

"Your Sins Are Forgiven

Mark 2:1-12

On Wednesday night we skimmed through the first 4 chapters in Luke, showing places where Luke the gospel writer wants to show us that Jesus was the Son of God; fully human yet fully divine. One of the passages we read was Luke 1:75-79 when Zechariah sings a song of praise to God for his son John (the Baptist), who was a miracle from God to aged Zechariah and Elizabeth. You remember that Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in front of the Table of Incense (prayer), when Zechariah was supposed to be praying to God, and Gabriel says you're prayers have been answered for a son and Zechariah doubts him. And is unable to share the good news until his son is born. But when he is, Zechariah is ready.

And most of his song praises God for sending the Messiah, who will save His people. In v.76 he thanks God for the role his son will play and he sings this:

⁷⁶ *And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of
peace."*

'To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.' Didn't they already have that knowledge? Didn't they already have the sacrificial system in place? You bring a certain animal to the temple, depending on the gravity of your sins, you place your hand on his head as its blood is being spilled out and it dies in your place. Except that, a few times every year you had to do it again and again and again. So what knowledge was missing? Zechariah went on to say that God was giving this knowledge in His mercy because the rising son will come to us from heaven and shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Even though they had the sacrificial system, it was insufficient because people were still in darkness. Something had to come from heaven, or someone, to share this knowledge. And when it comes to sharing our faith, perhaps the hardest part is sharing with people that they are in darkness because they have a sin problem that only someone from heaven can help them resolve. Here in Mark 2:1-12 when Jesus heals the paralyzed man, the focus is on the need for people to be healed of their eternal internal problem more than their physical, temporal problems.

As we've been following Jesus' early days of ministry, He began His ministry echoing John's message, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." (1:15). His message was followed by healings and casting out demons. Crowds were gathering wherever He was teaching and ministering.

Here in Ch. 2 we read that Jesus came "home" to Capernaum. While He was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth, the place where Jesus spent a lot of time and perhaps used as a home base was Capernaum, situated on the northwestern tip of the Sea of Galilee.

When word got around that Jesus was there, people came. Many would have come hoping to see a miracle. The friends of the paralytic, did. They came to bring their friend to Jesus. And they illustrate for us what we need to do for our friends who need Jesus:

If We Want to See People Saved, It Will Require Perseverance on our Part (2:1-4)

There are many Christians who when it comes to their faith or involvement in church and even working on relationships, are more spectators than participants. For some reason they just don't want to get involved. I'm sure the paralytic was glad that he had true friends who weren't afraid to get involved. They must have decided beforehand what they were going to do if the crowds were too big. They took risks for their friend.

One with a spectator attitude might have said something like this:

"Oh no - look at the crowd. We'll never get through that. Sorry, buddy, maybe some other time. We can at least pray and hope for the best."

If we're not careful we may use prayer as an excuse not to get too involved with people. Someone shares a concern, we feel for them but inside we're really thinking, 'Boy I'm glad that's not me. I'll tell him/her I'll pray for them and that will make them [me?] feel better.' When we think like that how seriously do we pray for them and will we follow up and ask how that person is doing later? Is that a friend?

These friends don't let the crowds stop them from their purpose. They have plan "b" in mind. Houses back then had outdoor staircases leading to a flat roof. Roofs were used for entertaining; they slept on them in the hot summer and in the fall they would make booths during Tabernacles and sleep in them during that time. The big thing is that they didn't give up. They needed to bring their friend to Jesus.

We need to get our friends to Jesus (vv.1-4)

... if we want to see them saved. No doubt, there are people we are trying to bring to Jesus. Maybe we've witnessed to a friend or family member and they didn't respond and we give up! Or a Christian friend that we know whose walk with the Lord isn't where it should be. And we pray, ask God for wisdom and an opportunity comes and we talk to that person about their relationship with God, and they don't respond favourably. 'Well, I tried' we say, and we give up. We need to

Expect obstacles, but don't give up (vv.2, 4)

Did God ever give up on His people? Have you ever noticed that the majority of Scripture (especially OT) is written to God's people who are not walking with Him? Time after time God sent prophets to confront His people about sin. We must never give up on trying to bring disobedient Christians back to Jesus. And we must never give up trying to bring non-believers to believe in Jesus. A real friend keeps trying to bring his friends to Jesus. We do it first by prayer, asking God to speak to their hearts and, secondly, we do so through being with them and lovingly challenging them to what the Word says.

Whether that's physical healing if we are suffering or spiritual healing of an unrepentant heart. These friends head to the roof. They are so determined to see their friend healed that they are going to crash the party. The roof of a typical home was made of branches & brushwood laid across the

joists. It was then covered with a mixture of clay and straw that was hardened and then rolled giving a smooth hard surface.

To make an opening in the roof they first would have had to break the clay, then “dig” through the branches and brush, making an opening big enough to lower the mat with the man down in front of Jesus. They believe with all their heart that if they can just get him to Jesus that He would solve their problem. But what’s his real problem? Is his real problem his health or his heart?

People are Unaware They Need Forgiveness of Sins **(2:5-11)**

⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

Jesus has a greater purpose in mind. He tells the man His sins are forgiven first. Many in Jesus’ day linked physical illness to sin. That was usually not the case [as in John 9] but the Bible links the two at times. David prays in Ps. 41:4

“Oh Lord, have mercy on me; heal me for I have sinned against You.”

When Jesus heals the man who was an invalid for 38 years at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem, He said to the man in 5:14,

John 5:14 *Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”*

Again, whether or not the paralytic was that way because of sin, we have no idea, but the Jewish leaders would have judged the paralytic to have been a sinner because he was sick. Jesus by saying that his sins are forgiven forces them to have to decide for themselves if He truly is the Messiah.

Notice that these experts in the law were “sitting.” How did they get to be sitting when the friends of the paralytic couldn’t even get near the door? Remember Jesus’ words from Matt. 23:6 “they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.” No doubt they probably came in expecting to sit near the front. Have they come with an open mind? Are they looking to see God do a work? No, they doubt Jesus is the Messiah, so they are critical of everything He does. No matter what Jesus does they will always find fault with something. They are blind to who Jesus is and what they needed to do to receive forgiveness of their own sins.

Believe in Jesus alone by faith (v.5)

When did this man receive the forgiveness of his sins?

“When Jesus saw their faith He said, Son your sins are forgiven.”

Even though Zechariah sang that from the Messiah the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins would come, they already had the knowledge foundationally. In Leviticus when we read about the steps they were to take with regard to dealing with sin in their life, they were to [just one example]

Lev. 4²⁷ “If any member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord’s commands, when they realize their guilt ²⁸ and the sin they have committed becomes known, they must bring as their offering for the sin they committed a female goat without defect. ²⁹ They are to lay their hand on the head of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. ³⁰ Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. ³¹ They shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.

How did they KNOW their sins would be forgiven? Because they had to believe God’s word said that their sins were now forgiven. They still had to have faith that what God said was true. The system however was flawed because as Hebrews said animal sacrifices can not completely remove human sin. Ultimately, a perfect sinless human alone can pay the price required for sin. Jesus did that for you and me. We must believe by faith that what He did alone on the cross was sufficient. If we say it’s Jesus and ... our good efforts ... Jesus and our church attendance ... we’re wrong. Because we’re not believing by faith Jesus alone did it for us. And if we need more evidence

That God declared this (v.6-10)

Where did God declare it? When Gabriel appeared to Joseph and explained to Mary she was expecting with the Messiah, he told Joseph

Matt. 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Is. 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

What would you have thought if you had been one of the 4 friends who did all that, hoping and praying Jesus would heal their friend and then He says, “Your sins are forgiven?” That might have discouraged them. Then the religious leaders scoffed at Jesus’ statement (inwardly anyway). Wasn’t Jesus going to heal him? But He will heal him physically and spiritually. It wasn’t what they expected; it was better. God’s way usually is, we just have to trust Him. The physical healing wasn’t the point; it was the pointer

Physical miracles are proof of spiritual authority (v.11)

Jesus heals the man and demonstrates that He if has the power to heal the body, He has the power to heal our hearts. Only Jesus can forgive our sins, everyone’s real problem. Everyone dies. Why? Because of sin:

Rom. 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom. 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins

committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Jesus healed many people and improved their life, but He died on the cross for everyone, and those who agree with God that they are sinners separated from God and believe Jesus alone paid the price for their sins, then they can have eternal life now and are declared right with God starting now. It's a gift. You can't earn it. You must accept it. This is what we have to help people understand. Their greatest problem isn't physical or material or emotional; it's spiritual. And

People Must Act on Their Faith **(2:12)**

Jesus commanded the man to get up, take your mat and go home. What Jesus was reminding us is that

True faith is neither private nor passive (v.12a)

Jesus challenged him to believe he was healed by acting on his faith in Jesus to heal. Commanded to get up, he got up in front of the crowd and the religious leaders. He acted on his faith in public. Jesus did many signs in public. He taught in public. The command to make disciples means being public about your faith. You can't lead people to Jesus if no one knows you follow Jesus. Following Jesus changes everything about you.

Everyone was amazed and praised God, saying 'We have never seen anything like this!' We can only imagine what a party the former paralytic had with his friends that day. What a celebration! And that's a good reminder for us. We need to

Celebrate acts of faith (v.12b)

When people come to know the Lord, praise the Lord! When God's people serve the Lord and make decisions that glorify Him, praise Him and encourage those who acted on their faith. It would be interesting if anyone has done a study on the connection between people who fall away from church and a lack of encouragement. I'm sure they are connected. Thank God for how He acts in and through people and encourage the people who are responding by faith in God, obeying His Word. Who have you noticed has acted on their faith and needs to be commended? Praise God together with them.

So many people do not have the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. They are unaware of their need for Jesus. And we have that knowledge. Is our faith too private to share? Jesus commanded us to make disciples that means letting people know we trust Jesus for everything.

As we reflect on this passage this morning, a couple of other questions come to mind.

Who can I count on that will bring me to Jesus?

Who are our real friends who will carry us when we're hurting? Who can we depend on to tell us what we need and point us to Jesus? Who is there for you and me when we have a need that only Jesus can help us with?

The other question is

Who is waiting for me to bring them to Jesus?

If Jesus says in John 4:35

³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Then I believe there are people wanting to find hope, joy and forgiveness of sins through Jesus, they just haven't found anyone to bring them to Jesus. This account may not have ever happened had four friends not persevered in bring their needy friend to Jesus. They faced the obstacles of the crowd and limited access. They were determined to meet Jesus because they had the faith that Jesus could change lives. Do we have that kind of faith? Who are we burdened for to receive forgiveness of sins from Jesus?