

WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

Mark 2:1-12

Intro: This account is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. Cf. Matt. 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26.

I want to deal specifically with Mark's account in Mark 2:1-12, but I will pick up a few details from the other Gospels.

Let us note, first:

I. THE SETTING (Mark 2:1, 2).

Mark says that it was at Capernaum, which Matthew called, "his own city" (Matt. 9:1). Archbishop Trench, in his book, Notes on the Miracles of Our Lord, said, "Bethlehem was the birth-place of Christ, and Nazareth his nursing-place, so was Capernaum his ordinary dwelling-place" (p. 216). Mark also tells us that the house was filled with people so that it was impossible for anyone to get in by the door. Luke tells us that "there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem" (Luke 5:17). We do not know why all of the officials of Judaism were there. Trench suggests that it might have been a conference of some kind, a friendly one, but Mark tells us that the Lord preached the Word to them, and Luke said that "the power of the Lord was present to heal them" (Luke 5:17). And so it would seem best to say that the Lord did there what He usually did in His public ministry: preaching and healing. But it is surprising that the Pharisees and doctors of law were there in such great numbers. We are not told whose house it was. From Mark's comment that "it was noised about that he was in the house," we would assume that this was not a planned meeting.

But the fact that it was in Capernaum ought to be of special interest to us.

Bishop Ryle says in his commentary on Mark (p. 26) that Capernaum probably enjoyed more of the Lord's ministry on earth than any other city. And this event certainly had to have been one of the most memorable. That can be seen by the fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded it, as well as the circumstances which led to the healing. And yet, while it is said that the people were amazed and glorified God saying that they had never seen anything like this, yet it does not appear that spiritually much, if anything, took place as a result of this miracle.

This makes our Lord's words in Matthew 11:23, 24 especially significant. Listen to what He said:

But thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven,
shalt be brought down to hell (hades):
for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee,
had been done in Sodom,
it would have remained until this day.
But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable
for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment,
than for thee.

This shows that, while the Lord performed many miracles there, it was not a city which had received the message of the Lord. When we visited Israel a few years ago, they were excavating the ruins of the city on the banks of the Sea of Galilee--a beautiful setting, but evidently the city had no place for the Gospel of our Lord.

II. THE SITUATION (Mark 2:3, 4).

Mark is the only one who tells us that four men came bearing "one sick of the palsy." He may have been a large man, or it may just have been easier for four to carry him.

However, when they got to the house where they knew the Lord was, they found the door blocked with people, and so there was no way that they could get their palsied friend in for healing.

Trench quotes a man by the name of Fuller who said, "Love will creep, but faith will climb, where it cannot go" (p. 217). And so the men carried the man afflicted with palsy up the outside steps, broke up part of the roof, and lowered the sick man down into the very presence of the Lord. The four men refused to let any obstacle stand in the way, so strong was their faith.

III. THE LORD'S GREETING TO THE PALSIED MAN (Mark 2:5).

Matthew tells us that the Lord said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). But before this all three Gospel writers tell us that the Lord saw their faith.

This would mean that they were believers. They possessed more faith than just to claim healing. The palsied man had evidently come face to face with his sin, and he looked upon his affliction as the result of sin. He had sought forgiveness from God, but was lacking in the assurance that his sins were actually forgiven. The Lord knew his heart, and knew that he had a greater need for peace than he did for healing, and so He spoke those gracious words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

So "their faith" meant the faith of the four men, and the faith of the palsied man. They were certainly seeking healing, but the Lord knew that the spiritual was a greater issue with the palsied man than the physical was.

How different this is from what modern healers do! They supposedly heal, but usually do it without any reference to the Gospel. The Lord put the Gospel first. That is surely what He had been preaching to the tremendous crowd which had gathered to hear Him. But they, even the Pharisees and the doctors, seemed more interested in healing than they were in salvation. Perhaps some of the Pharisees and doctors were there because they were sick in body, but were ignorant of the fact that they were sick in soul, too, and that the latter was more urgent than the former.

It seems to me that the palsied man had already been forgiven, but he needed to hear that he was from the Lord. And in this he was not disappointed.

IV. THE UNBELIEF OF THE SCRIBES (Mark 2:6-11).

They did not say anything aloud. We don't even know if they gave each other a look which showed their suspicion about what the Lord had said. But He knew their hearts! He knew that in their hearts they were accusing Him of blasphemy since He claimed to be able to forgive sins when they said that only God could do this.

And they were right in their accusation. Only God can forgive sins. And He was being blasphemous IF He were not God! They undoubtedly had seen other miracles performed that very day, but had not even gotten as far as Nicodemus did when he came to the Lord on that special night saying,
 Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God:
 for no man can do the miracles that thou doest,
 except God be with him (John 3:2).

Wouldn't it have been interesting to hear what those Jewish leaders would have had to say to the palsied man about the forgiveness of his sins? You can be sure that, flat on his back, helpless to move himself, he would not have been able to do what they would have required to be able to say that his sins were forgiven. They knew nothing about grace, the grace of God. They knew only works. They believed that you had to prove to God that you deserved His blessing, that you were worthy of His blessing, or they could not offer a sinner any hope.

But here were four men whose hearts God had already touched, men who not only believed in the healing power of the Lord,

but also in His saving power. And while the palsied man wanted to be made well, his greatest concern, we can assume from our Lord's words, was to know that his sins were forgiven.

The Lord knowing their unbelief, yet manifested His grace to them, and so He asked them,

Why reason ye these things in your hearts?
 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy,
 Thy sins be forgiven thee;
 or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

They probably would have been very hesitant to tell any person that his sins were forgiven. When you are dealing with people according to the Law, and only by the Law, you can't be sure. But instead of being ready to accuse the Lord of blasphemy, in the light of the miracles which our Lord had been performed, and His Word to the palsied man, should they not have been reasoning in their hearts about whether or not this Man might be God! They showed a terrible lack of understanding of their OT Scriptures which made it perfectly clear that the Messiah would be God in human flesh, the incarnate Son of God.

How would you have answered the Lord's question? Which would have been the easier for Him to say? Which would have been easier for you to say? Why?

Obviously it would be easier to tell the man that his sins were forgiven because no one could really check whether or not that was true, at least at that very moment. But if the Lord said, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk," every person present could see if the man got up, picked up the mat he had been carried on, and then walked out of the house. Under normal circumstances a man with palsy would not have had the strength to get up, nor the strength to pick up his bed, and certainly would not have been able to walk out of the room. He would have had to learn to walk all over again! But the Lord intended to heal him, strengthen him, make it possible for him to get up, pick up his bed, and walk out of the house with just as much ability as any person there had walked into the house.

And so the Lord told those unbelieving Jews,
 But that ye may know that the Son of man [a Messianic title] hath power on earth to forgive sins...,
 I say unto thee [turning to the palsied man],
 Arise, take up thy bed,
 and go thy way into thine house.

The Lord said that which the people could prove in order that they would believe what they could not prove--except for the

fact that He had said it!

Now let us notice:

V. THE RESULTS (Mark 2:12).

There were two results: one good, and the other not so good.

A. The palsied man.

Mark records, "And immediately [not gradually] he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all."

Everybody there saw what he did. Perhaps they waited to see if he would make it to the door, but he did! And he made it all the way home! He went home well, but, best of all, he went home knowing that his sins were forgiven. He must have been overjoyed over both blessings, but, of the two, he rejoiced the most to know that his sins had been forgiven, and that he would never be charged with them again. He had strength in his body, and he had peace in his heart. There was nothing more that he could ask the Lord to do for him. He was a permanent trophy of grace to the people who lived in the city of Capernaum.

Luke tells us that this man "departed to his own house, glorifying God."

What was the other result?

B. The crowd.

Everybody was amazed at what had happened. They gave the glory to God for the miracle. They remarked to each other that they had never seen anything like this before. And yet, can you believe it, there is no evidence in any one of the three Gospel records that a single person turned to the Lord and was saved! Luke tells us that some of the people were "filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today" (Luke 5:26).

Gary told us last week at Family Camp that people come into this world lost, and blind, and dead. We have some excellent examples in this story that Gary was right. They all were amazed, and some were afraid, but no one apparently got the message that the Lord had given to them. If the palsied man had not walked out of there, but had been carried out as he was brought in, that would not have been the great tragedy. The great tragedy was to be seen in the lives of all of those people who were under the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, but went away walking in their bodies but under the judgment

of God in their souls.

Concl: You know, I have been in the ministry over 40 years--
46 years to be exact since I finished Dallas Seminary. And during those 46 years I have seen many people sit under the ministry of the Word, some who were like the Pharisees and scribes and doctors of the law in this story we have considered tonight, who tonight are not walking with the Lord, and who, as far as I know, have never known the Lord. Some have been church leaders.

That is one of my great concerns about our work here at Trinity. My prayer is that all who come either are saved, or will be saved! If people could be under the ministry of our Lord and not be saved, then it should be no surprise to me if people can be under my ministry and not be saved. But I want to see all of you in heaven some day. Make sure that you are more than just fascinated with the Lord; make sure that He is your Savior.

Let me say one more thing before I close.

On what basis could the Lord say to that palsied man, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"? Was it just that the Lord felt sorry for him, and decided to excuse him from whatever sinful things he had done?

No, God does not forgive sins that way. Our sins are an offense against His righteousness. They have to be paid for, an atonement has to be made. The palsied man's sins were forgiven on the same basis that God has forgiven my sins and your sins. Christ was going to take that palsied man's sins to Calvary, and by our Lord's death He took the penalty that should have fallen upon that sinner. Perhaps the palsied man had learned about the Gospel from Isaiah and those wonderful words which he wrote in Isaiah 53:6. (Quote.) When a person comes in faith like that palsied man did, you know that he is trusting in Christ as his Savior, and needed to hear for his own assurance those peace-giving words, "Thy sins are forgiven." There is still only one way to be saved, and that is through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ Who died that we might be forgiven and live eternally in heaven with Him.

Who can forgive sins? Only God can, and He only does it through the work of Christ.