

Which Is Easier?  
To Forgive Or Heal?

Mark 2:1-12

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<sup>1</sup> And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." <sup>6</sup> Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" <sup>8</sup> 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? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—<sup>11</sup> "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." <sup>12</sup> 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!"

What is the greatest need in this world? What would you say your greatest need is?

If you just graduated high school you could say, your greatest need is to get to the next step – college or find work. If you just had a baby, you know your child's greatest need is their welfare and sustenance. If you are looking for employment your greatest need could be to do well in your next interview. If you are at a place where your health, marriage or business is struggling your greatest need might be to find relief or make things better. Fulfilling your greatest need in this world, however, has an expiry date. All your dreams all your aspirations, all your ambitions in this world ultimately come to an end when you breathe your last. Some people say so and so lives on even after they are dead. Have you ever seen a dead man cry or laugh?

People came to Jesus with a lot of needs. Physical needs. Emotional needs. Mental health needs. And Jesus cared for all their needs.

However, Jesus did not come to cater to physical or health needs alone. Jesus came to offer something much higher and greater.

There are many religions in this world that offer some form of morality, some form of spiritual discipline, some form of peace to the soul, some form of giving meaning and purpose to human life. They even offer forgiveness of sin by promoting some form of good works or penance. However, what is unique to the Christian faith is this: Jesus offers forgiveness based on what He has done – his death for our sins. His merit for our unworthiness.

Your greatest need is the need to be forgiven by God. Why?

Because, only forgiven sinners are accepted by God. Only forgiven sinners have the abundant life Jesus promises. Only forgiven sinners enter heaven. Only forgiven sinners are granted eternal life. On the other hand, unforgiven sinners can expect eternity without God and the judgment of God. Unforgiven sinners will be separated from God. There are no unforgiven sinners in heaven. The Bible tells us that God is just and righteous. But God also justifies the ungodly – God declares the condemned sinner righteous by passing over (forgiving) their sins.

So, a life knowing God, being right with and being forgiven by Jesus Christ is worth living. Because when your greatest need is fulfilled, you are free to pursue the things that are dear to God. What does God delight in? “*..I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight..*” Jeremiah 9:24.

*Why would people like David Livingstone, Amy Carmichael, William Carey, C.T Studd leave their places of comfort to serve in hard places around the world?*

It is said John G Paton evangelized and served where cannibals used to live. Why would they do that? Answer: Because their greatest need was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They were assured of their heavenly inheritance in God.

The apostle Peter has a staggering view of assurance for believers in 1 Peter 1:3-6

*“According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”.*

The sad reality is that, even in Jesus’s day, people did not see that their greatest need is to be forgiven of their sin. Sadly, this is how it is even today.

Last week we saw that Jesus has been away from Capernaum for several days while traveling throughout Galilee. In Mark chapter two, Jesus has now returned to the town that was his base of operations – most likely Peter’s home. Jesus had become very popular as a healer, as a miracle worker. Everywhere he went there were crowds. It is unlikely the crowd was a spiritually minded people who truly understood the nature of the God’s Kingdom. They are more of a curious crowd. Most times when you see a crowd, they are interested only in the spectacle.

Jesus knew why they were seeking him. Jesus knew what was in their heart. People crossed land and sea to see Jesus. *“many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man”*. John 2:23-24.

Jesus answered them, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”* John 6:26

In Mark 2:1, Jesus comes back into Capernaum, and the people in that village know that the miracle worker is back.

Verse 1: *And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.*

So we have a curious crowd in the house Jesus was. But what was Jesus doing?

Verse 2: *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.*

So the house is packed and Jesus is preaching the word. But something very interesting happens here. We see a disabled man, a paralytic being brought to the house where Jesus was. The man is so disabled that he needs assistance to bring him. Not one man to assist him, not two but four of them. Four of them and the paralytic are convinced that they need to get to Jesus.

Verse 3-4

<sup>3</sup> *And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.* <sup>4</sup> *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.*

The four men first attempt to bring the paralytic through the front door. But there was a no room because of the crowd. I wonder if the crowd was interested in letting the disabled man through. When these friends of the paralytic cannot get to Jesus, they go up to the roof and lower him to the place Jesus was. This is rather extraordinary.

A typical house in Capernaum had flat roofs. They had stairs outside the home. The house probably had only one big room. And Jesus was in the main room preaching. The roof was constructed with beams across the width of the house and had cross beams as well. The supporting beams were typical not finished. They were uncut – meaning they had branches and used as cross support. On top of the beams was straw. The top of the roof was covered with clay or mud. The Gospel of Luke says the roof had tiles.

So, these four men, seeing, that there was no room through the front door, go outside the house. They carry the paralytic man all the way up to the roof.

Verse four tells us that they removed the roof above. A better translation is that they dug through the roof and made an opening. They used their bare hands to clear out the mud, the straw and the wood. Then they make an opening in the roof. Verse four also tells us “they removed the roof above him”. Meaning they had to know where Jesus was located in the house. They want to make sure their paralytic friend gets the attention of Jesus.

Imagine the following - The house was packed with people. Jesus is preaching the word. And all of sudden, roof material, dirt and dry mud is falling down from over their heads. This was quite an unusual distraction. Imagine the reaction of house owner. Imagine Peter’s wife or his mother-in-law observing the whole thing. And, after lowering the paralytic into the living room, these four men would have gone back down the stairs and joined their sick friend or they may have remained on the roof. Regardless, they have made major roof damage, causing enough disruption but they accomplish what they came for. You can’t help but notice the persistence, creativity and the faith of these four men.

And what happens next? Verse 5:

*And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

Jesus saw their faith. This is the first time in the Gospel of Mark the word “faith” is mentioned.

Now what is this kind of faith? This is faith in Jesus.

Is it the human faith of these four men who probably heard about the miracle working power of Jesus. Mathew’s gospel adds that Jesus was compassionate and endearing. *Take*

*heart, my son, your sins are forgiven.* Matthew 9:2

Their faith includes the faith of the paralytic as well. But the faith of the paralytic is more than just human faith. It is the kind of faith that gives him eternal life or entrance into the Kingdom of God.

It is also the faith that accompanies repentance and belief in the Gospel.

Because, that is the *only* kind of faith brings forgiveness of sin. In Mark chapter 1 we saw the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. *Repentance* and *believing* in the Gospel are the foundations for the goal of being forgiven sinners.

So, Jesus announces that the man's sins are forgiven. However, there were some people who did not like what Jesus said.

Verse 6 and 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,* <sup>7</sup> *“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

Some scribes were sitting there. Who were these? Scribes were professional writers or skilled interpreters of the Law. The parallel account in Luke's Gospel tells us that *“Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem”* Luke 5:17. Ezra was a scribe in the Old Testament.

These scribes and Pharisees take offense at what Jesus said to the paralytic, and they say that Jesus is blaspheming. They say only God can forgive sins. They interpret scripture according to what they know. And they are right about one thing – only God can forgive sins! But they do not know enough. They do not know the identity of Jesus Christ.

What Jesus say to the scribes and Pharisees?

<sup>8</sup> *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? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup> “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”*

The scribes and Pharisees are not even saying this aloud. They are reasoning in their hearts. And *immediately* Jesus knew what they were thinking. This indicates a prescience, divine knowledge or an ability to read the hearts and minds of man.

Jesus asks the big question. Which is easier to say?

You are forgiven or you are healed.

It is easier to say “you are forgiven” than “you are healed” because pronouncing healing requires rather immediate proof. However, being forgiven is harder because only God can forgive. This was the point of the scribes and Pharisees!

Jesus tells us in Mark 10:25 “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*”

The authority to forgive sins belongs to God alone. The scribes and Pharisees know that. So Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees – that you may know. What do they need to know? That the Son of Man – a self-reference and a Messianic title Jesus used. This title is used in Daniel 7:13-14. The scribes and Pharisees obviously knew the Hebrew Scriptures. So Jesus reads their minds and answers according to their Scriptures. Jesus has the authority of God!

And then he tells the paralytic - *I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home*”

And what do we see happen to the paralytic?

Verse 12.

<sup>12</sup> *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!”.*

Jesus *immediately* knew what was in their hearts. The paralytic was healed. And *immediately* he picked up his bed before all. Four men had brought this man in. But now with one word, Jesus forgives him and heals him. He doesn’t need others to carry him or provide him assistance. He carries his own bed. There is nothing better this man would have needed. His greatest need was fulfilled. He received the greatest gift – the forgiveness of sins. And received another gift too – healing of his body. The difference between receiving forgiveness and receiving healing – you could get sick again. Eventually the body will age and die. But forgiveness is carried on into heaven. Notice the reaction of the people gathered. They were amazed and glorified God. *We never saw anything like this!*

Repentance, confession, belief precede forgiveness of sins.

*“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* 1 John 1:9

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Which Is Easier? Mark 2:1-12

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Why does Jesus say to the paralytic "your sins are forgiven" first and heal him later? What do we learn from his response to the Scribes?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. How does the authority of Jesus help us understand the Great Commission?  
Matthew 28:19-20

3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What must we do in light of Jesus' authority and his command to make disciples?