

Forgiver of Sins

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[0 : 00] Well, we all know the thing that makes for great drama are the plot twists. Whether it's a novel, soap opera, murder mystery, K-drama, you know who you are, or even Survivor.

On again tonight, so if I leave early for dinner, you know why. We know that what keeps us hooked is when there's a twist in the plot, isn't it?

That keeps us coming back for that next episode, or going on to keep watching until it's too late in the night. Well, today in Mark chapter 2, we come to an event in Jesus' ministry where there are a number of plot twists.

Unexpected turns in the exchange or dialogue. And from that, we're going to learn what the greatest thing Jesus has done for us is, and why. But first, let's set the scene in verse 1.

So if you look at me, either in your Bibles or on the slide, a few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They get it in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door.

[1 : 18] And he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat.

The man was lying on. And so we see in chapter 2 that these things happened soon after the end of chapter 1, a few days later. And we see again large crowds are gathering because of the signs and wonders that Jesus was doing.

Jesus, however, you read there, was intent on preaching the word to them. Now the house that Jesus was in is crowded. The doorway is probably narrow.

And so people were probably straining forward. And even if they couldn't hear him, couldn't see him, at least they wanted to hear him. And so as a consequence, anyone in a stretcher had no hope of getting in.

This paralyzed man in the story was that person. But he has four faithful friends. And so they devised a way to get their friend to Jesus.

[2 : 31] They clamber him on the roof because people were probably unwilling to make space for them. And then they make a hole in the roof. Now I'm not sure what material they used in those days.

But I'm pretty sure that it probably caused a big distraction. You know, Jesus probably looking up and what all the debris is falling on him. But what they did, however, impressed Jesus.

And so in response, Jesus gives us the first twist in the plot, verse 5. And he says to the man, Sons, your sins are forgiven.

Now our expectation, and indeed probably the people there as well, would have been for Jesus to heal the man. That's the obvious thing to do, isn't it? You know, if Jesus didn't want to heal, then perhaps he could have just kept on teaching.

Or, you know, rebuked the man for distracting them. But this is not what we expect Jesus to do, is it? To say those words. And certainly, that was not what the teachers of the law expected.

[3 : 37] Now it would be fair to assume that Jesus was probably preaching about the very thing that he had just done. You know, talking about the kingdom coming to repent, to have faith.

Interestingly though, Mark doesn't mention any request by the man for their friends to be healed. Now we probably assume that that's what they wanted Jesus to do.

But instead, Mark notes that what Jesus observes is their faith. Now is it their faith in Jesus to heal physically?

Or is it their faith that Jesus, you know, would be doing what he has been teaching all along? That is, faith that if they repented and believed, that Jesus would give them entry into the kingdom.

We don't know for sure, but Jesus himself is able to see in their hearts that they had that faith. And this is the first time in Mark's gospel that actually someone's faith is acknowledged explicitly.

[4 : 44] And as a result, Jesus declares forgiveness for this man, the paralyzed man's faith. Now of course, this provokes a reaction.

And again, Jesus must have known that. But in the minds of the teachers of the law, what Jesus had just done and said is blasphemous. For any other human.

Now these teachers wouldn't say it aloud. Maybe they just gave each other knowing looks. Or the side eye. But Mark puts it into words for us, doesn't he?

By revealing in verse 7 that what they were thinking is this. Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

And you know what? I mean, the teachers were right, weren't they? For the Jews, and that's the truth, God is the only one that can forgive sins.

[5 : 44] Now if you look in the Old Testament, there's not one single verse that teaches this. But you just have to look, for example, at the entire sacrificial system to know that this is what the truth was being taught to them.

Likewise, the numerous Psalms that we have would reinforce this idea that it's God to which we all need to turn for forgiveness. Hence, Psalm 51, which Nathan read, we see that even though David sinned against Uriah by sleeping with Bathsheba and then sending him to his death, when he prays in the Psalm, he prays to God, saying in verse 4, which is on the slide, Against you, God, you alone have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. And then later in verse 6, cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

All sin that is for, even if against others, is also against God, isn't it, who rules the world. And so to be truly clean, only God's forgiveness will do that.

And so even though the teachers don't say a word, they've really thrown down a challenge to Jesus, haven't they? There was now an expectation that Jesus would prove himself.

[7 : 12] You know, in a way, if only Jesus had stuck to something less controversial, right? He had the power to heal. This paralyzed man needed healing, clearly.

That's what the people expected. He could have just healed. And everyone would have gone, wow. And, you know, everyone would have moved on.

Jesus could have carried on. But to go out on a limb, without really needing to, and then now expose himself to this accusation of blasphemy? Why did Jesus do that?

Why did he give these teachers the opportunity to undermine his credibility? Now, again, I'm sure Jesus knew all this already. I'm not trying to tell him what he doesn't know already.

But he chose to do it anyway. Why? Well, we'll soon find out. But as we keep going, Jesus now gives a second response, which is the next twist in the plot.

[8 : 09] Verse 8. So, reading. Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts. And he said to them, Why are you thinking these things?

Which is easier? To say to this paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven? Or to say, get up, take your mat, and walk?

Now, I'm pretty sure you're all smart enough to know that this is a trick question, right? But I'm going to ask you to decide anyway. How would you answer Jesus' question?

And there's not going to be any sitting on the fence here, all right? Even though I know you want to, I do too as well. So, you have to make a choice. Which is easier? For Jesus to say, your sins are forgiven?

Or for him to say, get up, take your mat, and walk? Now, I'm going to actually ask for a show of hands here. So, I need you to put the courage of your conviction on display.

[9 : 13] I know in your mind you have all these caveats going on. That's fine. Have your caveats in your mind. Don't have to tell anyone about it. But make a choice, okay? Be bold for a change.

All right, I'm going to give you 10 seconds. I know some of you are bold by nature, but you know the rest of us. Okay, 10 seconds. Think about it. And then I'm going to ask you to put up your hands, all right?

All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right. All right.

Okay. If it gives you comfort to collude with the person next to you, that's fine as well. Okay, those of you who think, those of you who think it's easier for Jesus to say, your sins are forgiven, put up your hands.

[10:25] All right, come on. Yes. Okay, yep, 30% or so, yep, okay. Those of you who think it's easier to say, get up, take your mat and walk.

Okay, yep, 60, all right. And who didn't put up their hands? Well, as I said earlier, this is a trick question, okay?

But it's been asked so that it prompts us to think about it, doesn't it? Jesus is forcing us to think about this. So to those who lean towards saying, it's easier to say your sins are forgiven, well, you're right, in part.

Because it's easier to say the words, your sins are forgiven. It's easier to just say it because there's no way to disprove whether Jesus has done it or not, isn't it?

It's not like if you're truly forgiven that there'll be some halo above your head that proves it. No, that's a purely invisible thing, forgiveness. Spiritual and unseen.

[11:34] And yet, just as we've been discussing, it is actually much harder to say and then accomplish the forgiveness of sins because only God can do it, right?

But on the other hand, to actually say to the man, get up, take your mat and walk, requires you to follow through with it. And so in that sense, it's harder, isn't it?

You can't just say it and then, you know, not do it. This man actually had to get up to show that Jesus had done it. But the problem with that, of course, is that the power to heal like that can come from a variety of sources.

Back in the Old Testament, if we go back to the time of Pharaoh, Moses, when he confronted him, performed signs to show that he was God's prophet. And yet, some of Pharaoh's magicians managed to also do the same, even though their power was likely from the devil.

So why then did Jesus do what he did in this way? Well, that's where the final twist in the plot comes in, in verse 10. Because there Jesus declares, and so looking there, but I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[12:58] So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all.

It's much easier to get out than come in. This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. So why did Jesus say to the man he's forgiven in the first place? Well, as Mark points out, so that everyone might know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin. Now, Son of Man here is simply a reference to Jesus himself.

He's using the title of Daniel 7, where there was a Son of Man appearing before God's throne as a divine person. So, Jesus told this man that his sins were forgiven because his sins were indeed forgiven.

Jesus, the Son of Man, has that authority to forgive his sins. Jesus is claiming to be God. The teachers of the law were right.

[14:04] Either Jesus was blaspheming, or he was actually God. He is God. And it's funny, isn't it, that they did not consider that second option just the first. And if Jesus is God, then he doesn't need to forgive sins on behalf of the Father.

He can do it in his own right, which is what he does. But then we ask, why did Jesus then go on to heal the paralyzed man by telling him to get up, take his mat, and go home?

Well, the same reason. Jesus said, that all may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. That's right. Jesus doesn't just have the power to heal.

He has the authority to forgive sins as well. And just as we saw last week, the signs are used by Jesus to affirm his identity, to show that he is the Son of God, the Messiah sent by God to bring in God's kingdom, to offer salvation, so that all who repent will have forgiveness of sins.

But notice that Jesus has to do it this way, doesn't he? This two-step way. If he had simply asked the paralyzed man to get up, heal him, no one would realize that Jesus could also forgive sins, right?

[15:28] On the other hand, if Jesus had simply just said his sins were forgiven, but did not then go through with the healing, then there was nothing conclusive to show that Jesus had the power to forgive sins.

Anyone could have said that. Only God can effectively forgive sins, and that healing was a demonstration of God's, or rather Jesus' identity as God's Son.

And so, that's the one main point of this story, to show that Jesus is God. He is the Son of Man. And that is the first important lesson that we have from tonight's passage.

Jesus is God's Messiah because he can forgive sins, and he's proven that by also healing people. But there's also another point to this story, and that is to impress on us what Jesus saw as the most important thing he has given to us as the Son of God.

Because let me ask you this question. Of the two things that Jesus gave this man that day, which do you think is the greater gift? what was the greater thing that Jesus did for him?

[16:47] Actually, let's make it personal. Imagine you were this paralyzed man. Now, firstly, consider what your life would be like. You know, total dependence on others, isn't it?

Even for the most basic of things. You know, to shower, to cook, to do the daily chores. You can do that. You have to rely on somebody else to do it for you.

You know, I mean, you might call it life, but really it's mere existence, isn't it? You can't work, you can't enjoy many of the things that you and I would take for granted.

Then along comes Jesus one day, and he offers you these two things that you see today. The ability to get up and walk, or to have your sins forgiven.

Which would you choose? Now, I'm not going to do a straw poll, because I think I can guess. I think if you're like me, you would be tempted, wouldn't you, to choose to walk again.

[17:52] Would you not? But what Jesus is telling us with this story is that actually the more important thing which only he can do as God is to have your sins forgiven.

without this, we cannot enter God's kingdom. We cannot be God's children. Our souls will be lost. We won't have eternal lives.

In forgiving this man of his sins, Jesus was giving him the more important and valuable thing in life first. And even if Jesus did not then go on to heal the man, Jesus would have already saved him and given him what he really needed most of all in life.

But of course, Jesus didn't just stop there, did he? He did both. He healed the man as well as forgave his sins.

And we know that with our own lives as well, if we're Christians, that God has done more than just forgive our sins, hasn't he? He's blessed us with many good things in life that we need and so we should be thankful for it.

[19:01] But what Jesus did for that man that day prompts us to consider what the greatest thing is that Jesus has done for us and for all of humanity.

More than our jobs, more than our homes, more than our families, more than our spouses, friends or good health, more than peace in this land or money in your bank, the greatest gift that Jesus has given to us is forgiveness of sin.

Without it, we would have no hope of eternal life. Without it, we have no chance of a relationship with God, our Creator. Now, life may be very challenging for this paralyzed man on earth, but eternity would be far worse for him without a relationship with God.

But let me also say that the forgiveness of sin is the greatest thing that Jesus can do for us because it's the cost the costliest thing for him and his Father.

That is, not just what is easier for Jesus to say, but what is harder for Jesus to do, forgive our sins or heal us or tell the man to get up, take his mat and walk.

[20:19] You know, Jesus could heal this man with his power, you know, almost in his sleep, really. It's that easy for Jesus. But for Jesus to forgive our sins required the sacrifice of his very own life.

It required the Father to turn his face away and almost reject his son and place the penalty of all our sin on him on the cross.

So all of this comes at a greater cost, doesn't it, than anything else God can do for us, whether it's to heal or to bless, to bring justice in this world.

Forgiveness is only possible because Jesus himself paid the ultimate price by dying on the cross. And the amazing thing, of course, is that this great gift from Jesus is freely available to anyone, all of us, through repentance and faith in him.

And so if you're here today for the very first time and you have not received this great and costly gift, then let me urge you just to grab it with both hands. It's the greatest thing that God can ever do

for you.

[21 : 35] And you know, there may be other things that we may want in life that we want from God. And I'm sure that they are of great value to you. Perhaps you might even have prayed and went and doubting whether God cares.

Now, I don't know what God's answer to those specific requests might be. Maybe yes, no, or no. Regardless of what the answer may be, we need to remember that actually God does care for us because he's already shown us in Jesus that he's given us the forgiveness of sin made possible by Jesus' death on the cross.

You are challenging for you. I urge you to focus on his gift and blessing, to know that he's already done the greatest thing he can do for you.

I urge you, if you trust the Lord Jesus and repent, to have a relationship for them to be strengthened in your faith, to live despite whatever challenge, whatever else that has not yet come in your life. When Jesus says, which is the easier thing to do or say, forgive sins, or heal, or do whatever else, well, Jesus has done the most difficult thing.

[23 : 09] He's died for us so that we can be forgiven for our sins and therefore, have eternal life. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that Jesus has sacrificed his life for us so that we can be truly forgiven.

Thank you that he offers this freely to all, anyone, who repents and believe. Father, teach us to hold on to this great blessing, to live in light of it.

Comfort those of us who are finding it hard at the moment, that despite the challenges of life, we are indeed blessed to have a relationship with you.

And help us, those of us here who do not yet know you, to come to that same knowledge and relationship through faith in Jesus, the Son of Man, who has the authority to forgive sin.

In his precious name we pray. Amen. Amen.