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Title: "Who Can Forgive Sins But God Alone?"
Text: Mark 2:1-12
Theme: Jesus has power to forgive sin. He has conquered sin and its consequence.

Introduction:

The dogs lie crouched at the door waiting to nip the heels of all who would enter. The hurting begs to come but barred by the threat. Jesus stands bridging the gap and willing to throw Himself into the path of the dogs to heal the hurting.

Mark 2:1-12 sets the tone for what is about to follow. The note is struck and rings true and clear; "only God forgives, Jesus forgives, Jesus is God."

What was Peter thinking when his roof was busted through? What was the dynamic between the "vulgar" audience and the scribe? Did the scribes micromanage and judge? Were they critical of the common person?

The religious leaders of His day were already on edge since the crowds compared and contrasted His teaching with that of the scribes and concluded, "He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (1:22). They did not like playing second fiddle to an itinerate teacher.

"The subject of the verb is never identified in the story for the reason that the center of gravity of this story is not the healing but the remarkable claim to legitimate authority made by Jesus." <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#12>

"The administration of forgiveness, which according to the scribes is the office of God alone, acutely raised the question of Jesus' identity. Being God incarnate, of the same nature as God, he had authority on earth to act as God (Chrysostom). If Christ forgives sins, he must be truly God, for no one can forgive sins but God (Irenaeus, Novatian [The Trinity 13])." (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 26).

THE BIG PICTURE:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ in Galilee – Early Galilean Ministry – His authority challenged concerning the forgiving of sin (2:1-12)

- His authority challenged (2:1-3:35 [Ministry in Conflict])
 - "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" – concerning the forgiving of sin (2:1-12)
 - "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" – concerning the friends He kept (vv. 13-17)
 - "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" – concerning the fast and food (vv. 18-22)
 - "Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" – concerning the forsaking of the Sabbath (2:23-3:6)

“Mark’s way of telling the tale makes it a signpost. It points on, through the twists and turns of the gospel story, to Jesus’ trial before Caiaphas in chapter 14. **The story is a tiny version of the whole gospel.**” (Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 17)

“The five narratives found in chapters 2:1-3:6 share in common the element of controversy. It is unlikely that these five incidents happened consecutively or even at the same period in Jesus’ ministry. Together they indicate that the intrusion of the radically new situation provoked sustained conflict with the old and was the historical occasion for the decision that Jesus must be put to death.” (William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT, [Eerdmans: 1974], 91)

“The sequence extending from Mark 2:1 through 3:6 consists of five so-called ‘Controversy-stories,’ accounts of disputes between Jesus and opposing interpreters or interpretations of the Jewish law.” <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#12>

Up to this point, Mark paints a picture of wide acclaim and popular consensus. Chapter two is pivotal as to the open opposition He will begin to face in His public ministry.

“To trace the growth of this unfriendly feeling till it ripened into bitter hatred and avowed hostility, is one great object of the history which now presents this dark side of the picture, and exhibits the original causes, or at least the earliest displays of disaffection, with the very words and actions which occasioned them.” (Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Thornapple Commentaries, 1858, reprint 1980, 33).

Questions:

1. Is faith transferable?
2. Can sin be forgiven in any other way than through God?
3. Has the impact of the gospel lessened in our cultural circumstances?
4. Is sin always the immediate source for all sickness?
5. Why is faith necessary for sin to be forgiven?
6. What is the relationship between faith and forgiveness?

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know that only God can forgive sin.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Jesus as the sin-forgiver.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of having our sins forgiven.

The Eternal Value:

There is nothing as powerful as knowing that your sins are forgiven. Multitudes lie in bondage to sin’s crippling grip. Guilt, bitterness, hatred, scorn, such are the fruits of sin’s sowing. Such offspring cripple the soul and destroy the body. It is only Jesus who can deliver His people from their sins. Jesus brings healing. It is part of the power of the cross.

The Present Danger:

Our present danger is to deny Jesus the authority of God in forgiving sin. We are to trust Jesus in sickness and in health, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in good times and in bad. Jesus is Lord and Savior. It is possible for us to deny the power of God to deliver people from sin's penalty, power, and presence. We begin to believe the devil's lie that although He is able, He will not act in our behalf. He only does what we desire in the lives of others. Somehow we are forgotten and neglected. Friend, God knows you and is right there with you.

I cannot afford to fall into the trap of playing church. What we believe and declare about God is true and is real and does change lives.

The God of the Bible is incapable of being controlled or tamed by the finite expressions of sinful man. He roams the world in princely garb. He is the Lord of glory and He has power over all doctrine, disease, and death itself. He will not and cannot be silenced by the outbursts of the rebellious few.

The Story Line:

Jesus is the promised Messiah, the one who will deliver His people from their sins. He is the one who brings hope to the despairing, healing to the diseased, and wholeness to the dysfunctional. He is the last Adam who succeeds, He is the Israel that conquers temptation and leads His people in victory into the land of rest. This is Mark's "gospel" and it is the truth of which we are to embrace.

How will they best hear?

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It took faith to do what was done by the paralytic's friends. How is our faith showing itself?

In each of the stories we are reading there are three movements: the immediate environment (vv. 1, 2), the Kingdom expression (vv. 3-7), and finally the divine explanation (vv. 8-12).

- I. Introduction - the general setting (vv. 1, 2).
 - A. There is a span of time between chapters 1 and 2.
 - B. There is a significant crowd gathered at His home (vv. 1a, 2a).

"Jesus was in his own house in Capernaum, where his mother and other relatives dwelt, and not in Peter's house as some suppose." (R.C.H. Lenski, Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel, 97).

Think of the tremendous pressure placed on the religious establishment to determine what was happening. People were looking to them to give a defining word concerning these things. Think also of how glaring their failure was to assist those who were sick

with disease. I am sure many religious leaders had pastor's hearts for the sheep, but some were truly threatened by the workings of Christ.

"This was the highest testimony yet borne to our Lord's growing influence and the necessity increasingly felt by the ecclesiastics throughout the country of coming to some definite judgment regarding Him." <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.iii.html>

C. As was His custom He taught the Word to them (v. 2b).

"Preaching" is in the imperfect tense. This is something Jesus has done in the past and continues to do in the present.

What Word was Jesus teaching? I believe we should see the continuity between 1:14 and 15 with the message He preached. He is calling the hearer to repent and believe the good news about the Kingdom.

II. The power of faith (vv. 3-5).

A. His friends brought him (vv. 3, 4)

There is an energy and earnestness to their determination. Those who brought their friend embraced their own helplessness and hopelessness in the face of an unconquerable situation.

Although the paralytic was physically incapable of resisting the advances of his friends, it is to be assumed that he consented to their actions on his behalf.

"Their eagerness to reach Christ, and their faith in his capacity to heal, were shown by their extraordinary method of [affecting] an entrance." (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, Thornapple Commentaries, 1858, reprint 1980, 34).

"The roof probably was formed by beams and rafters across which matting, branches, and twigs, covered by hard-trodden earth, were laid. This is not strange in the light of the rediscovered living quarters of Capernaum, where one-story rooms were covered by light roofs reached through a flight of steps from the courtyard. (Rogers & Rogers, 70)

B. Jesus healed the infirmed because of faith (v. 5)

Our Lord saw the faith of all involved -- that of the paralytic and his friends. Up to this point nothing in the story is unusual.

- He has taught, (1:14, 21, 22, 38, 39)
- He has healed sickness, (1:29-34) and
- Cast out demons (1:23-27).

Here, however, He leads with, "Your sins are forgiven." There is significant turmoil and agitation of mind and soul among those who heard these words.

"The extraordinary, ardent, persistent action of the four in getting the man to Jesus was visible evidence of their faith in His ability to heal. Although their bold action interrupted His teaching activity, Jesus did not rebuke the intrusion but rather approvingly noted the expression of their faith. He indirectly commended their faith by turning at once to their suffering friend." (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 64).

"To the Jews a sick man was a man with whom God was angry." (William Barclay, Mark, 47). Sickness is a consequence of sin either directly or indirectly. By forgiving the individual Jesus was negating the source of his sickness.

"Healing is a gracious movement of God into the sphere of withering and decay which are the tokens of death at work in a man's life. Consequently every healing is a driving back of death and an invasion of the province of sin." (William L. Lane, The Gospel of Mark, NICNT, [Eerdmans, 1974], 94)

It is of interest to note the term used in addressing the individual, "son." It is a term of endearment. It is parental and of family.

"It is here intended to express, not only kindness and compassion, but a new spiritual kindred or relation, which had just been formed between the speaker and the man whom he addressed." (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, Thornapple Commentaries, 1858, reprint 1980, 35).

Jesus embraces the individual and speaks words of healing, "your sins are forgiven."

"' [Your] sins are forgiven' - The positive declaration of fact, meeting the man's deepest need. The verb stands emphatically before the subject." (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 64). "Jesus was deliberately arrogating to Himself the prerogative of God to forgive sins." (Hiebert, Mark, 65).

The forgiveness Jesus spoke is different than what we communicate among our peers and family members.

"Something in his voice, though, made them all realize this was different. This forgiveness went deeper than mere domestic disputes. Jesus was speaking with a quiet authority which went down into the paralyzed man's innermost being. Not surprisingly, those around felt uneasy. Only the priests could declare forgiveness, speaking in the name of God. If that's what the man needed, his friends should take him to the Temple in Jerusalem, not to a wandering preacher." (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 17).

The structure of the statement shows the forgiveness to be immediate.

III. The power of forgiveness (vv. 6-12a)

A. The problem of forgiveness (vv. 6, 7)

Jesus opposed by the scribes. They accurately assessed the situation. They accused Jesus of blasphemy (v. 7). "The scribes devoted themselves to the study and teaching of the laws and traditions which governed all of Jewish life." (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 64).

The Scribes sat as representatives of the Sanhedrin.

"The Sanhedrin was their supreme court. One of its great functions was to be the guardian of orthodoxy. No doubt they had annexed an honorable place in the front of the crowd and were sitting there critically watching everything that was going on. When they heard Jesus say to the man that his sins were forgiven it came as a shattering shock. It was an essential of the Jewish faith that only God could forgive sins. For any man to claim to do so was to insult God; that was blasphemy and the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning (Lev. 24:16)" (William Barclay, Mark, 49).

Although their initial response to our Lord was internal ("reasoning in their hearts" v. 6) there was a definite change in the temperature and tone of the immediate surrounding. Jesus sensed the shift in tone.

Only God could forgive sin and heal sickness. It would have been easy for Jesus to say, "You are forgiven." It would be another thing altogether to heal the man of his sickness.

There was strong disdain for what just transpired.

B. The picture of forgiveness (vv. 8-12a)

Jesus responds to His critics (vv. 8-11).

"This is the only place in the Gospel where the pardon of sins is associated with the Son of Man. The purpose of Mark's commentary is to make the community of believers aware that they have experienced the messianic forgiveness of the Son of Man." (William L. Lane, The Gospel of Mark, NICNT, [Eerdmans: 1974], 98)

"This official application of the term [Son of Man] accounts for the remarkable and interesting fact that it is never used of any other person in the gospels, nor of Christ by any but himself." (Joseph Addison Alexander, The Gospel According to Mark, Thornapple Commentaries, 1858, reprint 1980, 38).

"On their own stated beliefs the man could not be cured, unless he was forgiven. He was cured, therefore he was forgiven. Therefore, Jesus' claim to forgive sin must be true. Jesus must have left a completely baffled set of legal experts; and, worse, he must

have left them in a baffled rage. In this incident Jesus signed his own death warrant – and he knew it” (William Barclay, Mark, 50).

The purpose of the story is found in verse 10. “The key sentence, then, is the one in verse 10.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 17)

The intent of the statement “was not merely a question of His ability but His authority or moral right to do so.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 66).

Jesus gives a three-fold command to the paralytic personally.

“First, ‘get up,’ testing the man’s faith. It would be shown by his cooperation with the command, believing that he could do as told. Second, ‘pick up your pallet,’ demanding his prompt obedience as a definite act. Finally, ‘go home,’ ordering him to be on his way home. The command implies that he was a resident of Capernaum. He would be a standing witness there to Jesus’ authority to forgive sins.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 68).

“Take up your bed. Carry the very mat that once carried you. Change places, so that what was the proof of your sickness may now give testimony to your soundness.” (Peter Chrysologus, Homily 50:6, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 26).

“Says BENGEL: “The bed had borne the man: now the man bore the bed.”
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/jamieson/jfb.xi.ii.iii.html>

He commanded the man to do what was impossible for him to do. Something had to have changed in order for that man to be able to pick up his bed. His “new birth” preceded the verbalizing of faith. Yet Jesus healed because he saw faith first.

Our Lord has authority, not just power, to forgive sin. This is the idea of Matthew 28:19, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” There is nothing He cannot do should He so will it.

IV. The impact on the audience (v. 12b)

What just happened “made the scribal unbelief inexcusable.” I would have to believe that even the scribes were utterly stunned by what they were seeing. Their options are limited either . . .

- It is of God,
- It is of the devil, or
- It is staged.

- A. What they did.
 1. All were amazed
 2. All glorified God

““The miracle taking place before their very eyes filled them with intense amazement and awe. It was an acknowledged operation of supernatural power.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant, 68).

B. Why they did it (“We have never seen anything like this”)

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here, what is our NEXT ACTION STEP?)

Our view of God is often controlled by our view of man. We retaliate, God does not. We react, God acts. Where we drop bombs, shoot, and kill, God embraces and forgives. I am neither a pacifist nor a warmonger; I am a Christian and forgiveness and love must be my identifying characteristic and mostly toward those whom I would conclude to be my enemies.

“Forgiveness is the most powerful thing in the world, but because it is so costly we prefer to settle for second best.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 18)

1. For whom do you believe? Notice the faith of his friends.
2. Are you forgiven of your sins? Perhaps there is someone whom you think will never get saved. Friend, today God wants you to believe for them. Your faith cannot save them, but your faith might be able to believe what right now appears impossible.
3. God has conquered both sin and death. There is physical healing in God.
4. Let us not make God small. Let us celebrate the God who is infinite. He may do all He wills with what is His and when He does it, He is always right.