

The Better Miracle

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Date: 14 November 2021

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[0 : 00] Lord, we ask that you would bless us as we hear your word, that you would renew our minds, and you'll renew our hearts, you'll renew our souls, that you'll meet us where we need it.

Lord, we thank you that these words are ancient, and yet they are for us this very moment today.

We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated.

We've been going through the Gospel of Mark. In fact, we're going to be going through the Gospel of Mark for some time, and it really is, when you go through a whole narrative like this, rather than just maybe a one-off sermon, you start to see patterns.

You start to see the intention of Mark, certain things that he is doing. And one of the things that he is doing is that he is leading us to the cross. We start to see bits of who this Messiah is and what he has come to do.

Before we get into it, I'm going to just share a bit of a story. Years ago, I was really offended by a family member in a big way.

[1 : 12] It was a very rude thing that was said. And I lost my cool. It was over the phone. And I was 20 at the time. And my anger came out in a physical way, and I smashed the phone.

I was so angry. I've never seen red in my life. I saw red. I was bent. I was bent with anger.

Anyways, didn't talk to this family member for months.

It wasn't the first time I've had an issue with this family member. And anyways, it's summertime, and I'm at a summer camp. And if you're at a Christian summer camp ever, it's like spirituality is like it's ramped up to like a 10 or 11.

Like you are on a high with Jesus, especially if you're 20. And I just thought, man, you know what? I've forgiven. I've forgiven this family member. I've got to phone them up. I phoned up the family member.

It was six months, almost to the day. And small talk, small talk, small talk. And I said, you know, by the way, what you said in January, I forgive you.

[2 : 20] He said, forgive me for what? Oh, man. I thought I forgave. And within a moment, the red came. I was in the car. I didn't smash it or like drive it into the ditch.

Like it wasn't quite at that level. But I realized then, and it's stuck with me ever since, forgiveness is something we need. We also need to give desperately.

But it is darn hard to give it. And it's hard to receive it. We're going to learn a bit about forgiveness today. How Jesus approaches it.

We're going to see that forgiveness is actually at the center of the cross. And as Mark is leading us, setting these kind of breadcrumbs, so to speak, leading us to the cross, we're going to see that forgiveness is something that is greater than we could have ever hoped for.

It is beyond the pale, the forgiveness of God. It's, and I use this, it is scandalous. It is a scandalous thing.

[3 : 28] Jesus is proclaiming the gospel of God, the good news that he will destroy death and forgive sins forever by dying on the cross. This is what we see right from the opening verses of the gospel, that Jesus is the gospel himself, his life, his death, his resurrection.

And that an implication of the gospel is the kingdom of heaven breaking into the kingdom of earth. And all of a sudden we get to see little flavors, little bits of flavors of the kingdom.

That restoration and healing start to take place wherever Jesus goes. Cleansing and joy starts to take place wherever Jesus goes. We learned about the cleansing of the leper last week.

The kingdom of God is breaking into the kingdom of earth. We'll see how Jesus this week has the authority and the ability to forgive sins.

Not in the Daniel style of forgiving sins. The 20-year-old Daniel style of forgiving sins. Or maybe the 35-year-old Daniel forgiving sins.

[4 : 36] Or your version of forgiving sins. But true forgiveness of sins. And we'll see this play out as Jesus interacts with a paralytic, interacts with a traitor, and how it kind of plays out at a dinner party.

So let's take a first look at the paralytic. This is a very, very, very famous passage of scripture. The lowering of the paralytic through the roof.

Let's take a read. This is chapter 2 of Mark, starting in... Why don't we start in verse 2? And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door.

And Jesus was preaching the word to them. Notice, Jesus is preaching. Five times I've counted, since chapter 1, Jesus is either preaching, teaching, or proclaiming. And in all cases, what's implied is that he is preaching, teaching, and proclaiming the gospel.

The good news of God. And this is no different. He is preaching the gospel. And people are eager to hear. I have a suspicion, though, and we'll see that people are actually eager just to see a miracle happen.

[5 : 45] Jesus has already done a few of them. Anyways, the crowd is pressing in against Jesus. Verse 3. 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.

And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. So this house, it would not have been a big house. There's no room.

It wouldn't have been an uncommon thing to remove a part of the roof. It's pitch. It's wood. You remove it. It's, I mean, seasonally, they'd have to repair the roofs anyways.

So it's not like for us. It's like, oh, yeah, he tore up on my roof. Thanks a lot. \$20,000 bill or whatever, you know. In this case, the guys are just like, well, we need to get this paralytic down. They open the roof and they lower this friend down. And then all of a sudden the excitement starts in the story.

[6 : 47] Verse 5. And when Jesus saw their faith, talking about the four friends, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. It's very interesting what we have here.

Jesus, he is proclaiming the gospel. People are there maybe to hear the gospel, but really to see some kind of miracle. Jesus is a miracle worker. He heals people.

He casts out demons. He cleanses lepers. And he's proclaiming the gospel. This paralytic comes and there's like almost bated breath, I can picture.

And instead of healing him right off the bat, he says your sins are forgiven. If we pause it right there, there is no miracle that is happening. Jesus is just pronouncing words.

The wonderful thing about this is that Jesus is seeing the faith of the friends of the paralytic. He sees their faith and then looks at the paralytic and forgives them of his sins.

[7 : 47] And this isn't like a point in the sermon, a bit of an aside. Don't give up on praying for your friends and family. Do not give up.

If you've been praying for something, for some kind of breakthrough for years, don't give up. God hears your prayers and they're precious to him. And he might move the next prayer you pray. He might do a miracle in your midst and change hearts or bring great healing. This is what we have here. These guys, in a sense, are interceding for their friend.

They're helping their friend. They're sacrificing for their friend. It's a bit of an aside. Don't stop praying for those in your life. Let's get back to the text.

Jesus, unlike any other religious leader in the Bible, he is pronouncing forgiveness of sins on his own authority. The prophets, the kings, whoever, they are saying stuff in the Bible, saying like, The Lord forgive you your sins.

[8 : 53] The Lord forgive you of all of your infirmities. All of your misdoings. Jesus here, what does he say? He says, Son, your sins are forgiven.

He is speaking with authority as if this man whom he just has met is under him. He is over his authority. And it's also very interesting that Jesus here, it seems like, so nothing specific is given in terms of what these sins are.

But it's, Jesus is, he's not just saying some kind of generic thing. He is speaking to the heart of that young man on his cot, on his bed, and he's saying your sins are forgiven.

The very specific things about, the thing about sins is they're very specific to us. In a kind of a weird way, our sins are the things that make us quite unique.

I mean, you might do the same kind of sin as somebody else, but it's unique to you in the situation. Jesus looks at this young man and says, son, your sins are forgiven.

[10:08] He speaks to his heart. Jesus knows what's up. He knows what this guy needs. And he speaks directly to him. Really, really incredible and also controversial, and this is kind of where it picks up steam.

Mark draws our attention to the next verses. And in many ways, the scribes are going to say, verse 6 and 7. But if you're being honest and following along and kind of putting your Christian history behind, if you can, and you're reading this, you might ask the question, who is, what kind of gall does Jesus have in saying this?

And the Pharisees say just this in verse 6. Now, some of the scribes, the scribes of the Pharisees were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like that?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? The thing here is that they're not wrong. Verse 7, what does it say?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? They're right. Jesus never corrects that bit, does he? Look what he says after.

[11:31] He says, why do you question these things in your heart? He is addressing how they're incensed with Jesus, that he is a blasphemer in their books.

See, the scribes aren't wrong, but they're failing to see that Jesus, there's something about him. He is a divine man. There is something wonderful about this man.

And isn't it so interesting that we can be almost right, and yet be completely wrong? We can get 90% or, you know, three quarters of things right, and we can just slip up on one bit, and it renders everything wrong.

And this is what's happening with the Pharisees here. Jesus is perceiving in their spirit. So not only does Jesus say something that only God does, aka forgive sins, but he is perceiving in their spirit. He is reading their minds. Who can read the mind of somebody? I've, you know, I think I have intuition with Christine, my wife, where she can give a look, and I'm just like, I know exactly what she's thinking.

[12:47] Maybe I nail it every now and then. Not too, too often. We don't have intuition. We don't know. We can't read people's minds. You can know somebody very, very well and misread.

Jesus here, he is nailing it. He is perceiving what they were thinking. Only God can do such things. Who knows the mind of men except God?

Who knows, who can understand what's going on in the human mind, in the human heart except God? And it speaks to Jesus' divinity. It continues.

Jesus says, 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. And we'll pause there. What is easier to say?

I can say anything I want. I can say, yeah, your sins are forgiven you. Nobody can verify that. I just say stuff. If I all of a sudden then said, you know, take up your bed and walk, and nothing happens, I mean, that's the harder thing to verify.

[14:00] That's the harder thing of the two. I can say whatever I want. If that person doesn't get up, it's not verified. I'm a liar. I'm a cheat.

I'm a swindler. My words mean nothing. Jesus here, he says, what is easier to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise up, rise, rise, take up your bed, and walk.

Verse 10, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Then he looks to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.

And the paralytic, former paralytic, rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we never saw anything like this.

Jesus, he says to the man, your sins are forgiven, and then, he validates that claim that only God could make by healing the paralytic.

[15:02] Because the same authority and ability to heal is the same authority and ability to forgive sins, to truly forgive sins. Only God and God alone can forgive sins.

The authority is only God's, and clearly here, Jesus has that authority. And for you folks, if you have friends that are Jehovah's Witnesses, or are Muslim, or people that are just skeptics, atheists, say something like, Jesus never ever claimed to be God, it was some manifestation that came up later on, the church made it up, or Paul made it up.

Jesus, sure, he doesn't say that I am God. Everything in this section screams that Jesus is God. Everything. That he has God's divine authority, God's divine ability. Only he can forgive sins. Him and him alone. Jesus heals the sinner, but really, what does he do? He forgives the sinner. He is validated as God himself with all authority. And this, then, forgiveness flavors the rest of this portion of Scripture. So, he shows his forgiveness, Jesus does, by healing a paralytic, but then also with the call of a traitor.

[16:22] Take a look with me at verses 13 and 14. Jesus went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.

Again, Jesus is teaching. He is proclaiming. He is preaching the gospel. Verse 14, And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, Follow me. And he rose and followed him. Levi, also known as Matthew, is a tax collector. And he most certainly was a traitor to his people. He was a collaborator with a foreign power. I don't think it's quite apples to apples, but I think something that would maybe be a bit more current is, say, the French who collaborated with the Nazis during the war. This foreign power came in. They were oppressive. They taxed people into poverty. And this tax collector was a Jewish man who collected taxes and stuffed his pockets, lined his pockets with money that was forcefully taken.

[17:37] There was no chance that Levi was a part of the religious community. He was greedy. He was on the outskirts. He was considered a traitor to his own people.

He was an unclean person. In fact, there were two big rabbis not too long after Jesus' time who disagreed on just about everything. But one of the things that they agreed upon was that it's totally permissible to lie to tax collectors. They don't deserve our honesty. They're traitors. I don't know if there's some kind of equivalent in our day, but the tax collectors were not cool guys. They weren't. They're not like CRA people or just bureaucrats just doing their job. These guys were corrupt. They were corrupt. They sold out their own people. Jesus shows up just like with Andrew and Simon and James and John in chapter 1 and he doesn't say, Levi, you need to get your act together, clean yourself up, and then come follow me.

He just says, follow me. It's the same call as the four other ones in chapter 1. He says, follow me. And what does Levi do? He leaves his tax booth and he follows Jesus.

[19:02] We start to see the beginning of restoration, that forgiveness is being extended to somebody who ought not to be forgiven. I mean, he really shouldn't.

He should pay for what he's done. You know, sometimes vengeance feels good and it feels right and I'm not saying it's, I'm not condoning it, but it's like, like you're, if you're being honest with yourself, like yeah, that guy should just be tossed in jail.

The key should be melted down, like not even tossed in a river, just obliterated. Jesus says, follow me and he starts to extend forgiveness and all of a sudden we start to see that the forgiveness that Jesus extends is truly scandalous.

It is. It knows no bounds. There's no untouchables to Jesus' forgiveness. No matter what we have done, are we Levi?

And even if we were worse, this text tells us that the call is for us as well. It's beautiful. It really, it really is something.

[20:10] And it, it makes me uncomfortable. Because the, the, the levels of forgiveness that have been extended to me, we'll talk about this in a bit, God is calling me to extend them to others and I don't want to.

I really don't. Maybe you don't either. I don't know, I don't know if you, if you want to either. But Jesus extends this forgiveness to persona non grata Levi. It's, it really is something else. And what is Levi's response?

Yeah, I'm taking it. I'm, I'm taking this, this offer and I'm following Jesus. And this brings us to the other thing that shows us about God's forgiveness is the dinner party.

So it's, it's clear, we'll continue on, verse 15. It's clear that this is at Levi's, what's implied is that it's at Levi's house. But before we read it, it's also implied here that Levi isn't the host.

[21:19] But Jesus is the host. And as he reclined, Jesus at table in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. For there were many who

followed him.

And the scribes of the Pharisees when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, see unclean there. Unclean. No different in many respects than the leprous man.

Okay? See, see that. Think unclean. We'll go back in verse 16. And the scribes of the Pharisees when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, those that were unclean, said to Jesus' disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but the sinners. And it's not as though there are a class of righteous people that Jesus isn't referring to.

What he's saying is, I've come for everybody because everybody's a sinner. There are none righteous. I've come for everybody. Who here looks like the true, unclean sinner?

[22 : 33] Is it the tax collectors and sinners? Sinners is this kind of generic term. Or does it, is it the Pharisees? Like, is there not room at the table for them too?

I think there would be. Their pride wells up. Their self-righteousness wells up. We are the religious ones. These people that were the tax collectors and sinners, they were either too busy or too poor or just completely indifferent to join any kind of religious life in Israel at the time.

Interestingly, shepherds were a part of that. Shepherds, I know we read about shepherds in King David, King David being a shepherd and Christ has a beautiful picture of a shepherd. But shepherds became the type that were untrusted because they weren't a part of religious life.

prostitutes, tax collectors, beggars, lepers, you name it.

They were unable to participate in religious life. And Jesus, what does he do? He doesn't whip them. He doesn't just give them a tongue lashing.

[23 : 47] He eats with them. He has table fellowship with them. You can invite anybody over to your house and if you feel comfortable, you probably should if you can.

But, you know, it's nice to have dinner with somebody. To have table fellowship with somebody in the Bible, it meant that you were embracing them. That there was a connection, there was a friendship, there was some sort of deep, deep bond.

And that's what's happening with Jesus. He is the true host. He is forgiving the sinners and the tax collectors. And the basis of this table fellowship is truly forgiveness.

And although we don't see it here as though the tax collectors and sinners are throwing themselves at Jesus' feet asking for forgiveness, forgiveness, we know that in Scripture that the basis for table fellowship is the forgiveness of sins.

How do we know? At the end of the age, and if anybody wants to turn to, I'll just read it off my notes, Revelation chapter 19, at the end of the age, the redeemed of God, those that He saves, will dine with Him.

[25 : 05] It's called the marriage supper of the Lamb. And although Revelation, the book of Revelation, can be kind of intense and difficult to understand and, I don't know, cause of all sorts of controversy, Revelation 19, 6-9, I mean, it is like the high point of our existence, of what we'll experience.

That we are forgiven in such a way, clothed with God's righteousness, and we dine with Him. Verse 6 of chapter 19, Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude.

This is John, the Apostle, speaking. Like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, Hallelujah!

For the Lord, our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exalt and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the bride has made herself ready.

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure. For the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And verse 9 says, And the angel said to me, Write this, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[26 : 20] And he said to me, These are the true words of God. To dine with Jesus. That there is no more separation between us and Him. His forgiveness goes down to the last inch of our being.

There's no more of us that is no longer redeemed. We're redeemed completely. If you are honest with yourself and you ask yourself, What sins have I committed that are very unique to me?

That make me unique? And if you are honest and raw with yourself about that, and you might feel shame and guilt, look to the cross and know that God has forgiven them all if you only cry out to Him.

If you only leave the tax booth and follow Him. In the end, it really isn't the amount of faith we have. And we want to grow in our faith.

We do. But it's the object of our faith. That's what matters. It does not, it doesn't matter as much in many respects.

[27 : 37] In fact, it doesn't matter at all at how tight my grasp is on Jesus if His grasp on me exists. Because He'll never let me go. That's why when we go through tough times where our faith wanes, it's like we have no faith, it feels like, we can be sure that God in Christ is not letting us go.

The object of our faith is what matters. So Jesus dines with sinners. And it is this beautiful picture of what is to come and all of a sudden we start to see a bit more of who this Messiah is.

Mark is laying these breadcrumbs. He's leading us on the trail to the cross. We're seeing what Jesus is going to do on the cross. How He is going to truly forgive our sins.

He's going to pay the penalty on our behalf so that we can be in His presence forever. It's something you could have infinite lifetimes to try to earn and you won't earn it.

It's incredible. It is remarkable. How do we respond? Well, there's a few different ways. We can look at the four friends lowering their paralytic friend through the roof.

[28 : 54] We can look at Levi and how he leaves his tax booth. Those are all I think really good things to look at as an example of how we are to respond to Jesus.

But Jesus in verse 14 of chapter 1 really verse 15 when Jesus comes on the scene his first words that he says in Mark's gospel it says the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe in the gospel. The response is to repent and believe. It is. Jesus says it. And in the same message he either preaches teaches or proclaims it's the same thing.

Repent and believe in the gospel. So what does it mean to repent? I think it's being honest about our sin. We need to recognize that we need deep forgiveness.

We need to not justify the fact that we are tax collectors and sinners. And our society is set up in such a way maybe even your mind is set up in such a way that justifies sin.

[29 : 59] The way we see need and choose not to meet it not because we don't have the means or the time or the ability because we're selfish. Or the things we do with our bodies.

How we view sexuality. We have this kind of subjective nature about it. How we abuse people with words or deeds.

We are mean. We are just low level abusive in maybe sometimes the way we treat people. Whatever it may be we can easily justify our sin.

The call of repentance is to just be honest. Be honest with your need for Jesus. That's it. I mean it really is just first and foremost recognize that we are in need of him.

We can't live a godly life. We are the tax collectors and sinners in the story by the way. Just in case you were thinking you were maybe I don't know somebody a bit more nicer in the story.

[31 : 06] I'm the sinner and tax collector in the story. Maybe you're even the Pharisee or the scribe. The call is still the same to repent and believe so we repent we throw ourselves at the mercy of Jesus we stop justifying we stop seeing truth as subjective but objective that there is a truth that there is a way to truly live and the second thing is to believe and it is to have faith in Jesus and again it is it matters more about who our faith is in than how much faith we have.

We want to continue to grow in faith. I can't say that enough but we have our faith and trust in Jesus. We need to be careful that we're not like the crowds. The crowds in the gospel of Mark for whatever reason show up and Jesus has compassion on them he teaches them but they get in the way the crowds do.

They get in the way of this whole healing of the paralytic. The crowds aren't they don't exactly have the best reputation here. Remember Jesus when he's going to get crucified where are the crowds then?

It's really easy to think I am close to Jesus because I am a part of the church. I am a church goer and it's really good to go to church and to be around church people.

It really is. But let that not be confused with having genuine faith in Christ. To be more of like the Levi who follows Jesus rather than the crowds that just hang around looking for a show or maybe the benefit of being a part of a community or being a part of a more of like a respectable person or a part of polite society.

[32 : 53] I don't mean necessarily like within our community but within the group. I don't know. Whatever thing that you think coming to church will do, it has to start with Christ.

Repent and believe. And it is hard and I'll close with this. We're not going to get to the second part of Mark until sometime in the new year. We're going to go up to chapter nine and then we'll switch it up for a few weeks or something like that and then we'll come back to Mark.

But when we come back to Mark, whenever that will be, I think maybe the fall of 2022, there's this really beautiful picture where this desperate man comes to Jesus and begs that Jesus would do a miracle for his boy.

And he says to Jesus, I believe, help my unbelief. That is becoming a prayer in my life because I realize, Lord, I believe, actually I don't, help me.

My faith is small. I don't trust that you can really forgive my sins. That you are the one who's really going to restore me. And cleanse me.

[34 : 07] And that I truly have a spot at your table. But the prayer is, I believe, help my unbelief, I believe, even with a tiny shred, you can pray, of faith, that you are the one who's doing this work.

And I think it brings great joy to God. And that he will work in our hearts to grow that. And we grow, by the way, with fellowshiping with one another, by reading his word, by praying with one another, by lifting each other up, carrying each other's burdens, not trying to get some kind of new result by the same sinful decisions.

Friends, our God has set a table for us. It is what we will be doing for eternity. Let's really press into that.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the truth of your word. We thank you that Jesus indeed came to heal the sick and not the well, to call the sinner not the righteous.

Lord, help us to never think that in our own strength we can be the righteous, that we are well, but it's only through your Son that we are made righteous, only through your Son that we are forgiven, only through your Son that we are cleansed.

[35 : 33] Lord, by your Spirit, do a big work in our hearts, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.