

Sermon Title: Who Can Forgive Sins?
Scripture Text: Mark 2:1-12

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-18-18

It's our joy to rejoin the Gospel According to Mark this morning, at the beginning of Chapter 2. I like this passage on a lot of levels. It's not hard to understand. But it is also an in-your-face kind of display of the power of Jesus Christ. This record of a healing shows that He is God; it illustrates and confirms what we've seen as the purpose of miracles (see Jn. 5:36; Acts 14:3), and it, at the same time, shows what false religion does. We're just starting Chapter 2 and this is already the fourth miracle recorded by Mark, and I think the best way to handle this one is to just dive into it. So as we look at this, you're going to see this based around three ideas I want to show you. I want you to see some faithful friends, in the first four verses; and then, overlapping with that, some faithless phonies; and it's all ultimately about a fantastic Savior.

That's certainly a man-made outline because the text doesn't go in exact increments like that, but, let's just jump in and take a look at this and see with, first, these faithful friends. Chapter 2 begins this way: "When He had come back to Capernaum"—and clearly the He is Jesus—"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, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them" (vss. 1-2, NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). Now, remember, chapter divisions in your Bible are for convenience, they're not inspired. Mark did not write 16 chapters, he wrote one book. And so there's a strong connection here to the context, in a couple of ways. It says, "When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward." We get two connections to the context. Number 1 is the statement that Jesus had a plan that had been altered; there was something significant about Him needing to come back to Capernaum because it had been His plan to be based there all the time. But His plan was to go into all the cities and towns and synagogues in Galilee to preach the gospel. Preaching is what He came to do, and so it says here that when He got back there, "He was speaking the word to them." That was His plan—Mark 1:38. Remember that He had healed some people, Peter's mother-in-law and some other people, and then the next morning a huge crowd gathered and His disciples came and hunted Him up and told Him there was a lot of people there, and He said, "Let us go somewhere else." He wasn't trying to gather crowds, He was trying to preach the gospel. "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." So He was planning to take the gospel to all the places in Galilee.

But the second connection we have here is that those plans of Jesus had been modified because of the actions of one man. It was the leper that He healed at Peter's house in Capernaum; that's the last six verses of Chapter 1. After He healed him, Jesus gave that man two specific orders. It's in Verse 44 of Chapter 1: "He said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'" So Jesus intended for this guy—as glorious as the healing from leprosy was, it was not to send this guy out to be His advertisement for His healing ministry. He said, no, keep quiet about this; first, go to show yourself to the priest. Now, that meant, take about a three-day journey. He had to go from Galilee all the way down to the temple in Jerusalem to do what was required by the Law of Moses. Now, this guy had come to Jesus asking to be healed, and, remember we saw in Luke that when he came to Jesus, he referred to Him as "Lord" (Lk. 5:12). But at the very first opportunity that he had after Jesus healing him, he flagrantly disobeyed what the Lord specifically told him to do.

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It was Jesus who says in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" So, he immediately showed his true colors, that he *rejected* the idea of Jesus as a Lord (see 1 Jn. 2:4); he wanted Jesus as a fixer of his physical problem. But beyond that, the law—the Law of Moses, or what "Moses commanded" that He's referring to here—is very specific, it's in the book of Leviticus. Someone who had been cured of leprosy—now, you would never be restored to full function, as this guy had been, but if you got over the disease, there was a very specific examination that you had to go through at the hands of the priests, and you had to bring certain offerings before you would be allowed to reenter normal social life in Israel. So that guy had refused to do what the law required and he had refused to do what the Lord Himself had commanded him, and instead of obeying what Jesus said, he acted on his own exuberance and he became the local hawker for the healing ministry of Jesus—just the opposite of what Jesus wanted. And there was a consequence to that; look at the last verse in Mark 1 as a reminder: "But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere" (vs. 45). So Jesus had had to adjust His plans for a while by avoiding the cities and the villages, and that's where the synagogues were, and that's where He had intended to go.

Now, God is sovereign; He wasn't surprised by all of this, but it was a human consequence of this man's disobedience. So apparently, Jesus had traveled for days—likely even weeks—around the least-populated areas of Galilee, and instead of Him being able to go to the synagogues and start there, people had to come to Him. Well, finally the fervor had settled down a little bit, and Jesus came back to Capernaum, and so that's why it says in Chapter 2 Verses 1 and 2, "When He had come back to Capernaum...it was heard that He was at home." Now, what's that? Where is Jesus's home? I mean, some places in the New Testament, He says "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58); even foxes have their dens. Well, what it means is that, He was there at the home of Peter and Andrew, which was a nice home; they were successful businessmen and their extended families lived there, and that apparently became Jesus's headquarters for His ministry in the region of Galilee.

So they heard He was back. And it's not surprising another crowd gathered when they heard that He was there, and apparently it was a crowd of not necessarily the most polite people. Look at verses 3 and 4: "And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 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." The antecedent of the word "they" is these four guys that carried their paralyzed friend up the stairs to the roof of the house. Now, that wouldn't make any sense to us, but you've got to understand a little bit about first-century architecture. The roofs of houses in that part of the world in those days were flat, and the roof was like the patio; it was even a sleeping area often when the weather was warm. That's why there are specifications in the Old Testament about having a parapet around the roof of your house so people don't fall off or sleepwalk or whatever (Deut. 22:8); that's why those regulations are there. Well, the stairway to the roof was always on the outside. Now, the roof itself was generally made of slabs of burnt or dried clay interwoven with thatch to make it strong, and that would be placed across supporting beams which stretched from wall to wall over the top of the rooms of the house. They would

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add a smooth coat of extra mud or plaster to the areas of the roof that were to be used for sitting or sleeping. That was the common type of construction of nice homes in first-century Israel, and that's the case of Peter's home. And as I told you, that archaeological location is very well-known; you can visualize it. It was a kind of building like that, probably, that Jesus had in mind when, in the Sermon on the Mount, He said to lay up treasures in heaven, remember—"Where thieves do not break through nor steal" (KJV)? You see, it wasn't all that hard to literally tear your way into a house built like that, or break through a wall or break through even a roof (see Geneva Bible—"dig through"). So these four friends of the sick man had made a hole in the roof. That wouldn't be easy to do. I mean, it was built to withstand people up there. They lower him down by ropes attached to the four corners of the pallet or bedroll that he was on.

Now, think about that scene. It's no small task to carry a grown man around, and they brought him there. But then, they carried him up the stairs. That takes a little bit of work. I mean, you can't just tilt the guy the angle of the stairs or you'd lose your friend down to the bottom of the staircase. But they did that—carried this guy up a flight of stairs, dug through the roof. You can bet it disrupted Jesus's preaching when He's talking and all of a sudden a little dust starts to come down from the roof, and then chunks of dried mud and thatch start falling from the ceiling, and then this guy is lowered down in front of Him; I'm sure it was in front of Him because Jesus took a step back when that stuff started falling. And the friends of this severely handicapped guy made history. Little did they know that they would be forever remembered as the very first ones to create a retrofitted handicapped-access building. None before them.

Well, this guy had a serious need; he was described here as a paralytic. You actually know a Greek word that you don't know you know—it's the Greek word "paralytic." That's where our word comes from. It means he was paralyzed. It seems, from the way that it describes him lying, he probably was a quadriplegic, at least a paraplegic, and the simple and portable place to lay was this little pallet or bed or whatever; it was probably actually like a mat on top of what we would think of as a stretcher. He could never have gone anyplace without being totally dependent on others to carry him. They might have made the handicapped-access building, but they didn't have Rascal scooters or motorized wheelchairs just yet. He was totally dependent, but he had faithful friends.

Now, that overlaps with the next ones that we're introduced to: the faithless phones. But notice first of all, Jesus says in Verse 5—"Seeing their faith [He] said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" Now, it's interesting that, in all three gospel records of this—and this one's recorded by Matthew and Mark and Luke, and it's one of the rare ones where Mark, I think, has the longest description. They all say that Jesus "saw their faith." That's something you and I can't do. I can show you evidence of my faith by my works, according to James Chapter 2, but he's saying He saw the faith of these men. Well, He would have seen these four guys were willing to work hard for their paralyzed friend, but we aren't given any details about them except the fact that they had faith. What does that mean? What were they actually believing? Well, it means they believed in Jesus at least to the extent that they believed that if they could just get their friend into His presence, Jesus could—and He probably would—heal him. Surely, they had seen Jesus healing others, or at least heard of it. Several places in the

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gospels, it mentions that Jesus healed *all* who came to Him during that time of His ministry in Galilee (Matt. 12:15). And it would appear that the paralytic man also believed at least that much, but we don't know for sure just exactly what he and his friends believed before they arrived, but we know that Jesus saw their spiritual realities of their heart. And in this guy's case, He forgave him. He didn't say that to the other four, but maybe they believed as well.

So at least the paralyzed guy must have been repentant. Now, from other situations, we often know that Jesus healed people who didn't believe in Him, as of the time when they were healed. It's clear in the Bible—and this is totally contrary to the teachings of modern "faith healers"—faith is not a condition for healing. But in this case, we do know that, apparently, the guy believed before he was healed. Jesus did sometimes respond to faith, and He would see it in people who came to Him. I don't know how He "saw" faith, but I know that He knows hearts (Matt. 9:4; 12:25; Jn. 1:47; 2:25; cf. Jn. 6:64), and you'll see more of that in a minute.

Now, there's a lot going on in this scene. You have a whole crowd of people who are obviously extremely interested in Jesus, but that seems to be their interest; they came to see healings. Because think about this: this crowd didn't even have enough basic compassion to let a quadriplegic get in front of them in line. I can see these guys coming up and saying, "Excuse me, could we make a little room here for my friend?" They couldn't get there! The crowd wouldn't let them. Jesus had to deal with that a lot. A lot of people came for the goodies, but He was always going for the soul (Jn. 6:27). They seemed to only want the healings.

But among them, you have five very zealous ones in which Jesus sees faith. He doesn't say that about anybody else present. So the faithful friends get the headlines most of the time in the telling of this story, but notice this other group that is about to take center stage. Mark 2:6-7—"But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way?' " What way? He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (vs. 5). "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" Now, Mark points to the scribes; if we harmonize Luke and Matthew as well, we'll know that there were some Pharisees and scribes, or, Pharisees and teachers of the law. The Pharisees were the ones who were the official party—there were about 6,000, we think, card-carrying Pharisees in the days of Jesus—but they had spectacularly strong influence over the everyday teaching in the synagogues in Israel.

It was the Sadducees who were theological liberals and of a more aristocratic background who controlled the priesthood in Jerusalem, but the Pharisees had a death-grip on the teaching of what was in most synagogues in most places. In both cases, there were scribes involved; there were scribes of the Sadducees, there were scribes of the Pharisees (see Lk. 5:30), there were scribes of other sects among the Jews. The scribes—that was the scholarly wing of the Pharisees. They were the ones who kept the scrolls, who did the research; they probably fed the information to the rabbis. The Pharisees were the leaders of the populist version of satanic false religion that was being taught pervasively among Israel in the guise of Judaism. It was not a gospel of faith, it was not the true gospel of the true kingdom; theirs was a system of works righteousness, and it produced in them great pride and elitism (see Lk. 18:9-14). Look

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through the gospels and see who Jesus condemned most loudly, most strongly, and most commonly: it was the Pharisees, the ones who taught people wrongly (Matt. 15:1-14). It led to pride on their part; they were the judgmental ones that Jesus had in mind when He talked about "Do not judge so that you will not be judged" (Matt. 7:1).

Well, Jesus knew that among this crowd there were these enemies, and one of the things I like about this passage—and there are many others like it—is that Jesus did this exactly in the manner that He did it, apparently to stick His finger in the theological eye of the Pharisees and their scribes. He wanted specifically to seize this moment to expose their hypocrisy *and* to do something far more important, far more serious, than healing the paralyzed man. Now, think about that. That's pretty cool, to heal a paralyzed man! I mean, if I could send everybody home and we'd have a big wheelchair yard-sale here, that would be fantastic. No more walkers, no more canes, no more limps—wouldn't that be great? That's spectacular, but there's something *even more important*. "Son, your sins are forgiven." "Forgiven" is the main New Testament word for that concept. It means literally, "to let go"—if your sins are forgiven, you are freed, or "let go" from, the consequence of the eternal punishment of your sin—or "to send away" or "to drive away" or "to do away with them." That's why it says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12; cf. Jer. 50:20)—separated us from our sins. Now, that's pretty cool, because you can keep going east and you'll keep going east and you'll keep going east, and you can go for lap after lap after lap around the globe, still going east—or west. Now, if you go north, you're eventually going to be going south, right? Perfect analogy! Buried them in "the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19)—totally taken away (see Ps. 32:1-2; 85:2; Is. 38:17; Zech. 3:4; Acts 3:19; Rom. 8:33; Col. 2:13-14).

Now, when Jesus did this, it was with the full understanding of the beliefs of the Jewish teachers of the day. And He understood that this man, as much as he yearned to walk, he needed something beyond the relief from his physical problem, so that's why He deals with him in the order that He does—starts out with, "Your sins are forgiven." You see, the Pharisees held to *some* things that were true, many things that were true; they had some pretty decent theology about life after death, resurrection, angels, there were a lot of things that they had right (Acts 23:8). But they held to a concept about sin and sickness that is not what the Bible teaches. There's a classic reflection of their belief that is exposed in the story in John Chapter 9. Remember, they were going about, Jesus was, with His disciples, and they came upon the man who had been born blind? Do you remember the question that the disciple asked when they saw him? They asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" That's in John 9:1-2. They had an over-emphasis on *personal* sin; they had a link of direct cause-and-effect—if they saw somebody who was suffering physically, and especially if it was severe, like blindness or paralysis or something like that, they assumed that was direct punishment from God for their sin. Or, even more wrongly than that—in this case, *horribly* wrongly—the parents could sin, like you could suffer for the sins of your parents. Now, it is true that God can use physical affliction as chastening for sin in the lives of His beloved children; Hebrews 12, 1 John 5, there are several places that mention that. But they believed that was always the case. Disease and disability was the direct result of someone's personal sin. They even had a wrinkle of their doctrine, reflected in what the disciples asked Jesus, that explained that some afflictions were the result of sins that were committed while you were in

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the womb. You know, I think I probably did less sinning in the womb than I've ever done since then. I still had a sin problem, because I was born to my parents (see Ps. 51:5; 58:3), and we're all children of Adam and Eve, but that's just absurd!

So, with that as the background, when that guy was lowered down in front of Jesus, can you imagine the jumble of emotions that he must have been? One part of him *obviously* wanted to walk. But if he understood other things that Jesus had taught, and knowing he obviously is a Jew, he had obviously been raised in the synagogue under the teaching of the rabbis, dominated by the false teaching of the Pharisees, so, maybe he was also scared to death that he was going to be exposed as guilty of some sin that he didn't even remember—maybe even one in the womb. I'm sure he knew he was a sinner; like you and me, he knew he wasn't perfect, and missing the mark of perfection—that's the Bible's definition of sin (see Rom. 3:23; Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). But this man must have wondered just what else Jesus would say to him. Imagine when the first words that Jesus said were, "Son"—one of the other gospels says "Friend" (Lk. 5:20); probably called him both—"Son, your sins are forgiven." So He didn't indict him for his sin, He *forgave* His sin (Jn. 3:17). Imagine how comforting that was to him.

And Jesus also did that, and said it exactly that way, for a secondary purpose of irritating the religious hypocrites. You see, the scribes were correct in one thing: it *is* blasphemy to claim to have the authority to forgive sins. Only God can forgive sins. Now, I can tell you that, if you believe what the Bible teaches, if you accept the free gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus, your sins will be forgiven, but that's not on *my* authority—that's on the authority of the Word of God (see Matt. 16:19; 18:18, NASB). It is God who does the forgiving. But they did know that, according to the Scriptures, only God can forgive sins, so when Jesus said that He forgave this man's sin, Jesus was claiming to be God! And it was crystal-clear to them!

That rules out a couple of silly ideas that you'll often hear. There are people who don't like to say that Jesus was God in human flesh, but they'll say, "Oh, but He was a great teacher!" That option is eliminated! Great teachers do not deceive and lie! And to claim you're God if you're not—that's deceiving and that's lying, that's not an option! There are other groups, and some of them very religious, that claim that Jesus never claimed to be God—that's also not true (see Rev. 1:8, 17-18 and Rev. 2:8 with Is. 44:6 and Rev. 22:12-13)! The people who hated Him the most saw it perfectly clearly: He was claiming to be God (see Jn. 5:18; 8:58-59 with Ex. 3:14; Jn. 10:33). They knew it was blasphemy for a man to claim to be God. Now, there's one way that it wouldn't be blasphemy: that's if you're God. But they weren't about to accept that. They weren't stupid; they were well-learned in their own system of theology. They weren't stupid, but they were spiritually blind to the evidence that was right in front of them that Jesus *is* God in human flesh (see Ex. 34:10 with Jn. 15:24), that He *is* the Messiah, that He *is* doing all the things that the Old Testament promised that the Messiah would do (Lk. 7:20-23). But they were self-righteous, they were proud, they were arrogant. They didn't come there to learn anything. They came there to be offended (see Matt. 11:16-19). Their motto was something like, "Harrumph! We don't like that!" They came to fuel the fires of their own hatred and rejection, and Jesus gave them vivid proof of His deity (Jn. 5:36; 9:32-33; 10:38; 11:44-46; 14:10-11).

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So this one starts out with our introduction to faithful friends, and then come the faithless phonies, but now, look at the fantastic Savior, who really is the hero of this whole passage. Now, Jesus starts out with kind of an oblique claim to be God; He doesn't say, "I'm God," but He says, "Son, your sins are forgiven," which you could say only if you were God. So He said that—now He's going to *prove* something, because He knows what people are thinking. Matthew specifies that Jesus was "knowing their thoughts" (Matt. 9:4); Mark said they were "reasoning in their hearts" (Mk. 2:6). They weren't saying this out loud, they were thinking it. Over in John 2:25, we have this statement: "He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man." He sees right through everybody. And so, Mark 2:8—"Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit"—not a word has been spoken about this—"that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, 'Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?' " Now, that should have stopped these guys in their tracks. I saw a cartoon some weeks ago, I don't remember where it was, but there's a guy that is there and he's thinking something and his wife or his girlfriend busts him for whatever it is that he's thinking, and he says, "How did you know that?" And she said, "Well, you forgot—this is a cartoon, and your thoughts are in a little bubble over your head. Jesus knew *exactly* what they were thinking, and by the way—He knows exactly what *you're* thinking right now! Some of you ought to stop it, okay?

He knows what they were thinking. Why? Because He's God! He just claimed it, now He reads their minds and challenges them for what they're thinking that they haven't even said—that should have stopped them. Oh, but it didn't. They were theological legends in their own minds. They did not ever entertain the possibility that they might be wrong; they never would *consider* the fact that they could *learn* anything from this unlearned carpenter from—of all places—*Nazareth*, the armpit of Galilee, the region of sinners! How could He ever teach us anything (see Jn. 7:52). To them, Jesus was a threat (Matt. 27:18), not a Savior. He was one to be exterminated, not worshipped. Very few of the Pharisees humbled themselves before Christ. I'm glad we have the story of Nicodemus—he did. Some surely, at some point, came to faith. But these guys were going to be, before long, heading back down to Jerusalem to heat up the plan to murder Jesus. They worked on that plan for over a year.

But look what Jesus does—if not for them, for the sake of everyone else present, and to expose their hypocrisy, and for you and me to see because it's written down here for us. Look at this, all the way from Verse 8 to Verse 11—"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? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"; or to say, "Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk"? But so 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, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.' "

A little sidebar, first of all, I think this is Mark's first mention of the phrase "Son of Man." Jesus used that phrase to describe Himself more often than any other way, any other self-description, in all of the gospels. Now, there are some who say that He describes Himself as "Son of Man" rather than "Son of God" so that He wouldn't throw up unnecessary barriers to people rejecting Him and calling Him a blasphemer, that He was calling Himself Son of Man—

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"I'm a man like you." Well, He *was* a man, He *was* humble—I get that. But I think He used Son of Man for a very specific reason, because if you go look in Daniel 7:13-14, you'll find that the "Son of Man" is the man who appears before God the Father and is *given the kingdom*. He was claiming to be the King. I mean, why would He shy away from calling Himself the King if He's already called Himself God, essentially, by the words that He used? So He's the Man who is the King.

But—this is cool—He reads their minds, challenges them, and He doesn't even stop to give them time to get a word in edgewise. He asks them, "Which is easier to say—'Your sins are forgiven,' or, 'Get up and walk'?" You see, anybody can say, "Your sins are forgiven," and you can't prove it. You can't *disprove* it. I can't look at you and tell if your sins are forgiven, or if your sins are not forgiven. That's a spiritual thing—that's only between you and God, so He's saying, "Look, it's easy to toss those words around, but how about this? What if I say, 'Pick up your bed and walk'?" Both forgiving *and* instantly healing a paralytic are *impossible* for man. Ah, but they're both equally possible for God. You can claim to forgive sins—there are priests going around doing that every day, but no one can verify that the forgiveness actually takes place. All you can do is point them to the Savior and urge them to repent. But on the other hand, if you can claim to heal a quadriplegic, it's pretty easy to figure out if you're bluffing or not! It's easy to verify if the person is healed. So Jesus was saying, in essence, "You can't see the results of My forgiveness, but you sure can see the results of My healing," and they're both miracles.

Now, think back to our previous study on healing. Remember, we inserted a message between Mark 1 and Mark 2? And I said there—and I want you to remember this—that, for all of the countless healings that Jesus did, healing was never the main point. He said, "I came to preach—to preach the good news." The healing—or the exorcism, or a miracle like feeding thousands of people from one person's lunch—that miracle is always for the purpose of validating the preaching; validating the message of the Word of God; validating the gospel (see 1 Kings 17:22-24; Mk. 16:20; Jn. 3:2; 5:36; 10:25; Acts 2:22; 4:29-30; 8:6; 14:3; Rom. 15:18-19; Heb. 2:3-4). And remember, what was He doing when this whole incident started? "He was speaking the word to them" (vs. 2). And then the paralyzed guy decided to drop in. This passage is in harmony with all of the others, and it will validate the point that healing isn't the point! He was preaching, this opportunity arose, and He kept on preaching—He used it as an opportunity to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. That gives you a good idea of what it was that He was probably preaching when He was speaking to them; He was saying things like what He'd said all along: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; cf. Mk. 1:15). He forgives the guys sin, *then* He heals him to validate that He has the authority to forgive sins. So He made the claim, He backed it up, and He left the conclusions to be drawn by everyone who was present.

And He left it for us—look at the final verse of this section, Verse 12—"And he got up"—clearly that's the paralytic—"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.'" It's an interesting word, "amazed"; it's a word that implies, from its etymology, that, it's like they were beside themselves. Matthew used the word that's often

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translated "fear" for reverential awe, the awareness of something great and powerful, deep, profound, respect and admiration, and kind of speechlessness ("awestruck," Matt. 9:8). They were glorifying God, though, for putting on such a display among men. Jesus yet again demonstrates that He is God, even though He's also a man (Col. 2:9). No one had ever seen anything quite like Jesus, because He is unique (see Ex. 8:18-19 with Luke 11:20; Ex. 34:10; Deut. 3:24; Jn. 15:24). I don't know exactly how it happened, but somehow I can picture that crowd that wouldn't even step aside to let the paralytic man's friends bring him in—the way I play it in my mind, I see the crowd parting as he walked out, and just that, "Whoa!" And probably silence, and then somebody praising God.

Now, in typical Bible fashion, there are many things that are revealed here: the deity of Jesus, the miraculous power, all of that; and there are many things left for you to wonder about. You see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their scribes. But you also see Jesus showing a little flash of omniscience; you see Him healing. At least five people, it appears, left believing in Him and being blessed for it. So many things aren't said. Wouldn't you like to hear a biography of at least one of those scribes having come around like Nicodemus did (Jn. 3:1-2)? Were there any others in the crowd willing to follow Jesus? You know, the Pharisees were very good at intimidating people and throwing them out of the synagogue if they even said something nice about Jesus (Jn. 9:22). Don't you wonder how many in this crowd eventually would have stood up to that? I hope there were a lot. What became of the guy who was healed? We're not told; he died, I trust he died in faith. Did his friends go back wherever they came from and grab another stretcher and bring the next one? I bet the crowd would part if they did. And then there are other questions. Did they fix the roof? Did Jesus *heal* the roof? That's an interesting concept. Was it covered by Peter's homeowner's policy? A lot of things we don't know about. You know, there's no record here of the man who was healed saying anything to Jesus. I can't imagine that he didn't at least say "Thank You." I think it's Luke that says that he walked away "glorifying God" (Lk. 5:25).

But this passage is here for us. We're a long time away, a long ways away...where do you stand? You've heard—you've seen in your mind—everything that there is to see here. Where to you stand? Do you have awe for the power of God? Do you understand how profoundly you need forgiveness, and that only He can give it to you? I said it a couple of weeks ago—if I could heal your every disease, take away your disability, get rid of your aches and pains, I would so happily do that in a heartbeat, just out of pure human compassion. If I could calm your nerves and drive away your fears and make you immune to worry and anxiety, oh, I would do it, and I wouldn't hesitate for a second! But if I could do all of those things, you'd still have to go out and reenter the real world. You would still keep growing older; eventually, your body will wear out. Unless you live until the Rapture, you will die. So the big question—the one that this text leads you to—is, "Then what?" When you die, and you are faced with the reality of life after death, and there is judgment and there is eternity, it won't matter if you've been temporarily relieved of pain and suffering right now, unless you stand *forgiven*. Otherwise, the righteous, perfect, holy God—your Creator and Judge—*must*, by His own character, sentence you to "the lake of fire and brimstone" to be "tormented day and night, forever and ever" (Rev. 20:10; cf. Ecc. 12:14). There are only two outcomes (see Rev. 20:15); the paralyzed guy got the good one. He was forgiven.

Sermon Title: Who Can Forgive Sins?
Scripture Text: Mark 2:1-12

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-18-18

So I'd heal you if I could, but, if I can let you know that you have total forgiveness of your sins in what Christ did for you (1 Cor. 15:3; Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 1:5); if I can let you know that you have eternal life if you'll accept the free gift of eternal life (Jn. 6:40, 47; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-9; Rev. 21:6; 22:17), letting go of everything you think you have to bring to the table (Phil. 3:7-9); if I could let you know for sure that your eternity will be endless joy and blessing (Ps. 16:11; Rev. 21:3-4); your temporary earthly sufferings will pale by comparison (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17).

The point of this passage is, not only who can forgive sins, but, "Are *your* sins forgiven?" Far better than seeking temporal relief—it's good, but far better is to be understanding that that's not the most important thing (Matt. 16:26). Remember the Apostle Paul's autobiography in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18? He says, "For momentary, light affliction"—referring to what he's gone through. Now, that's a euphemism; it wasn't momentary and it wasn't light...he'd been stoned, left for dead; it as *awful* what he had gone through (see 2 Cor. 11:23-27). But, compared to *eternity*—see, that was his perspective. He says, "Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal"—as opposed to momentary—"weight"—as opposed to light—"an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen"—you can see the healing, you can't see the forgiveness. He says, "for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Jesus claimed to be God—crystal clear (Jn. 8:58 with Ex. 3:14). His enemies understood *immediately* that His claim to forgive was a claim to do something only God can do, but they made the mistake so many people make—they ruled out the correct answer before they ever asked the question of who Jesus is. Don't do that. I will gladly pray for you in any circumstance of suffering or illness, and God will show you His faithfulness through whatever you need, but ultimately you either accept the forgiveness that's offered to you now (Matt. 11:28; Mk. 1:15; Acts 16:31; 2 Cor. 6:1-2), or you accept the consequences offered to you for eternity (Ps. 81:15; Mk. 9:48; 16:16; Jn. 3:18, 36; 8:24; Acts 17:30-31; Heb. 10:26-27; Rev. 14:10-11).

Let's pray.

Father, thank You for this passage. Most of all, thank You for Your Son, unveiled to us here. Please, Lord, don't let anyone go away from this place not dealing with his or her own sins. Drive them to the Savior, I pray. Draw them to the Savior, I pray, by Your grace and by Your mercy, that You would get the glory for everything that is accomplished today. And may we keep our eyes fixed on that eternal weight of glory, so that we see everything of this world as momentary and light afflictions. And that way You can get the glory through us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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