word”** to those who were able to gain access to His house. Then, right in the middle of His sermon, the roof starts to fall in. Then a man is lowered through the hole right at Jesus' feet. Talk about a distraction to your sermon! Here Jesus was, fulfilling His purpose in coming, proclaiming the word, and His house is destroyed right before His eyes. Now I know how we probably would have reacted at that moment. But how would Jesus respond?

## II. The Response of Jesus (2:5-11)

Jesus was not at all distracted as evidenced by His response to the situation. As we saw with the leper, Jesus does not stop and evaluate the immediate situation but remains focused on the eternal. He uses this circumstance as an opportunity to visibly demonstrate the gospel.

### 1. Jesus' declaration (vv. 5-7)

A peculiar thing happens in this situation. Previously when Jesus was confronted with the sick it was the sick person who opened the conversation, or, in the case of Simon Peter's mother-

in-law, a relative or others would make a request. That is not the case here. None of the five men says a word, but Jesus initiates the conversation. As a matter of fact, the men never speak. Their faithfulness on this occasion was demonstrated by their actions. Jesus saw **“their faith,”** that being the faith of the five men. Leon Morris notes, “First, the unqualified plural *their* seems meant to include the whole party, the sick man as well as his friends, and secondly [and more importantly], it is impossible to think that the man’s sins were forgiven if he had no faith of his own.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus knew their hearts and recognized their faithfulness.

We then see Jesus’ declaration, a declaration that sent shock waves through the crowd. Even the paralytic and his four friends were almost certainly discouraged at Jesus’ pronouncement because it was not what they had anticipated. Jesus said to the paralytic, **“Son, your sins are forgiven.”** He did not give him the healing touch that he had given the leper. He does not rebuke the man’s paralysis as He had Peter’s mother-in-law. He gives the simple but profound declaration, **“Your sins are forgiven.”**

This was something new in the words and actions of Jesus. He had previously preached forgiveness of sins as His forerunner John the Baptist had and the need for repentance. But here for the first time He states verbally that *He* could forgive sins. Why does He choose to do so at this point? Why hadn’t He done the same in the previous miracles? I think the reason is twofold. First, it was a commonly held belief during this time that catastrophic illness or disease was directly related to sin. In other words, a person’s sickness was God’s judgment on them either for some sin in their life or for the sin of others. We see this in the counsel of Job’s friends who thought that Job’s misfortunes were somehow related to sin. We have evidence of this belief even among the disciples in John 9:1-2, “As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And His disciples asked Him, ‘Rabbi, *who sinned*, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?’” Some today still hold this belief that sickness is always a consequence of sin. But that is not the teaching of Scripture and is a fatalistic view of sickness. While it is true that sickness is a direct consequence of the Fall and evidence of the presence of sin in the world, it is not true that it is brought on by some specific sin of the person who is suffering. Jesus demonstrated this in His response to the disciples in John 9:3, “*It was* neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Was it God’s will for that man to be blind? Yes, but it was not a result of his or anybody else’s sin.

So one of the reasons that Jesus chose this moment to demonstrate His authority was to discount what the people had begun to formulate in their minds in associating sickness with sin and God’s judgment. They thought that when Jesus healed a person physically, driving out their illness, that He was also driving out their sins. Jesus here says, “No.” Physical healing alone could never save a person from their sins. No matter how healthy a person might be, unless their sins were forgiven, they remained under the wrath of God. In doing this, Jesus was peeling back the veil of the mystery a bit further.

But a second more apparent reason that Jesus chose this moment to make this proclamation was because of a certain group of men who were in attendance. In verses 6-7 we read, **“But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’”** Here we see the beginning of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. This story and the next four in the gospel of Mark have been titled “conflict narratives” because we see these antagonizers plotting and scheming to get rid of Jesus. Their assertion in this instance is correct. God alone can forgive sins. Any person other than God that made this pronouncement would be guilty of

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *TNTC: Luke*, p. 129.

blasphemy because it would slander God and His character. The scribes further looked at this as blasphemous because Jesus had just demonstrated that forgiveness is based on faith and not works, which they had lived their entire lives striving to accomplish. So their downfall, and the source of their animosity, was their failure to associate Jesus with God and to see that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

## 2. Jesus' question (vv. 8-9)

Notice that the scribes did not speak their thoughts. Just as Jesus knew the thoughts and intents of the paralytic and his friends, he also knew the thoughts and hearts of the scribes. He was immediately aware of what was happening, and He says to them, **'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"; or to say, "Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk"?''**

Here we see one of Jesus' techniques of dealing with the religious leaders. He would ask a question that presented them with a dilemma. His purpose in this was to show them that their conclusions were wrong, that they had just enough theology to be dangerous. These questions were rhetorical in nature and always put the leaders in their place and heightened their antagonism. The answer to Jesus' question here was obvious. On the surface, it was much easier to say, **"Your sins are forgiven"** than to tell a paralytic to get up and walk.

The scribes were caught in a theological dilemma. As John MacArthur points out,

His opponents said nothing, but the answer was obvious: both things are equally impossible for men and both are equally possible for God. The point was that no one but God could either heal disease with a word or could forgive sins, and He can do both with the same divine ease. Even their own distorted theology should have led the scribes to believe in Jesus' divinity. If, as they believed, sickness and disease were consequences of sin, then removing disease would be connected to dealing with the sin that caused it. In their thinking, *all* healing of disease would have to involve at least some forgiveness of sin—which by their own declaration only God can grant. They were trapped in their own theology and logic.<sup>3</sup>

So Jesus' question revealed that the scribes contradicted their own beliefs. But He does not stop there.

## 3. Jesus' command (v. 10-12)

**"But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup> 'I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.'"** This is Mark's first use of the title **"Son of Man."** He used it 14 times (cf. v. 28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [twice], 41, 62). Scholars have debated the meaning of this title, but the best evidence points to Jesus' meaning that He was the divine Messiah, the representative man (cf. Dan. 7:13-14).<sup>4</sup> The crowd, and especially the religious leaders, *should* have picked up on this Old Testament reference, but, as we will, see they failed to do so.

He then demonstrates this His authority as the Messiah, not a military Messiah who came to conquer the powers of this earth, but as the spiritual Messiah who came to conquer sin and everything associated with it. He looks at the man and commands, **"Get up, pick up your pallet and go home."** And His authority is instantly verified, **"And he got up and immediately**

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 8-15*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, pp. 197-98.

**picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone.”** The crowd was left with only one logical option when the man got up and walked home under his own power. If Jesus had the power to heal this man physically with a word, then His word about forgiveness for sin must have the same cleansing power. As one writer put it, “He did the miracle which they could see that they might know that he had done the other one that they could not see.”<sup>5</sup>

Then Mark gives the people’s response, **“they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’”** Luke says they were “all struck with astonishment...and filled with fear” (5:26). It might seem as if these people got it. But Matthew adds one little caveat; they “glorified God, who had given such authority *to men*” (9:8). Not that God had given authority to *this* man, the Son of Man, but *to men*. William Hendriksen picks up on this thought, “They were equating ‘Son of Man’ with ‘man’ and by doing this they missed the terms deeper meaning. To be sure, for the moment the glory of Jesus flashed before their consciousness, but they caught only a glimpse of it. They missed seeing him as ‘the effulgence of God’s glory and the very image of his substance’ (Heb. 1:3, A.R.V.).”<sup>6</sup> In other words, they missed the deity of Christ and in so doing once again missed His real purpose in coming.

## **Conclusion**

- 1. This man’s paralysis provides a picture of man’s inability to come to Christ on His own because of sin.**
- 2. We must take great care that our theology does not become a stumbling block in our lives.**
- 3. Forgiveness for sin is in Christ alone – not our works, not in church attendance, not in our human lineage, not in our service to Him, not in walking the aisle.**
- 4. The believer can take great assurance in the truth that His forgiveness is complete forgiveness!**

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<sup>5</sup> A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> William Hendriksen, *NTC: Matthew*, p. 421.