



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 2:1-12 Mark

“King, Paralytic and Power to Forgive”

TRANSCRIPT

Our passage this morning is Mark chapter 2 and I couldn't help but notice as we were singing our hymn that it was appropriate for the passage. That second stanza, the very beginning says, “Hither by Thy help I come.” Well, that is what we have a picture of in our passage this morning in Mark 2:1-12. If you have your Bibles open, follow along with me as I read.

[Prayer] “When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. Being unable to get to Him on account 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. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’ Immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”; or to say, “Arise, and take up your pallet and walk”? But in order 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, take up your pallet and go home.’ And he rose and immediately took 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.’ ” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

Our gracious heavenly Father, we praise You and thank You for the privilege that we have to come together as a people, redeemed from the foundation of the world by the blood of Your Son through no merit of our own, but by Your work, Your good pleasure. And we thank You for the life that’s ours and for the time we have to be here together and study the Scriptures and to consider Your Son, who He is, what He has done, who we are by our very nature, but what He has made us by Your grace.

And so we pray, Father, that as we study this passage together, You’d bless us, that You would guide us in our thinking. We recognize, Lord, that apart from Your grace we can really understand nothing and we cannot live in a way that’s pleasing to You apart from that grace, and so we pray that You would supply it and bless us and equip us for the week to come, that we would be prepared for a time of ministry in whatever way your providence guides and directs us. That as we go out into the marketplace we enter into our jobs in this week to come, that we would be fitted and able to not only speak the gospel, but live it before people, that they might see by our deeds, by our works the vitality and the reality of our faith.

This comes by Your Word, Father. You sanctify us through the Scriptures and through the study of it and we pray that You would do that this morning. We are a people with spiritual needs and we pray You’d bless us at this time and in the week to come and in the months and the years to come. We pray, Father, that You would build us up as a church and that You would equip us and that You would use us in this community. And not only us, but others who are meeting at this time. Bless them and equip them that the church of Jesus Christ would truly be the church triumphant and would move forth triumphantly, proclaiming the gospel and living for you.

I pray, Father, also for our material needs because we have many. These are difficult times in which we are living. Many are without employment. We pray for them that You would provide. You instructed us to pray for our daily bread, and we pray for that, that You’d make provision for the material needs of each and every one of us gathered here. And those who are without employment, we pray that You

would provide and that You would give encouragement. We pray for the sick, pray that You might give healing. We pray that You would give encouragement in the midst of that affliction, and not only for those who are in hospitals or in their sick bed at home, but for their families that are also undergoing the difficulty and the strain that comes with that situation. We pray that You'd give healing and encouragement.

Pray also, Father, for those who are traveling on business or vacations, or whatever the case may be. We pray that You'd give them safe trips and bring them back safely. Pray, Father, for our nation and this time of decision making. Pray that You'd give wisdom to the people of this land and that men and women would be chosen for high office who are equipped and qualified. I pray that those who would enter into government would be a people that have a desire for the principles of godliness that we find the Scriptures. We pray that You would give us wise leaders and we pray that those who are leading would be given wisdom and that this land would be blessed.

We pray, Father, for ourselves again. We pray You'd bless us in our time together now. We pray You'd bless us this evening as we return for the evening meeting and pray that You'd bless us as we come together to remember our Lord and His sacrifice and remember His return, as we look forward to that. Bless us now as we sing our final hymn, that it would prepare our hearts for the ministry of the Word, and we pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] Whenever things are going well in the life of a Christian or in the life of a church, for that matter, you can be sure that trouble is on the way, that opposition will arise. Satan, the accuser of the saints, does not stand idly by while the gospel progresses and while Christians grow in their faith and in maturity. I think that's an important principle to know, particularly if you're a young Christian. Right now, you may be experiencing joy in your life in Christ, the peace that comes with the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and that Christ will never leave you and that you have eternal life. But be ready because, as Peter writes, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

I'm not suggesting by this that the Christian life is a life of toil and trials and there's very little joy and it's a rather difficult experience. There are many trials. I

think we need to be aware of them, but that’s not to say that it’s not a life of joy also. It is. It’s a life of joy. It’s a life of peace. And because of that, Satan will try to rob you of your joy. He’ll try to rob you of that peace and make life difficult for you. He may do that in a variety of ways. He may do it by stirring up opposition at work or at school, depending on your situation. He may stir up opposition at home among your family, among those whom you love and whom you assume love you. Because he wants to frustrate the Christian in his or her Christian life and Christian growth and wants to frustrate the Christian in his or her ministry and the ministry of the church. He wants to attempt to thwart the gospel and its progress.

We can see that from the life of individuals. We see that, though, in our passage in the life of our Lord, in His own ministry. He’s been preaching throughout Galilee to large crowds. In fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 9, he has entered into Galilee of the Gentiles. Many Gentiles in this region of Galilee at this time in Israel’s history. So it was a place of darkness, a place of ignorance. And so Isaiah speaks of a great light entering into that place of darkness and with Christ that light has come, and it has shone.

Now, to this point in Mark’s gospel, the Lord has been enthusiastically received and He has preached openly. But with chapters 2 and 3 that changes. Lord runs up against opposition from the religious leaders, from the clergy of the day. Christ came preaching the gospel of God, the light of God’s truth, but men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds are evil. And so whenever light and darkness meet, they clash and there’s a conflict. And oftentimes the greatest opposition to the gospel comes from not the men and women that we consider the most sinful, but those whom we think are the most righteous. It comes from the men and women of religion.

God’s work is never ultimately frustrated. He causes the wrath of man to praise Him and He uses that wrath and He uses that opposition to His own glory. and we see that here because the opposition of the scribes really serves to clarify the issues in our Lord’s ministry. And it’s interesting as you study through church history, you see that that tends to be the pattern. A church has grown in its understanding of theological issues and of the nature of its beliefs. Not so much in times of peace, but

in times of conflict as those who have come on the scene and challenged the truth of the gospel have forced men and women in the church to think deeply and to consider what they believe, and through that they have come to more clarity in their understanding of God’s Word.

And in a sense, we see that here because of the conflict that arises the issues in our Lord’s ministry are made even more clear and through this opposition there is given to our Lord the occasion for Him to further reveal Himself as King and Messiah and show His power not only over sickness, which has been clearly demonstrated to this point in His ministry, but now His power over sin with His authority to forgive. The great lesson of this passage is that there is hope for the sinner regardless of how great that sinner is because Christ has the power to forgive. Earlier, the Lord had left Capernaum. He had turned away from the crowds at a time when we would think that He would embrace them. He leaves them and He sets off on a tour of Galilee, entering into their villages and synagogues, preaching and doing miracles.

And now, in chapter 2, He returns to Capernaum, which was His base of operations. Must have been very tired because Mark tells us that this is several days afterwards. So He’s been on a long and arduous tour preaching and ministering and now He comes home, comes to the place that He calls home, but even here, in this place, where you might think He’d find rest, where He’d find privacy, He finds none because word quickly spread throughout the town that the Lord had returned and the crowds, they returned and filled the home in which He was staying, probably Peter’s house, filled it to the point where it was overflowing so that even the door was blocked.

No doubt they had come for more miracles, but He wasn’t working miracles. He was speaking the Word to them. Probably preaching the gospel of God, the coming of the kingdom, as He had preached earlier when He first comes on the scene, and the need of repentance, the need of faith, it was a message of hope, message of liberty, the message of joy and salvation, something that they weren’t hearing from the scribes and the Pharisees, preaching to them the gospel of God.

Now to visualize the next scene and the scene that really is the heart of this passage and sets the context for us in which the things that our Lord does and says

take place, to visualize that, we must first understand the layout of a typical Palestinian house, the kind of house that Peter owned and our Lord was staying in at this time. They were usually small, one-room structures with a flat roof and a stairway on the outside that would lead up to the rooftop. Many events would take place on the rooftops, chores such as washing and this kind of thing. In fact, if you go to Israel today, you can see basically the same architecture, flat roofs where a lot of activity takes place. The roof itself was usually made of wooden beams with thatch and compacted earth. In order to shed the rain. And sometimes tiles were laid between the beams and the thatch and earth was then placed over them. I've seen houses over there that had grass growing on the roofs, and it may have been the same situation here.

The events that follow must have left a deep impression on Peter's memory since it was his house that underwent this surprise renovation. And you can just see him recount this story to Mark with perhaps a smile on his face as he remembered events that had taken place some 30 years previously. Four men came bringing a paralytic. He's lying on his pallet. No details are given of the man's condition, but from the determination of his four friends, it seems very clear that his condition was desperate. They had arrived late and saw that from the size of the crowd, it would be impossible for them to enter. But that didn't discourage them. They thought for a moment. They saw what they had to do. And then they carried their friend up the stairway to the top of the roof, where they proceeded to dig up the thatch and the earth and remove tiles until they had dug a hole of sufficient size to lower the man down into the room below.

You can imagine the disturbance that all of this caused as the Lord was teaching and the people were hanging on every word that He was saying, they heard this commotion going on on the roof above them. And then as they perhaps tried to dismiss it or their minds were distracted a bit, suddenly dirt begins to fall from the ceiling and fall on some of them, and then suddenly this man on a pallet drops out of the ceiling. It probably was distracting to most, if not annoying to many, and particularly to one particular group that was sitting there.

And when the Lord saw it, He didn't see a disturbance. He saw faith. There was nothing these men wouldn't do that would keep them from getting their friend to the Lord. I think in that we have in them a good example of ambitious, resourceful evangelism. They were unconventional. And sometimes situations call for the unconventional, for measures that are out of the ordinary and sometimes upset people.

I'm reminded as I was thinking about this of George Whitfield. When it was God's time for revival in England, He raised up Whitfield as His man to ignite the great awakening. When he began preaching the gospel, the poor came to hear him. The middle classes came to hear him. The upper classes came. They all poured out to hear Whitfield preach, and multitudes came to faith. It was in a particularly dark period in England's history and multitudes were changed and brought to saving knowledge of our Lord. Wherever he preached, churches became so crowded that at times, he writes in his journal, the steam from the people's breath would condense and fall from the rafters like rain. Often, the churches overflowed with people. The doorways like in our passage were blocked and there was no room left, so people were turned away for lack of room in these churches.

Well, it wasn't long before the clergy of the Church of England became alarmed by his popularity and so they began to accuse him of fanaticism and opposed him doctrinally on such issues as the new birth. They were offended by the idea that he was preaching, that men are born in need of the new birth. They attacked him on that, on his doctrine of the assurance of salvation, and many churches that had originally been open to him were then closed to him. But still people came. And so Whitfield decided to go preach in the fields in the open air. It was unconventional. It was considered undignified. And even some of his friends called it a mad notion. But he did it. He said, “The churches are closed against me. Bless God, the fields are open.” And thousands came and he was able to reach thousands upon thousands, not only in England, but in America, as well, and the great awakening spread from England to North America.

Well, if we can draw an application from these four men in terms of evangelism, it's that within the principals of Scripture, we should be aggressive with the gospel and we should, if need be, be unconventional if that's what's called for in

our presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And their conduct illustrates the fact that difficulties don't present a barrier to faith. They may present a temporary barrier, but often they're only a test of our faith, which will increase as we exercise it in the midst of difficulty and barriers. When we meet with difficulties in situations that seem to be something of a stone wall to what we have perceived to be the will of God, we're not to assume by that that God is saying no. These men didn't. They looked at what seemed to be an impossible situation and as they put their mind to it and they thought carefully about it, they knew what they could do and they did it.

Now, there is a time when we face difficulties that we have to wait, wait upon the Lord. And that's a time for study, for consideration, for analyzing the situation and then looking at it in light of the principles of God's Word, and spending time in prayer and seeking wisdom and wise counsel from other individuals. But there comes a point when we must act. And that's what we see here. Because, you see, it's very easy to take a passive attitude as though the Holy Spirit is just going to work it out.

Well, He'll work things out, but He expects us to use our wisdom and to use our energy and to be diligent about the situations that we face. And oftentimes it is by means of those barriers that we find the will of God. And sometimes the will of God is found by going through them in unconventional ways, as these men did. He expects us to act and we see that in these men. They did act and in their acting, the Lord recognized their resourcefulness and the faith that lay behind their action. They wouldn't have taken such drastic measures if they weren't convinced, if they did not believe in the Lord's power to heal and in His willingness to heal.

Now, genuine faith is recognized not only from words. It's recognized there, but not only from words. It's also recognized from our works. And that's the natural fruit of a living, vital faith. If you have a genuine faith, then it will be seen in your conduct, in your activity. James makes this very clear in his epistle in the second chapter, where he writes, “Show me your faith without the works and I will show you my faith by my works.” Faith without works is dead.

And Mark writes that the Lord saw their faith. He saw their faith because He saw what they did. They haven't said a word to this point. In fact, not a word of conversation is recorded between them and the Lord throughout this entire passage.

They’ve only acted. But in their deeds, the Lord could see the faith that lay behind what they did. And further, we know from what follows and the way He will deal with another group that is in that audience that the Lord not only can see deeds that people do, He can see the heart itself and looks upon the heart. And in looking upon the hearts of these men, He can see the true faith that was there.

Now when Mark writes that He saw their faith, he meant that He saw the faith of all five. Sometimes it’s thought and perhaps just at first reading you might have thought, “Well, he’s talking about the men that brought this paralytic.” Well, it’s not the faith of the four that led to the healing of this man. The faith of this man is included in this pronoun “their.” It’s all five men. After all, we would assume that this man had agreed to be brought by them to the Lord and he had agreed to all of the measures that they took, these extreme measures that followed when they couldn’t get into the room. And so we would assume that he is included in that pronoun “their,” and that certainly is consistent with the teaching of Scripture, that an individual’s faith is the means of that individual obtaining blessing.

Sometimes saying of the faith of our fathers, but we’re not saved by the faith of our fathers, or any of the spiritual blessings that we might be born into. And many of us have been born into many spiritual blessings, into Christian homes, opportunities to hear the gospel and the teaching of Scripture, but that of itself does not save. A godly mother and father does not save a child. It is that child’s faith. Individual faith obtains the individual personal blessings, and so it calls for personal faith in our Lord.

And seeing faith in the paralytic the Lord addresses him. He says, “My son –” That’s an expression of affection, a term that was intended to cheer him, to give him confidence the Lord was not angry with him for this interruption. In fact, the Lord was delighted with it. He sees faith and there’s nothing more pleasing to the Lord than faith, and He sees it in this man, and He has words of hope, too. He is to be cheered because of what our Lord says. And what He says is a bit surprising. He says, “Your sins are forgiven.” That’s surprising because we would have expected Him to say, “My son, be healed,” or “be cleansed.”

Presumably, he came for healing, not for forgiveness. It seems a little inappropriate at first glance, and yet on further reflection, it was the most appropriate thing of all because there is a fundamental connection between sin and sickness. All disease, all affliction is rooted ultimately in sin, and looking on this man, the Lord’s eyes saw beyond his physical paralysis to, as one writer says, the paralysis of the soul. He saw a sinner, and very likely a sinner who was weighed down by the guilt of his sin when he was brought to our Lord. And the first words that our Lord speaks to him were words of hope.

Now that’s not to suggest that the Lord was tracing this man’s sickness to a particular sin that he had committed. That was a very common notion in our Lord’s day, that a man with a great affliction must have been a great sinner. Job’s friends thought that and as you read through that book, you see their argumentation with him. They try to convince him that all of the trials and the afflictions that have come upon him and his household are due to some sin that he’s committed, and he searches his life and he can find nothing that he has done that is wrong. Not suggesting that he didn’t think he was a sinful man, but he can trace his problems to no particular sin. Well, they try to convince him that there has to be a sin there that he’s ignoring, and perhaps it’s just his pride or some such problem as that. Well, that was their theology. If you live a good life, you won’t suffer. If you suffer, it’s because you’ve sinned.

Now, the Lord had to disabuse the disciples of that error, as well. John chapter 9 when they saw a blind man, a man who’d been blind from birth, they asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?” And the Lord answered them, “Neither; but *it was* in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.” So suffering is not always due to a particular sin in a person’s life. I say not always because sometimes affliction does come due to sin. Sometimes the Lord has to discipline us, has to chasten us with physical affliction because there’s a sin that hasn’t been dealt with. Now, I think that when that is the case that the sin is rather obvious to the sinner. I don’t think God plays guessing games with us, but you sometimes see that.

A person goes through a protracted illness and they wonder, “Why has this come upon me?” And they begin to wonder, “Is it a sin that I’ve committed?” And

that might be a valid question. But if we search and search and can find no particular sin, then I think we can reasonably conclude that that's not the reason for the affliction. It's not always due to a particular sin. Sometimes sickness comes not so much as discipline, but in order to work a work of God within us, to display, as our Lord told His disciples, the works of God in that particular individual. And God does great works in our life through affliction, through trial. Sometimes He produces a work of patience within us. Sometimes He builds such characteristics as wisdom, understanding, compassion, characteristics that really come ultimately through trials and difficulties. We grow and we mature in difficult times. And so sometimes that's the reason.

And here, we should probably understand the connection between the man's sin and his suffering as not a particular sin that he had committed, but his sinfulness, his condition as a result of the fall, which is common to all men and women. Sin separates man from God, and that separation has resulted in all kinds of misery in the world, and there can be no final remedy to suffering until the cause of suffering is removed with the forgiveness of sin. As Alexander MacLaren wrote, “The taproot of all misery is sin and until it is grubbed up, hacking at the branches is a sad waste of time.” Well, that's really what the Lord was calling attention to here. He was going to the source of the problem and doing it in a way that He knew was unusual and would capture the attention of these people, and particularly one group that was sitting there. So He deals with the paralytic in a rather unconventional way, but in doing so, He was directing the attention of the people from, as one writer puts it, “the lower to the higher cure or miracle.” And the highest cure or miracle that can be performed is that of forgiveness of sin.

Now in the audience, there were not only friends of the Lord, but also foes. Mark writes in verse 6 that some of the scribes were sitting there. These were the teachers of the law, men who were mentioned back in chapter 1 when our Lord first begins to minister in the synagogue, men over whom the people had elevated Christ. Remember that they said that our Lord taught with authority, not as the scribes. Well, the scribes were the men of training. They were the rabbis. They were the scholars of the day. And the Lord's ministry was a blow to their prestige, a blow to their

position. This new teacher had come along and He was brilliant. He was clear in His teaching. He was relevant. He was engaging. He hadn't been trained in their schools, and yet he knew the Bible better than they did, and He could teach better than they could teach.

And the people were fascinated with Him. If they weren't talking to the rabbis about this new Teacher, then they were leaving the rabbis to sit under His teaching. It was very difficult for these men to see their congregations turning away from them and going to this other person. And so they became jealous and had nothing of the attitude of John, who said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” And as they sat in that house, the sight must have rubbed salt in the wounds of their pride because here they had this house that's filled with people to overflowing that have come to hear Him teach, and they knew they've never filled a house with people wanting to hear their instruction in the Scriptures. And Luke writes that the scribes came from every village of Galilee, and from Judea, and Jerusalem.

So the Lord's influence was widespread. His reputation had spread throughout all of Israel and His popularity in teaching were so disturbing to the religious authorities that they brought in the head men from Jerusalem. These were probably men who were members of the Sanhedrin, and so they had come to examine this new teacher and all that He was saying and doing. And as they sat there, perhaps with pieces of ceiling and dust on them – I'd like to think that was the way they were sitting there – their minds were already made up. They had judged Him already and they were just looking for the opportunity to render their verdict, and that opportunity came when the Lord made this statement about the man's sin, a statement of forgiveness. And began to reason and think within their hearts about what He had said, and that's recorded in verse 7.

They were reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” Now, they were right on one point. God alone can forgive sins. We, too, forgive sins, of course. In our Lord's model prayer, He instructs us to pray “Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.” But that's forgiveness in a relative sense, when we resolve not to take revenge. Only God can forgive in the absolute sense. Only God can remove the guilt

of sin. Only He can remove the penalty of eternal punishment for sin, and that's what the scribes were referring to here, and that's the sense in which they were right. Only God can do that. But rather than reason only God can forgive sins, this man forgives sins, therefore this man is God; they reasoned only God can forgive sins, this man is not God, therefore, this man blasphemes. And in saying in their heart that He is blaspheming, they were saying He deserves death, and that's what they had in their heart. They had murder in their hearts for Him, and they were there to seek an opportunity to carry that out.

Now, in fairness to them, was that all that unreasonable on their part when you consider the situation, consider what our Lord was doing and saying? After all, it's one thing to claim authority. It's another thing to have it. It's one thing for a person to say that he can do something. It's quite another for that person to actually do it. And when a man comes along claiming authority that belongs to God, making a claim that would indicate that He is God, you would think that there's room for skepticism here, a room for wondering and doubting. After all, God is a spirit and this was a man who was making these claims. And yet if they had been well-versed in the Scriptures, as they should have been, being authorities of the law, they should have been looking forward to a visitation from God because all through the Old Testament, there is that prophecy that He would visit His people. And in Isaiah 9:6, two names were given of the Messiah, and they are “Mighty God.” That's His name. And “Eternal Father.” They look at His life and they could find nothing to fault Him for. He lived a faultless life. He lived a sinless life. And further, the very miracles that our Lord had been performing, and He had performed many of them, were miracles that had been prophesied would be done by the Messiah when He came. Prophecy was being answered with fulfillment for those who had eyes to see.

Well, they soon found that He had eyes to see what they thought was hidden from Him. They kept their judgments to themselves. They kept them private in their thinking, not wanting to voice them before this crowd that was very favorably disposed toward our Lord. But as they learned, nothing can be hidden from the Lord. And we read in verse 8 that immediately Jesus perceived what they were thinking. Now, this wasn't knowledge that He gained by simply reading their faces. We

sometimes think that we see an expression on somebody's face that we know what they're thinking, that they're either approving or disapproving of what we're saying, and that's maybe the case, maybe a good educated guess. But we never know for sure.

We can't know the heart of a person, and that's not what's going on here. The Lord was not making some kind of educated guess as a result of previous confrontations with these men. This was infallible knowledge of which His divine nature informed His human nature. And so when He asked, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?” He must have unnerved them. They thought they were keeping this all inside and suddenly He knows exactly what they're saying. It's like they were standing before Him naked, exposed. I'm sure it unnerved them, but in saying this to them, He was giving them a further reason for trusting His words and not their judgments. After all, just as God alone can forgive sins, God alone can search the hearts of men and women.

When the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4 witnessed this knowledge that He had of her, secrets that He couldn't have known, she was amazed and she knew that she was talking to a man who was more than a man. And she responded by going back to her village and saying, “Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done.” This is not the Christ, is it? Now I don't know that she concluded from what He said to her at the well there in Samaria that this is the Son of God. I think she came to that understanding, but she never would have arrived at that understanding if she first did not come to the conviction and the belief that this is more than a man, this man is sent from God. He is a man of God.

Before we can arrive at the greater truth, we have to arrive first at the lesser truth, at the more fundamental truth. But these men who were sitting before the Lord in this house evidently were not willing to grasp even that, that He was of God. They remained recalcitrant in their thinking. They were unmoved in their attitude toward Him and so He challenges them with a question in verse 9. “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your pallet and walk’?” Well, of course, neither of the two are easier. Both are equally impossible for man. Both are equally easy for God.

But from the standpoint of the scribes, it would certainly seem to be easier to say “your sins are forgiven,” since that’s something that can never be verified, and forgiveness of sins doesn’t register in some physical manifestation. It’s a spiritual reality and it’s unseen. A person’s countenance may change and their attitude may change, but there are no visible signs that forgiveness has taken place in a physical kind of way. It’s hard to verify such as that. But that’s not the case with the command “Arise and walk,” because that command is either followed by the evidence or seen to be an empty statement. And so if the Lord can just as easily pronounce a man healed with healing effect, then the burden of proof rests with the scribes to show that He has no authority to forgive sins. If He can prove His power to heal, how can they dispute His power to forgive?

And so the Lord continues in verses 10 and 11, “ ‘But in order 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, take your pallet and go home.’ ” The Lord gives that command in the authority of the Son of Man. That’s a very important title and this is the first time in the book of Mark that He uses it. In all it occurs, I think, 14 times in Mark’s gospel. It our Lord’s favorite way of identifying Himself and it’s a Messianic title. It’s a title that’s taken from the book of Daniel. Daniel 7:13, Daniel sees a vision, a night vision, in which he sees “One like the Son of Man approaching the Ancient of Days and receiving from Him dominion, glory and a kingdom, a kingdom in which all the nations of the earth will serve Him.” And so it’s a title of a heavenly person with divine authority, a heavenly person who is a king, who is at the same time a person who partakes of our nature. He is the Son of Man and that suggests His mission of identifying with man.

Later in 10:45, he declares, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, – ” even though in Daniel chapter 7 it says that the nations of the world will serve Him – but in this first coming, He “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” So there He makes very clear His mission. He identified with men as the Son of Man in order to die for men and women. So in the face of the scribes’ unbelief and their opposition, He identifies Himself as the heavenly person of Daniel 7, the Messiah, the King. And it’s in that authority, the authority of king, that

He commands the paralytic to, “Rise, take up [his] pallet, and go home.” And we read in verse 12 that, “he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all.” Not a word was said by this man, but he left the crowd in amazement, and all “were glorifying God and saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’ ”

Now by “all,” Mark means all without distinction. The majority of the people that were there. Not all without exception. The scribes were not glorifying God. They were severely chastened. They were even more resolute in their determination to destroy our Lord. In 3:6, we read of their plot to do that. And if later events are any gauge on the spiritual condition of Capernaum, then the amazement that the people showed and the glory that they gave is not an expression of true saving faith. Maybe what some theologians call “miraculous faith,” meaning faith that God can or will do a miracle, and in this case faith that He had done a miracle.

But it’s not saving faith. It may be a step toward saving faith, but of itself it’s not saving faith. And that this was not saving faith on their part seems to be clear from a pronouncement that the Lord would make later, recorded in Matthew 11, when He curses that city. “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.” He goes on to state that it would be more terrible for the city of Capernaum than for Sodom in the day of judgment. In other words, there are degrees of sin and degrees of punishment, and the greatest of sins is sin against the light.

We might think, “Well, the sins of Sodom are the greatest of sins. Those heinous sins that characterize that city and that society, that’s what we think of as the most grotesque and weighty of sins.” And yet, I think it’s clear from the Scriptures that the greatest of sins are the sins against the light, being exposed to the truth, coming to an understanding of the truth, and then rejecting it. It’s not enough to acknowledge God and His power, as these people did. It’s not enough even to acknowledge the truth of our Lord’s teaching and acknowledge that He is divine. He must be believed in. He must be trusted. One must recognize that He or she is a sinner in need of a savior and see that savior in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in that light, the paralytic is the true picture of the sinner coming to Christ. Of ourselves, we are helpless. We are spiritually lame because sin darkens the mind. It enslaves the will. That’s not a popular thought, but it’s very clear thought from the Scriptures. Paul taught that. Listen to Paul from Romans 8:6-8. “For the mind set on the flesh is death, –” he’s speaking there of the unregenerate mind, the unbelieving person “ – but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Man naturally does not subject himself to God, and further, he is not, as Paul says, even able to do so. Man is helpless. He’s like that lame man. Even faith is an impossibility in of ourselves. He says – Paul says – we cannot please God. Well, does faith please God? Of course it does. The author of Hebrews makes it clear that without faith it is impossible to please God. We’re like that lame man in and of ourselves and that’s why Christ came. See, that’s no reason for despair. To look at our inability is no reason to be without hope, because Christ came for just that kind of person. He did not come for the righteous, but the unrighteous. He did not come for the strong, but the weak. He did not come for the living, but the dead. And He is sufficient to overcome our inability, draw sinners to Himself, give them life and power and faith.

Listen to what Paul writes earlier in the book of Romans in 5:6. “For while we were still helpless, –” like that paralytic “ – at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” He came for the sinner. He came for the helpless. And He’s sufficient for all of us in our greatest sin and in our most helpless state. Now, if you say in your heart, “I’m not interested in that. In fact, I really don’t believe anything that man is saying or anything that is written in this book,” well, that’s just the evidence that you are spiritually lame. It’s the evidence that you are in great need of grace, that you can’t even see your need. Your need is great. All men are born into this world with the need of a savior. And so you must look to God for the grace to open your eyes, look to Him for the grace of salvation. And if you sense that need

and you have a desire for the life that can only be found in Christ, then perhaps He’s drawing you to Himself. Don’t resist. Respond in faith. Respond to the only one who can save, and He will enable you to believe. It’s not enough to believe good things about our Lord. You must believe in Jesus Christ. You must believe in Him as the Son of God, the Son of Man, the savior of sinners, who alone can forgive sins.

If you have not believed in Christ as savior, I urge you look to Him, believe in Him, and be saved. And all who come to Him, He receives with the same joy, the same compassion that He expressed to that paralytic. “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Forgiveness of sins doesn’t come through our works. It comes through faith and faith alone. If you’ve never believed in Christ, I urge you believe in Him, enter into the forgiveness of sins and to life everlasting. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the truth that we see here, that there is forgiveness for the greatest of sinners, and Christ is sufficient for all our needs and all who turn to Him are received with joy and forgiveness. Father, if there be any in attendance who do not know Christ as Savior, we pray that You’d give them no rest or peace until they find rest in Thee. And encourage us with the truths that we see here, the sufficiency of Christ, the grace that’s been extended, and give us the resolve, the resourcefulness to serve You faithfully, preaching the gospel and living a life that’s honoring to Your name, honoring to Your Son, and beneficial to others. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.