

CALLED IN AUTHORITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 103:1-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:1-12

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:1-12

I. A Packed House

Mark 2:1-2

1 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

1. Although Jesus grew up in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, He had made *Capernaum* His base of operations when He began His public ministry in that region.

As news spread of Jesus' presence in Capernaum, He was likely at *the house* of Simon and his brother Andrew (Mark 1:21, 29). Simon's mother-in-law had been healed there and showed herself happy to offer Jesus hospitality (1:30-31).

2. Partially as a consequence of a healed man's spreading the news about Jesus *there was no room* in or even near the house where Jesus was. Evidently the door was left open so that others could at least cram close to it and hear what was being said. Those who could do so listened to Jesus preach *the word*—that is, the good news regarding the impending kingdom of God and the necessity

of repentance and faith (see Mark 1:14-15).

II. A Paralyzed Man

Mark 2:3-5

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

3. Meanwhile, *four* men carrying a fifth man approached the packed house. The only thing we know for sure about this man who was *sick of the palsy* is that he was unable to walk. He may not even have had use of his arms. The determination of the man's friends to bring him to Jesus suggests that he was in dire straits, and those four believed Jesus could help.

4. The action of breaking a hole in *the roof* isn't as destructive as it seems. Houses in Israel in Jesus' day generally had a flat roof that was accessible by a ladder or stairway. The wooden crossbeams were overlaid with reeds, branches, and baked

mud or clay. It wouldn't have been difficult for the four men to dig through the thatch, and their deconstruction could be repaired with relative ease.

5a. The reason given for what Jesus said in response is *their faith*. The plural *their* is important since it includes the faith of the friends rather than just that of the afflicted man. Seeing the great lengths these men went to, Jesus realized that they believed He had the power to heal their friend.

5b. What Jesus had to say in reaction to this extraordinary entrance surprises us! What He said got at the heart of most people's assumptions about illness. The Old Testament frequently assumes a direct connection between sin and sickness. God's forgiveness is often required for physical healing, and healing is often the evidence of forgiveness (examples: Exodus 15:26; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 41:3-4; Isaiah 19:22). This belief persisted into Jesus' own day; it's what led the disciples to ask regarding a blind man, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2).

Back to our text at hand, the sequence of events suggests that Jesus treated the paralysis as being the result of a spiritual malady. Every issue of humanity's physical frailty can be traced in a general sense to the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1-19). But that doesn't mean every specific illness is traceable to a specific sin of a person (see John 9:3). Regardless of why the man was paralyzed, Jesus recognized that the man's greater need was to be *forgiven* for his *sins*.

III. Cynical Bystanders Mark 2:6-9

6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7 Why doth this man thus speak

blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

6a. *The scribes* were educated both in God's written law and its oral interpretation. *Sitting* was often a posture of teaching, which suggests that these scribes were anticipating more of a debate with Jesus than being taught by Jesus.

6b-7. Mark does not describe the reaction of the paralyzed man, his friends, or the larger crowd to Jesus' surprising statement, but only the unspoken skepticism of the scribes. The scribes were well aware that the Old Testament taught that no one *can forgive sins but God only* (Exodus 34:6-9; Psalm 130:2-4; Isaiah 43:25).

But Jesus spoke as though He had the same power to forgive sins as God. If the scholars even considered whether Jesus could be God, they would have rejected the idea out of hand. There was no precedent for God becoming man.

The scribes were therefore left to conclude that Jesus was speaking *blasphemies*. They viewed Jesus' presumption to forgive sins as an arrogant offense to the authority and majesty of God. The Law of Moses pronounced the penalty for blasphemy to be death by stoning (Leviticus 24:10-16; Numbers 15:30-31). That will indeed be attempted later (John 10:31-33), but not on this occasion.

8a. We can be confident that Jesus' judgment here went beyond merely

reading the body language of the skeptics. Scripture clearly affirms God's ability to know people's hearts (Jeremiah 17:10; Acts 1:24; 15:8).

8b-9. Jesus met the scribes' unspoken disapproval with questions of His own. The use of counter questions was common in rabbinic debate and employed frequently by Jesus. Here Jesus' counter question challenged the skeptics' belief that Jesus had offered the man something that wasn't in His power to give. And it paved the way for Jesus' upcoming declaration of physical healing.

It is *easier* to declare forgiveness than to tell a paralyzed man to *walk*, since the former can't be objectively verified and the latter has physical proof. But the declaration of forgiveness is more essential—and difficult. Most likely, Jesus was emphasizing that both declarations are impossible for human beings and easy for God.

IV. An Amazing Miracle Mark 2:10-12

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

10-11. In this climactic pronouncement, Jesus refers to himself as *the Son of man*. This rather mysterious title seems to have its origin in Daniel 7:13-14, which states that God would bestow on this heavenly figure dominion and glory in the end times.

The ambiguity of the title spared it from preconceived ideas in Jesus' day. Therefore, He was able to infuse it with His own definition. In the Gospels, this messianic title is connected with the nature of Jesus' person and work—who He is and what He does.

Jesus was able and willing to show the scribes—and everyone else—that He had *power on earth to forgive sins*. Although there is a technical distinction between power and authority, Mark doesn't make a sharp distinction. Jesus has both! And that is the crux of this story. His ability to heal physically was tangible proof of ability to heal spiritually by forgiving sins.

After Jesus addressed the scribes in particular, He shifted focus to the paralyzed man. If the man could obey Jesus' command to *arise*, it would be evidence that Jesus was capable of miraculous healing. The man's obedience would also imply that Jesus' earlier pronouncement of forgiveness was as effective as His pronouncement of healing.

12a. To put it simply, the man believed and obeyed. As there could be no evidence of the man's forgiveness without the healing, there could be no evidence of his faith without his obedience.

12b. Mark speaks of people's being *amazed* several times in his Gospel to describe reactions to what Jesus said with authority and/or did as miraculous. The evidence Jesus offered affirmed that His declaration of forgiveness was legitimate.

We might think Mark's statement that *all . . . glorified God* is overstated. Surely the scribes weren't included! But they too had to acknowledge the miracle, whether or not they believed that forgiveness had also been granted. For them to glorify God wouldn't necessarily mean that they thanked God for sending Jesus. The scribes, along with everyone else, simply had never seen events after this fashion.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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Into the Lesson

Using magazines and newspapers look for examples of our culture's search for physical and spiritual health. Answer the following questions:

Which search was easier? Physical or spiritual health?

Which kind of health concerns people more these days?

Which of the two kinds of health issues are more likely to drive people to seek unproven or unscriptural methods of cure?

The search for cures isn't new. Today's text will look at an ancient account that points us in the right direction.

Into the Word

Read Mark 2:1-12. What are some key issues regarding Jesus and attitudes toward Him?

Each of the characters in today's passage would tell the story differently, mention-

ing details they most noticed and including their own opinions or biases. Choose one of the following characters and write a brief retelling of the story from their point of view: (1) Jesus, (2) the gathered crowd, (3) the man on the mat, (4) the four men carrying the mat, and (5) the scribes.

Into Life

A man in an adult Bible-study class decided to record and categorize the prayer requests he heard expressed over a 10-week period in the class. When the period was over, he discovered that the prayer requests could be categorized and tallied this way:

Prayers for physical healing: 97 requests
Prayers for life situations: 26 requests
Prayers for spiritual healing: 3 requests

What might be wrong with this picture? Make a point today to make a prayer of thanksgiving for God's healing forgiveness.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Jesus still has absolute authority and power to both forgive and heal.