

God's Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's good to see you all here. I'm glad you could join us for worship this morning. Today we're going to talk a little bit about forgiveness. And you know, I've been thinking about it, and the world today is wrestling with forgiveness.

Some of us, facing the fatigue of living in a fallen world and with a proper desire for justice, have come to view forgiveness as weak, or even worse, unjust and wrong.

Something that allows evil to continue. The attitude is, we just can't forgive that. And yet there's a whole other strain of our culture today that's saying that forgiveness is really important.

But it's important for us. It's important for our well-being. If you go to the Mayo Clinic, or if you go to the Center for the Greater Good at the University of Berkeley, you will see that they see forgiveness as forsaking bitterness and resentment to free yourself from unhealthy emotions so that you can live at peace.

Now, both of these have a thread of truth in them. Both of these see something right and good. And yet, it's missing something, I think, often in this, which is that forgiveness has a relational element to it that we need to make clear.

[1 : 21] Forgiveness is not just about us. Forgiveness in the financial world, for example, means that if you borrowed \$10,000 from me, I would then hold you to pay that back.

I might choose then to forgive that debt. And this is not a policy discussion, just in case you're wondering. This is simply an illustration. I might choose to forgive that \$10,000 debt.

But if I do that, I forsake the claim to that \$10,000 that were originally mine and is now yours. I am giving up that. I bear the loss.

I bear the cost of this forgiveness. And so there's a relational element in this where I'm bearing something if I choose to forgive.

If forgiveness is relational, then we would say that it is forswearing vengeance or revenge of a wrong that someone has done against you.

[2 : 24] It does not mean that you don't allow consequences to play out. It does not mean that it's wrong to ask for restitution. It does not require instantaneous and unquestioned trust when forgiveness is offered.

But forgiveness happens in the context of relationships. These are just some big picture thoughts about forgiveness to get our minds thinking about the topic that our passage is going to look at this morning.

I want you to imagine this scenario that's going to focus in on what our passage this morning is looking at. If I walk up to Alex and I say, Alex, I forgive you.

His first response is, Great. What did I do wrong? Because he probably doesn't know. Maybe he does. And he's like, Yeah, I know. I blew it. Right? But what happens if a stranger in the street walks up to Alex and says, Hey, Alex, I forgive you.

He doesn't even know I ask his name. He's like, Hey, you. I forgive you. You think, Do I know you? If I don't, What are you talking about?

[3 : 30] I've never done anything wrong. How is it that you can forgive me when we've never met and that we've never done anything? We've never had a relationship to deal with.

This actually brings us to, I think, the passage most clearly today. Our passage isn't going to be how we forgive one another. This is not what it's about.

It's about who can forgive and why that's true. So let's look at us. We're in Mark chapter 2, verses 1 through 12.

I forgot to look up the page number. Anyone want to, in the Pew Bible? 786. There we go. 786 in the Pew Bible. If you want to look along with me, that would be great because it's a great story.

It's a great narrative for us to look at this morning as we think about the topic of forgiveness. So let's go ahead and read our passage together.

[4 : 27] We'll pray and then we'll dive in. Does that sound good? Mark 2, starting in verse 1. And when he, that is referring to Jesus, 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, My 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's 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?

[5 : 38] 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 went out before them all so that they were all amazed and glorified God saying, We never saw anything like this.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word. We thank you for what you have to say to us through it this morning. Lord, I ask for your help, that your spirit would enable me to speak clearly as I ought.

And Lord, I pray for all of us, that our hearts would be humbled before you and prepared to receive and to sit under your word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So as we continue our series in the book of Mark, the context, chapter one tells us that Jesus has come proclaiming the kingdom of God is at hand and that he's calling people to repent and believe the good news.

[6 : 50] He's begun his ministry characterized by preaching and teaching and healing and delivering from evil spirits. And in the last section, if you remember, Tom preached to us last week about Jesus healing a man with leprosy.

And it said at the end of that story that his fame became so great, he could no longer go into towns because the crowd was so great. And so Jesus was now such a thing that there were crowds, there were mobs happening.

And so he couldn't go into a town. And that leads right into our story, which has a very surprising beginning because it says he returned to Capernaum, which is a city on the north side of the Sea of Galilee.

It's likely where Jesus lived during his time in doing ministry in the northern part of Israel before he moved to Jerusalem later in his ministry life.

And Jesus was in a house. And it seems like he was there kind of clandestinely because it says, and when they found out, and they meaning the crowds, they meaning the people, when they found out, the mob showed up.

[8 : 01] And the house was full. And if you don't know, first century houses were usually one story. They would have lattice roofs with mud plaster on top of it.

And often there would be different rooms. And so even at the doorway meant that this house was completely full of people spilling out into the hallway, into this road outside of the house, I mean. And so Jesus is there. He's teaching the word, continuing his normal ministry, right? And then we pick up and we are introduced now to some new characters in the story because suddenly there's a paralytic.

And he has four friends. And these four friends say, Jesus is going around doing all these amazing things. He can heal you. Let's take you there. So they pick up the guy on his bed and they try to take him to Jesus.

But the crowds are so great, they can't get there. What are they gonna do? They say, we will not be put off. We will not, we are determined to get you to Jesus. So they go around, they climb up onto the roof and they dig through the roof.

[9 : 05] If you've ever seen The Chosen, it's a lovely miniseries that depicts first century life. It's not always theologically exactly how I would interpret the Bible, but it's worth watching. And the picture of this one, we actually saw this episode.

And it's amazing because Jesus is in this dark room and then suddenly chunks start falling from the ceiling above him. And then the roof collapses as these guys dig a hole through the plaster and lower this man down.

Brief aside, what a beautiful picture of friends. Friends who see their friend in need and are so determined to bring their friend to Jesus, the one who can help them.

Oh, may we be friends like that. And would we have friends like that? What a beautiful picture it is. But you wonder, how is Jesus gonna respond to the ceiling collapsing on him?

You would imagine he might be a little frustrated or a little upset at this, but Jesus isn't. Jesus looks at the man, he looks at his friends and their faith, and he rejoices in this.

[10 : 13] And he looks on them with compassion. And we know what's gonna happen in the story. He's gonna look at the paralytic, he's gonna say, rise and walk, and everyone's gonna say, this is amazing. Except that's not what Mark is telling us, and that's not what Jesus did.

Look with me at verse five, because it's shocking. What we expect is Jesus coming to demonstrate his power over the fall and the brokenness of the world by healing this man's paralysis, by bringing wholeness to his spinal cord and restoring his ability to walk.

But instead, he looks at the man and he says, son, son, your sins are forgiven. He speaks personally like he's a part of his family, showing his compassion.

And yet, Jesus' compassion sees greater than we do. Jesus' compassion sees more than we do, because he sees that this man's greatest need is not healing, but forgiveness.

And we may bristle at this. This is not compassion. You're looking at a paralytic man, and you're telling him he's got a greater problem?

[11 : 26] You're looking at him who suffered such great, such loss and has suffered so much of his life, who's completely helpless, and you're going to ignore that?

And to infer that he has a greater problem than that? But it's clear that Jesus is being compassionate, not cruel. So what is Jesus doing?

He's seeing that this man's spiritual paralysis of unforgiven sin is greater than any of his physical suffering. Now, in the first century, there were often, there's lots of speculation that sin was connected to physical suffering.

And so, if someone was suffering physically, people would often think, well, what sin did he do?

This is a common question. It would have been an assumption in the first century. But there's no reason in this text to believe that.

There's nothing in here that gives us a sense that you see anything in this man but his need and his friends. They bring him, they lower him, because they've seen Jesus heal people with touch.

[12 : 35] Jesus looks and he sees at this paralytic's greatest need, and he looks at our hearts and he says, I see all of you in your greatest need.

And your greatest need is, in fact, the forgiveness of your sins. How can this be? Well, biblically, we need to recognize that sin is never merely a horizontal thing.

Oh, surely, we will sin against one another, and we do so in our selfishness, in our pride, in our anger, our jealousy, our ingratitude, our self-pity.

We are always being selfish and therefore sinning against those around us by asking them to change and work according to our plan and our world.

But sin, biblically, is more than that. It is fundamentally a rebellion against our creator. It is fundamentally a rejection that God should be the center of our lives and instead putting ourselves in the center of our lives.

[13 : 40] God who created us to flourish under him, and yet we have rejected him and said, we're going to go our own way. This is what happened in the Garden of Eden. God provided everything for Adam and Eve and said, live and receive my provision so you can flourish.

And they said, no, we would rather try to be like you than receive from you. And tellingly, when one of the greatest stories of human sin and failure in the story of the life of King David, after David's sins, horrifically, against a woman, against her husband, against the nation.

Psalms 51, when David writes about his sin, he says this in Psalm 51, three and four, for I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me against you, speaking to God, against you and you

only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

See, the Bible and what David is saying here is though he has sinned terribly against Bathsheba, terribly against Uriah, and he's not denying that, I don't believe in this passage, but he's saying, deeper than that, I have sinned against my creator.

I have sinned against my God. And this is the greatest fault and the greatest problem. And Jesus sees in the life of the paralytic and he sees in our own hearts that this too is our greatest need.

[15:17] Jesus comes, Mark is painting this picture of the kingdom of God on earth. And this passage reminds us that the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a relationship with God is the very centerpiece of it.

Friends, we need to recognize if we gain all the healing, all the righteousness, if we overthrow evil in all of society, if we eradicate sickness and disease, poverty and oppression, but do not have the forgiveness of sins from our God, we have nothing.

We know that Jesus and his kingdom is more than just forgiveness of sins, but it must be based on and centered on this idea. So I ask you, do you think this is your greatest need?

Do you think it's the greatest need of the whole world? So you look at your neighbors and your family and your friends, even your enemies, do you see that their greatest need is for forgiveness from God for their sins?

So verse 5, Mark brings us to this point where we're expecting healing and we get something very different.

[16:34] But the story goes on because it doesn't just say this is the greatest need that you have, but verses 6 through 12 tells us that there is a help that will meet that greatest need.

And the narrative continues, right? So we have this man, the scribes haven't even been mentioned until now, but now in verse 6, the scribes show up. And remember from a couple weeks ago, the scribes are the teachers of the law.

They're the experts who would act as both moral advisors, as judges, and as teachers and rabbis. And so this is what they do, this is what the scribes are, and they look at Jesus and they think in their hearts, you can't do that.

Why are you doing that? Who do you think you are? Only God can do that. And of course, they're right. In the Old Testament, what we see in multiple places and in critical places in the Bible is that we see God as the one who forgives sins.

So when God reveals himself to Moses, when Moses demands on Mount Sinai, God, show me your glory. And God responds and says, well, you can't see my glory and live, but you can see the backside of my glory.

[17:44] So I'm going to show you just a little bit. And so he hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and he passes, the presence of the Lord passes by and the words come out, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

He says more than that, but he's saying this is the God that has revealed himself. And so these scribes are not wrong when they see, when they say only God can forgive sin.

And Jesus looks at them and he knows their hearts. This is one of those little windows where you realize Jesus, Mark is just assuming that we understand that Jesus is someone special, that Jesus has the ability to understand our hearts supernaturally.

We didn't have to tell him that. He wasn't super insightful in guessing that this was true. He knew what they were saying in their hearts. And he looks at them and he says, he challenges their thinking.

He says, why are you questioning in this way? Let me ask you this. Which is easier? To say, I forgive you or to say, rise and walk to this paralytic man?

[19:04] Now, think through the logic of this for a minute. If I say, I forgive you, it's easier in a way because you can't disprove it.

Right? There's nothing to see. And so I can say whatever I want and there's nothing actually that happens. Right? But if I say, rise and walk to a paralyzed man, it either happens or it doesn't.

Right? And you can see the outcome. And that's Jesus' point. He's saying to these scribes, you don't think I have the ability or the authority to forgive sin.

Well, what about the authority to do something that you can watch me do and see me do? I also think Jesus is suggesting that actually forgiving of sins is way, way, way harder than actually

healing the paralytic.

And he's going to show us that from the arc of his whole life because he's going to go to the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. So I think that's also what Mark is doing here. But in the middle of this, Jesus says, okay, you're asking a question, who do you say I am?

[20 : 14] Well, let me show you. Watch this. So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth. And he turns from them and he turns to the paralytic and he says, rise, pick up your bed and walk and go home.

the man picks up the mat that he'd lived his life on and he walked home. And the crowd responds with amazement. We've never seen anything like this.

And Jesus is sitting there with a crowd and Mark is looking at us, the audience that he's writing to and he's saying, who do you think Jesus is now?

And this is the point of the story, right? This is the point of the narrative arc is Jesus alone has the authority to forgive sins. He, as the Son of Man, has the authority to forgive sins.

and we see in this story a response of awe and joy and wonder because the greatest need that we have, even greater than our personal suffering, even greater than our circumstances now, even greater than the global trials that we are facing and enduring as a world, even greater than all of those things, our greatest need is met by the greatest help we could ever imagine, the Son of Man who comes with authority to forgive our sins.

[21 : 47] And we see the crowds responding in awe and wonder, the man walking home with joy. Friends, we who are now, and of course Mark is writing to Christians who know the end of the story, they know where Jesus is going, the gospel itself tells us that Jesus has authority to forgive sins in a unique way because it's baked into the logic of the gospel.

And I want to spend just a few minutes thinking with you for a minute about how is it that God can forgive sins, right? Because what we see in the Bible, and we're just going to walk through, this is going to feel familiar to a lot of you, but Romans 6.23 tells us that the wages of sin is death, right? That our offense against our creator is so great, it is a capital offense. We have rejected the Lord of life, we have turned from life to death, and God is going to bring his judgment upon our sin with the condemnation of death.

This is what happened in the garden, it's what we see. So Romans 6 says the wages of sin is death. Then Hebrews 9.22 tells us, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. This is the outworking of Romans 6. Somebody has to die for sin. In God's economy, it must be atoned for.

[23 : 12] Either the one who committed the sin must die, or perhaps someone might be able to die in their place. But who could do that?

Who could die for someone else's sins, since we know that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God in Romans 3.23? And Jesus comes, and he was without sin.

And he says, I have come to offer my life a ransom for many. I have come to give myself to die so that you might live.

And so Romans 3 tells us this, there is no distinction for all who sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

[24 : 25] Paul uses some fancy words here, some theologically loaded words. Justification means being made right before God and it requires the removal of the penalty of sin and the curse of sin.

Propitiation is the satisfaction of God's judgment against sin and Jesus is the one who accomplishes that propitiation through his death, making possible the forgiveness of sin because Jesus comes and dies in our place so that our sins might be judged in Jesus and so that forgiveness might be extended to us.

This is the logic of the gospel. You see, because God doesn't forgive sin the way we do. Most of the time when we forgive sin, we pretend that you really didn't do anything wrong or we say it wasn't really a big deal or I've gotten over it.

It's okay. But God can't do that because God is perfectly just and he can't overlook our sin. He can't overlook evil and we don't want him to when someone else is evil but we really want him to overlook

our evil in our own hearts but God can't do that nor will he simply condemn the whole world with no chance of forgiveness because he is a God loving and merciful slow to anger and abounding in kindness.

So how can God be both just and the justifier of the ungodly? Well because a perfect man came and in love offered himself for us.

[26 : 10] He did not deserve to die said I will die for you so that the wrath of my father against your sin will fall on me so that you can be forgiven and your slate wiped clean and restored to a relationship with your creator.

And this is what the gospel is about and this is ultimately why Jesus says I have the only authority to forgive sin because I alone am the one who will do what is necessary for you to have your sins wiped away so you can be restored in your relationship with God.

Now Mark doesn't spell this out but this is for us as we think about what is it how is it that it is good news that Jesus as the son of man has authority to forgive sins.

So coming back to this story in Mark Jesus looks at us and he says yes I can heal your paralysis I can heal your leprosy I can cast out the demons but more than that I can forgive your sin come to me in repentance and faith come and believe and trust in me come to me the only one who can meet your greatest need and if you're here this morning and you're not sure whether Jesus has forgiven you of your sin if you're feeling like he can't or he won't or he doesn't Jesus invites you to come come and receive his forgiveness as you repent of those sins and turn and put your faith in him and if you're here and you've been hearing this story for a long long time and this is the good news

I pray I pray that you would be renewed this morning in your awe and wonder and joy like the man who walked home with his bed under his arm for the first time in who knows perhaps his whole life may we have that same sense of joy that we who are crippled by our sin can now walk and rise and live and worship because Jesus can forgive our sins let's go ahead and pray together oh Lord Jesus we come to you and Lord we confess that we often don't see the world the way you do Lord we don't often understand things the way you have arranged them and Lord how often we lose sight of you and who you are and what you have done that you alone are our hope in being reconciled with God you alone are the one who can wash away our sin

[29 : 26] Lord I pray this morning that you would be with us as we go to the Lord's table Lord that as we celebrate communion together Lord that you would renew in us joy that you would Lord draw those who are here who maybe haven't taken that step Lord to put their faith in you and the forgiveness that you offer in Christ we pray this in Jesus name Amen