

"1 When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. 3 And they \*came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 4 Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. 5 And Jesus seeing their faith \*said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, \*said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? 9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? 10 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--He \*said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." 12 And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this." Mark 2:1-12, NAS95.

Marks' continuing narrative shows us the result of the actions of the healed leper.

When Jesus ventured back into Capernaum, the house was mobbed presumably by people wanting healing.

2:1-2. The capacity of the average Capernaum home may have allowed only about fifty persons standing close together (the longest span in excavated homes is eighteen feet). We thus should not think of literally the whole town inside or just outside the door.

2:3-4. Many "beds" were just mats; the paralytics' friends may have carried him on the bed on which he lay all the time. The roof was approached, typically by an outside staircase, so they could reach it unimpeded. The roof of single-story homes was sturdy enough for walking but was normally made of branches and rushes laid over the roof's beams and covered with dried mud; thus one could dig through it.

But Jesus continued to preach the good news to them, for that was his purpose. It must, therefore, have been a great temptation for him to be irritated when four men, anxious to get their sick friend healed, lowered him through the broken roof right in front of Jesus as he taught. But Jesus saw only faith.

Consider this group of men. They were all as helpless to heal this man as he was to heal himself. They had no medical competence, and no supernatural powers of miracle working. There were no drugs nor treatment nor doctors they were aware of which

could help their friend. What did they have? One great fact. They had knowledge of Jesus Christ. They have gained this in the last weeks by what they had seen and heard. Had they been to his meetings? Had they met people whose lives had been transformed by him? Had they heard from people whom they considered trustworthy and sensible who told them plainly and simply what Jesus taught, that we had to repent because of our sins and believe in him. They also told of his extraordinary power to heal any and every kind of illness. Somehow they were told of the reality, power and wisdom of this Jesus who was living in Capernaum.

He never seems to have healed without faith ( not a saving faith but a belief that He could do what was asked) either on the part of the patient or of others Jesus, instead of healing at once, publicly forgave the man his sins. Imagine their disappointment. Jesus saw that this was what the man both desired and needed most. Jesus never said that all disease was directly related to sin, as most Jews believed, and some Christians still believe today. Most doctors today would agree, however, that many sicknesses are indirectly related to our mental states and that a sense of guilt underlies some illnesses. Perhaps it was so in this case.

Now, remember, news spread quickly about Jesus – the word was out. These men would not have brought their friend if they had not heard something about Jesus' prior healings.

They knew that Jesus was able to heal a man of leprosy, and Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, and that when the people from the community had brought to him people sick with various diseases that he had healed every one of them.

More than that, they knew that Jesus was willing to heal men because they had been told of the leper who said to him, "If you are willing you can make me clean," (Mk. 1:40) and Jesus had said to him, "I am willing. Be clean!"

And still we must remember, Jesus priority in purpose is to preach the good news not heal the masses. This event was literally pressed on Jesus. In the next verse we see he is not healing masses of people but teaching as he was doing when these men came to

him in our text:

..., it was heard that He was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.

In the context of this narrative I do not believe we can use this as an illustration of bringing our friends to Christ in an evangelistic sense. There is nothing said here that says these men wanted to do anymore than see their friend rise up from his paralytic's bed. And this is good. There is absolutely nothing wrong with desiring to see Christ's mercy in any form poured out on another human being even if it is not in the way of saving grace.

But, Jesus had other intensions.

5 And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

2:5-7. Sins were to be atoned for by offerings in the temple. Judaism taught that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews allowed that some of God's representatives could speak on God's behalf. The passive form, "are forgiven," could be interpreted in this way (Jewish teachers often used the passive form to describe God's activity); but Jesus was not a priest, no one had offered sacrifice, and the scribes had heard no basis for the pronouncement of forgiveness, not even clear indication of repentance.

The story might have ended here (for in the joy of sins forgiven the man might not have cared whether he was healed physically or not) if it had not been for some teachers of the law who were there. They, quite correctly, observed to themselves that only God can forgive sins and so Jesus was committing blasphemy by assuming this right for himself. It never entered their heads to ask whether Jesus was more than mere man. The gospels make no secret of the insight of Jesus, and he, knowing their unspoken thoughts, asked a very obvious question: Was it easier to grant forgiveness or to grant healing? The unspoken answer was that there was no way to test the reality of forgiveness but a very easy way to test the reality of healing. To prove that he had the power to forgive, and as a sign of the kingdom, Jesus healed the paralysed man. There could be no argument about that. Again, amazement followed but not, apparently, faith in Jesus.

Jesus referred to himself indirectly as the Son of Man, which seems deliberately vague. In Mark this is the usual way Jesus describes himself. The title could be used in several ways e.g. either referring to 'mortal man' (a sort of representative of humanity) or echoing the heavenly figure of Dn. 7:13, coming down from God to exercise his rule.

This is the start of another theme in Mark, the opposition of the religious leaders to Jesus. As they had rejected John, so they would reject Jesus. Ordinary people, not blinded by prejudice, listened to both and received the good news.

The Old Testament penalty for blaspheming God's name — reproaching rather than honoring it — was death (Lev 24:10-23). According to subsequent Jewish teaching, blasphemy involved pronouncing the divine name or inviting people to follow other gods. Strictly speaking, therefore, these legal scholars would have been mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, even by their own rules. But the term was used much more broadly in the common language in this period, and they may apply it in the general sense of dishonoring the divine name.

2:8. Because supernatural knowledge was especially attributed to prophets (e.g., 2 Kings 6:12), Jesus' hearers would probably view him here as a prophet; "speaking in one's heart" may be idiomatic (Deut 15:9; 18:21; 30:14). Most Jewish teachers believed that "prophets" in the Old Testament sense had ceased, but most of the people were happy to entertain new prophetic figures, many of whom they saw as harbingers of the end.

2:9-12. Some Jewish teachers accepted miracles as verification that a teacher was truly God's representative; others did not regard miracles as sufficient proof if they disagreed with the teacher's interpretation of Scripture.

Jewish teachers knew that only God could ultimately forgive (on the Day of Atonement in response to sacrifice) and we know that that Day of Atonement was only a TEMPORARY REPRIEVE, IT WAS NOT A FINAL FORGIVENESS OF ANYONE'S SINS, IT REMINDED THEM OF THEIR SIN.; but they also recognized that healing ultimately came from God. Both were from God but could be announced through God's agents acting

according to his will. Josephus shows us that many false prophets in Jesus' day claimed to work miracles but actually failed to work them; some of Jesus' critics may have placed him in this category. His act in front of these witnesses, however, should have challenged them to rethink their case.

But the Lord Jesus puts the whole dynamics of this situation on a new level. This man is sick, and he needs to be healed, but that is not his primary need. Even if he gets healed then one day in the future he will contract another illness and on that occasion he may die. This man's greatest need was not deliverance from paralysis but eternal life. Our greatest need too is eternal life. Think of the most memorable words in the Bible: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). We are going to die. Is there life beyond the grave? If a man die shall he live? Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Lazarus is raised from his sepulcher. The widow of Nain's son is delivered from the cart taking his boy to the cemetery. Jairus' daughter is raised from her deathbed. Christ constantly shows that he is more powerful than death. It is he, not the grave, which has the final word. We believe in the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

All men contemplate death in one way or another. For some it is merely the end of all things - for others it is something that plagues the mind. Shakespeare grabbed that well in Hamlet.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them? (commit suicide) To die: to sleep;  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation (eternal silence)  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; (obstacle)  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, (body)  
Must give us pause: there's the respect (it must be contemplated)

That makes calamity of so long life; ( terrifying thoughts of what will happen in eternity)

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, (temporal life)

The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, (insulting language)

The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay, The insolence of office and the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus make (settle his own account)

With a bare bodkin? (a dagger) who would fardels (burdens) bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death,

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles the will

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution (red- the natural color of courage)

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pitch and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,

And lose the name of action.-- Soft you now!

The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons (prayers)

Be all my sins remember'd.

If I am to live as long as God himself then my first need is forgiveness for my sins, that I may face eternity pardoned by God, reconciled to God, washed and cleansed for ever. That is far more important than living a long life, or being healed and healthy. Can my sins be forgiven? Is there mercy with God? How can he be just and straight, a God who hates sin, and yet cover all the guilt of mankind? How can he shrug his shoulders at terrible wickedness? How can he be just and yet the justifier of sinners? That is the greatest question in the Bible. Its answer is 'at great eternal and divine cost.' The sending of God the Son into the world. The incarnation in Mary's womb. The humiliation of the Lord of glory. The bloody agony of Gethsemane. The deep wounds of the scourging whip. The nails through wrists and feet, and the darkness and rejection of Golgotha is the price paid by God. The coldness of the tomb where Jesus' body lies is the cost. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

The very nature of God requires atonement to be made that forgiveness can be

effectual. That is how God is. Not a God who shrugs, and turns a blind eye. Not an indifferent God, but one who loves and redeems at such cost to himself, sparing not his own Son. The Lord Jesus is speaking of all this when he cuts through this man's pain, and frustration, and helplessness, and despair. "Your sins need to be forgiven, don't they? And I tell you because you have come to me for mercy they are forgiven." The Lord is speaking in the light of his great mission into the world not to be served but to serve, and give his life a ransom for many. He is speaking in the knowledge that one day soon, his redemption completed, he would cry "It is finished." The salvation of all his people would have been accomplished on Golgotha, and then forgiveness of sins in his name would be preached in all the nations of the earth. That is what the Lord Christ was sure of as he said to this man, "Your sins are forgiven."

We are told that sitting in Jesus' house were some teachers of the law. They weren't sweating and weary having carried a man some miles to meet with Jesus. They were not covered with dust having opened up the roof. They were sitting there watching everything instead of directing the crowds and helping needy people come to Christ. They were not enjoying being in the presence of Jesus. They were there waiting for him to make a mistake. They were the critics, the opposition, the people who knew all about religion. They had not come there in their need. They came as self-appointed judges.

When they heard Jesus say to this man that his sins had been forgiven they immediately saw the red warning lights flashing: "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v.7). The question was sensible. You rob a bank and kill a security guard and then come and confess it to me. I cannot say "I forgive you that sin. Go in peace." I have no authority to say that. You take a man's wife and you confess it to me. I cannot tell you that I forgive you the sin. I have no authority to do that. But if you steal my car or spread malicious stories about me than I can forgive you because you have sinned against me. Who can forgive sins but God alone?

Christ knew what they were thinking.

"Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts" (v.8).

So he turned to them and he asked them two questions, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Get up and take your bed and walk'" (v.9).

The first question probed their motives for having a questioning spirit. Why do we come where Jesus is and disapprove of what he says? What does that tell us about our inner condition? The first question confronted their consciences.

The second question addressed their minds. Is it easier to talk about forgiveness or to talk about raising this paralyzed man? The answer of course is that it is easier to talk about religion and forgiveness and mercy than to talk about actions which can be checked immediately.

Of course it is easier to talk about forgiveness of sins. Talk is cheap. Religious people do so all the time, and people are so used to it that they presume it's God's job to forgive us because that is what He does.

Of course it was easier for Jesus to say the words, "Your sins are forgiven." There is no possibility of an operation on this paralytic's soul by which we could remove it and see that it was ransomed, clean, forgiven, and then replace it.

The evidence here is that there is only one man, then and now, who could do this with this kind of authority proving Mark's intentions for writing this Gospel.