

Mark 2:1–12

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 2, verses 1 through 12. 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. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 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.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven. Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? 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?

[1 : 14] Which is easier? To say to the paralytic, Your sins are forgiven? Or to say, Rise, take up your bed and walk? But 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, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and all amazed and glorified God, saying, We never saw anything like this.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Good morning and welcome.

So glad that you're with us today. I want to set this sermon this morning in the context of the two that preceded it when we began to look at Mark together.

Week one was the prologue wherein we saw five witnesses declare the arrival of the king.

[2 : 42] Last week, we moved on from there and we saw five scenes that described the activity of the king.

And now today, coming with chapter 2, verse 1, and what will hold us through chapter 3, verse 6, not five witnesses that declare his arrival or five scenes that describe his activity, but five stories that define the authority of the king.

His arrival, his activity. And this morning, we engage with his authority. By the time we're done, I want you to not only know, but to embrace this truth when it comes to his authority.

Because of Jesus, anyone's sins can be forgiven. Yes, even yours and mine.

This first story among five is said to take place in the city of Capernaum. You can see it there. Put your eyes on it. Verse 1.

[4 : 02] And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So where are we in the setting of the story?

We are now some 120 miles north of Jerusalem. Capernaum is little more than a small fishing village.

Interesting that it's so far north of the center of the king's work. The Old Testament prophetic tradition actually prophesied that when the Messiah came, he would come from the north, from the region of Galilee.

I suppose it was the same route that the Assyrians came down when they captured Israel. It's the same route that the Babylonians would have come down to rule God's people.

And now Isaiah had said that God himself will come from the north and make his way over God's people. And so here he is, far away from the city center, in a small fishing village of Capernaum, but even so already fulfilling this movement south over the souls of the world.

[5 : 30] The setting is not only in regard to the city, though. It says that he's at home. 1968, archaeologists were on the site of a first century home in Capernaum.

Walls would have been sourced from local volcanic stone. Roofs would have been constructed. Well, I imagine them being constructed the way those who go on the TV show alone might do. They take as large a wooden beam as they can find and throw the branch over wall to wall, and then the leaves, and then the smaller branches until there's a covering over it.

Ceilings would have been fairly low in first century Capernaum. And then after the covering is there, the wet mud and mortar would eventually dry and cake over the home as a roof.

From what I have read, external stone stairs would have come alongside such a home to the roof.

[6 : 51] You know, even though they were in rural areas, they had their own attic of sorts, an outdoor attic. The roof became a place where you would dry different things, or even in the heat of the season, sleep out under the stars on your roof.

And this is not new, this access to the roof. It goes all the way back even in Israel's day in the book of Deuteronomy of all places.

He said, when you build a new house, Deuteronomy 22, when you get to the roof, make sure that you have kind of a raised railing, lest the blood of someone be on your head because they fell off your roof.

Although they've uncovered these things all over, the Levant and the area of Palestine, these early homes, which would have been typical common structures, probably with a narrow door out the back into connected rooms where there was a courtyard open that would allow the family or the various ones to emerge in their life together.

He's in Capernaum, a small fishing village. He's in a house. More importantly, what we see then with that setting is that this home suddenly is attended by friends who are coming with faith.

[8 : 28] Take a look at verses 2 through 4. 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.

And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. These friends come with faith.

When you continue to read it, you can see their faith emerging. 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. And Jesus, it says, saw their faith.

The setting is fixed, but the faith of the friends is brought to the fore of the story. Can you imagine having friends like this?

[9 : 33] Oh, don't some of us know the travails of life, the immobility of movement, the need of others to get us from one place to another? Evidently, they had heard and believed that Jesus could heal their friend.

I'm talking physically heal him. Now, we saw last week, even in the activity of the kingdom, those five scenes, the various things happening in the kingdom, one of which was the physical healing of Peter's mother-in-law, which then gives us encouragement as well to pray for those of physical sickness.

He's not obligated to heal, but he can, and he does. And how many of us know that even in our own lives, he has lifted us up and off of sick beds and given us reason to continue to work for him unto this day.

These friends are coming with faith. They believe that Jesus can heal their friend. So they ascend, awkwardly I'm sure, some external-like staircase or in a rudimentary way, even perhaps a wooden ladder.

And arriving at the top, crusted roof, they find their way to the feeling of seams on the larger, undergirding lengths of wood.

[11 : 14] And they begin to make a hole between them. And the smaller branches are now separated. And the dry clay is now both floating upwards in the sun and yet descending downwards on a room full of people.

probably not very far above their own heads. Oh, to have friends like this. And so the paralytic is eventually forced through an opening large enough and probably almost handed down to those beneath wherein there was no room but what are you going to do?

It's like stepping into a tube station in London before the door closes. It looks full but there's always room for one more even when you're trying to mind the gap.

So here he is. The friends now peering down through the skylight of their own creation. The light in the room now larger than it had ever been since the time the man constructed his own home.

Jesus sees the man now at his feet. The crowd is quiet. The friends' heads can be seen. And then the most extraordinary thing is said.

[12:58] You can see it there. For me it's the largest surprise in the text. Verse 5 When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic Son your sins are forgiven.

Now just put your thumb over the words in your text. Just place it over that little phrase your sins are forgiven and fill it in as you would expect it to be said.

Son take up your mat and go. We've already seen Jesus perform things like this.

But he moves from the material need the physical sickness and almost seems to overlook that which is most important in the minds of his friends and he says this Son your sins are forgiven.

Now remember what I was trying to argue this morning that by the close of the time you walk through these doors you would not only know but embrace the truth that anyone's sins can now be forgiven.

[14:18] The surprise of the text is Jesus now is claiming what could only be said as unrivaled authority. We gloried two weeks ago in the arrival of the king promised God by the prophetic tradition amplified by the preaching of the baptist overwhelmed by the voice of heaven strengthened as it were even by the opposition of hell supported by the declaration of the attending angels.

Yes we marveled didn't we together at the arrival of the king and who wasn't encouraged in our midst when we saw his activity and the activity was not merely spiritual although it was when he cleansed the unclean spirit we saw that it was familial people who didn't have a family or a place in the family of God are suddenly following we saw that it was physical that Peter's mother-in-law herself was healed we saw that it was social and the leper actually being received back into the community we saw that it was relational as he continued to proclaim the kingdom of God as a priority in his midst and now today today the arrival and the activity are focused on this one line unrivaled authority son I declare to you your sins are forgiven can we even dare to imagine it let's just get a hold of what it would mean pardon righteous restoration freedom from guilt no longer having to lie or cover our shame you know the Westminster confession of faith our own confession as a church family speaks about forgiveness with this language it speaks of forgiveness as a free act of

God's grace grace wherein he pardons us accepts us and imputes Christ's obedience to us and this is for our sins now sins can simply be defined as missing the mark you know we come out in life flying like an arrow and yet we're all kind of a crooked shaft are we not and we miss the mark of God's intention at creation we we come out therefore over time with the stain of the impurity of our own actions sins by the things we have actually done but also the things that we were leaving undone that should have been done you ever find your way in the evening going oh I missed it today I felt now like I was supposed to have done that and I let it go right by me and I don't have the opportunity anymore to capture the rightness of my response in the moment those things these these sins these iniquities what was it that

Dan and Jing prayed from Psalm 103 they were blessing the Lord who forgives all your iniquity and heals all your diseases who redeems your life from a pit and can crown you with steadfast love and mercy he can satisfy you with good so that your own youth yeah I'm speaking to those of us who are old that our own youth yeah you who have Medicare cards don't hide it I already told you I got mine and I know some of you got yours you in your aged state can find your your youth renewed when you consider that iniquities can be forgiven that a fresh start can be had that a new leaf can be turned over that the forest fire of your life can actually bring forth new growth that roots can come out of dry ground all these things this is the stunning nature of the claim

Jesus in just that little phrase son your sins are forgiven four words that really would change our complete understanding of the world in which we exist unrivaled authority quite a claim but you know you got to back it up it's one thing to say it another thing to be able to do it Larry Bird used to say is not bragging if you can do it the scribes are here though we move in a sense from the setting to the friends with faith to this incredible claim by Christ in one sense now to scribes that are offended get it in your mind friends with faith

[20:24] Jesus with forgiveness scribes who are offended take a look at verses six and seven now some of the scribes were sitting there if you don't know what a scribe was they were a religious kind of person that spent a lot of time reading their old testament and then letting others know what it meant they said this is what God says to us and how we ought to live now those then that deal with

God and religion are there some of them in the room they're sitting there questioning in their hearts why does this man speak like that he's blaspheming who can forgive sins but God alone now it's not a bad question God is the only one who would be able to forgive my sins and yours because God alone is the one to whom we answer to yet fall short of so the question is good so they say how in the world can you do this which means that controversy is now underway it's the first time in Mark's gospel that controversy is in play it's great to see his arrival it's great to see his activity but all of a sudden we find him playing the mixed reviews not everyone's buying it controversy is only going to increase as his story goes along well it will be for you and me to decide this morning does

Jesus have this kind of authority can he restore anyone's relationship with God can anyone's sins be forgiven can your sins be forgiven and if so how all these things will have to come back to in a moment but it's critical to see what Jesus does next it's amazing verse 8 and following immediately Jesus perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves said to them why do you question these things in your heart which is easier to say to the paralytic your sins are forgiven or to say rise take up your bed and walk well I can tell you what's easier to say your sins are forgiven but the proof the harder thing to do is well let me let me demonstrate that claim which is easier to say but harder to do by doing the thing which is harder to do although I also say it son take up your bed and walk it is a very interesting thing here

Jesus is now saying I will do a miracle for the purpose of vindicating my message that's what the miracles do in the whole gospel miracles vindicate that the message is true and the messenger is who he said he was see this is what happens physical healings are not universal in his ministry he doesn't heal everyone all the time but the physical miracles that are recorded are indications that his spiritual claims are authentic so he says I will demonstrate that I have unrivaled authority to do what only God can do forgive sins my spiritual truth claim will be vindicated by rising up and walking my message will be validated by the miracle and so he says to him verse 10 but 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 rise pick up your bed and go home and the most extraordinary thing happened I mean this is the biggest another big surprise those first three words in verse 12 they defy all common understanding and he rose and he rose the paralytic rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all now we're not there but I can envision the man standing the friend's eyes now in an amazed wonder like stars from above the tears falling the crowd separating the legs suddenly strengthened no need even for physical rehab

I mean just absolutely supernatural and and this man of whatever age he was is now standing in the midst of a room that begins to part like the waters of Israel's exodus and he is suddenly out under the light again friends tripping over themselves down the stairs greeting hugging running like like a calf that would spring from the stalls at spring time I mean even the owner himself probably I know what I'd do I'd kind of look up at night after everyone had gone I'd be reflecting on the moment and just absolute wonder and say I kind of like the idea of a sky light but the light of heaven that penetrated the depth of the human condition and it did something more than put a man on his feet it brought forgiveness to his soul crowd's response is there

[27 : 25] I don't know whether you'll take offense at Jesus claim or you'll grab hold of it to this morning as something that is on offer but as he rose and he went it says they were all amazed I bet they were they glorified God saying we never saw anything like this I mean the man himself standing in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene he took all of his sins and he bore them he made him clean can it be true can it happen for you remember

Mark has already told us in that prophetic tradition in chapter one that although Malachi and Isaiah prophesied that God would come to deliver he claimed in the preaching of the baptists that when God came to deliver he pointed to Jesus who said behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world we've already seen the claim of John is that this is a story about Jesus who is both that promised Messiah in scripture but also the son of God who can actually accomplish or do things for God because he is God in the flesh come for you isn't that great to know God's not up there with a big old club waiting to hammer you he actually comes and says I want to forgive you I want to know you I want to set you in your right mind again I want to give you purpose

I want to forgive you now some of you have been brought here today by friends oh for such friends friends who have faith not only for what he can do physically materially but what he can do spiritually you you're sitting today not in a house outside of Capernaum with low ceilings no growth room but you're sitting under stained glass constructed built renovated by the commitment of many

people to say that for the next 50 years or more anyone who comes into this house will find an accommodating seat where they can learn the story of Jesus and have their own sins forgiven what a story if you already know

Jesus then you know what I'm going to say this is a story that makes you want to sing when with the ransomed in glory his face I at last shall see well then I'm going to sing I'm going to sing I'm going to sing of his love for me one last thing and then I'm done a few years ago I was reading the gospel of Mark with Andrew Zulker who was on the piano today we sat in my little office and you know Andrew knows about 17 languages not just 66 keys he's one of these kind of wonder boys in our midst you know he said to me Dave let's read it in Greek I said man that's like

Uta asking me to read it in German I said yeah this would be good for me good practice so we reinvigorated reading one to one in the original language and you remember when we came to this passage and the editors of our little Greek volume had put in the margin this phrase your sins are forgiven and they attached three Old Testament texts to it which we thought were worthy of scouring and we looked and almost the same phrase comes three times in the Old Testament record you want to know when when David who had sinned with inexpressible tragedy with Bathsheba yeah when the very king over God's house had fallen into sexual immorality Nathan comes to him and he says oh king your sins are forgiven

[32 : 44] Isaiah who wanted to speak for God who saw the need comes in Isaiah 6 and suddenly he finds himself in the presence of God and the reality of his sin and all the things that he had done and left undone were there and he could only say I'm undone and the angel comes and touches his mouth and says your iniquities are forgiven the book of Zechariah in the second temple era Joshua the high priest needs to be able to accomplish the work in the new built in a sense cultic worship of the people and again the phrase is there well Joshua your sins are forgiven I hope it's beginning to fall on you the truth of the matter is that in the old testament you couldn't be God's king and ruler without your sins being forgiven you couldn't be God's prophet and speak for him without your sins being forgiven you couldn't be a priest and mediate things without your sins being forgiven but now here with

Jesus and a paralytic anyone anyone anyone anyone sins anyone sins everyone sins your sins my sins can be forgiven but how well I'm not going to ask you to read all the way forward to the cross which is of course going to be the fulfillment of the answer keep coming along but let me just point you back to the first chapter verse 15 where Jesus said behold the kingdom of God is at hand repent and believe in the gospel that's what I'm inviting you to do today simply repent of your sin turn to him and believe the good news that he can actually do the things the confession of faith talked about he can actually in your life produce a free act of

God's grace wherein you are pardoned you are accepted and his obedience is imputed if you want that today that's it you don't have to come forward from right where you are in the quiet of a moment say dear God I believe this to be true and I repent and believe I take you up on the offer and I will not be offended by your claim would you do that this morning and I let me know let me know our heavenly father for those who need this story to envision the unrivaled authority we thank you we thank you lord even in faith that there will be some today who leap forward from these doors not like a paralytic off a mat but certainly like a calf springing from the stall and for those who know you may this produce such an amazement in our own heart that we would together in unison not only stand but we would stand amazed not only amazed but that we would sing of your goodness to us in Jesus name we pray amen so