

Discipleship According to Mark

The Authority to Forgive (Mark 2:1-17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 18, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ We recently started a new series in the Gospel of Mark. Which has been a great introduction to Jesus. If any of you here are newer to Christianity – if you didn't have a Christian upbringing – Mark's Gospel is a great place to start. Because, unlike some of the other Gospels, you don't come across long discourses of teaching that are often challenging for first-time readers. You see Jesus on the move. You see him in action.
 - That's not to say Jesus does very little teaching in Mark. He teaches a lot. Just not through sermons or parables like in Matthew or Luke. Jesus teaches through his actions. He doesn't just tell you. He shows you.
- ❖ So when it comes to the central question regarding his identity, Mark starts, in chapter one verse one, telling us that Jesus is the Son of God. But Jesus doesn't go around verbally announcing that. He prefers to show you he's the Son of God. And so far, we've seen plenty of evidence that he possesses a divine authority – an authority no mere man can possess.
 - **He has demonstrated the authority of the Son of God in the way he calls disciples, he casts out demons, he cures the sick, and he cleanses lepers.** And in today's passage, he forgives sins. These five blocks of evidence present a clear claim concerning Jesus's true identity. He was claiming to be equal with God. To be God in the flesh. Even his enemies recognized that he was making so bold a claim.
- ❖ Now if this is true – if Jesus did make such claims to divinity – then he is a polarizing figure. **What I mean is that it's impossible to be neutral in your thoughts about Jesus.** I realize most non-Christians try to be respectful of all religions, Christianity included. They may not believe Jesus is the Son of God, but they don't want to be disrespectful. So they try to remain impartial. They'll tell you they don't have a strong opinion towards him one way or the other.
 - **But how can you be impartial towards Jesus unless you simply ignore what he says and disregard what he does?** Any mere mortal who made the kind of claims Jesus made about himself will elicit strong reactions from anyone listening. **C.S. Lewis** argued in his most famous book, *Mere Christianity*, that Jesus only leaves us three options when we're trying to form an opinion of him.
 - Jesus is either a **Lunatic** – a crazy man who thought he was God. Or he was a **Liar** – a con man who convinced a lot of followers he was God. Or you take Jesus at his word and believe he's the **Lord** – the Son of God made man who came to die for the forgiveness of sins.
- ❖ **If he's a lunatic or a liar, then you honestly shouldn't respect Jesus.** You should condemn him. He wouldn't be worthy of our respect, much less our devotion. **But if he is telling the truth, if he is Lord, then you should fall on your knees in worship.** You should follow him with your whole heart. The only thing you shouldn't do is shrug your shoulders towards Jesus and remain ambivalent. **If you're going to take his words and actions seriously, then they demand a response one way or the other.** Condemn him or worship him. Treat him with disdain or give him your heart. Choose one or the other.

- ❖ Of course, I hope you choose to worship Jesus and follow him with all your heart, all the days of your life. **To help you make that choice, I want to show you three things about Jesus's authority in relation to sin.** They're drawn from his encounters with a paralytic and a tax collector. First, we'll see Jesus's audacity to pronounce forgiveness. Second, his authority to offer forgiveness. Third, the audience that ends up receiving forgiveness.

The Audacity to Pronounce Forgiveness

- ❖ **Let's begin by considering how audacious it was – how shocking – for Jesus to pronounce forgiveness over this man for his sins.** To many, in that moment, that was a change of topic. A non sequitur. The paralytic came looking for healing. And, Jesus, you're talking about forgiveness? They're two different topics. Or are they?
- ❖ Let's start in v1. Based on how chapter 1 ended, we learn that Jesus is a local celebrity at this point. He can't go anywhere in a city like Capernaum without crowds surrounding him and hounding him. We're told that he was at home. It most likely wasn't his home. It was probably Simon Peter's or another disciple's. Regardless, it was a home that became inaccessible due to the large crowds. Look at v2, *"And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them."*
 - We're told that four men were trying their best to bring to Jesus their paralytic friend. But *"they could not get near him because of the crowd."* (2:4) That shows you the nature of crowds. In Mark's Gospel, crowds are often the recipients of Jesus's teaching (2:13) or the object of his compassion (6:34). **But nowhere in Mark are crowds described as turning to Jesus in repentance and faith. Only disciples do that.** In fact, the most common function of the crowds within the narrative is to obstruct access to Jesus. Just like you see in our text.
- ❖ **That observation reinforces the importance of making disciples and not simply drawing crowds.** Sometimes Jesus's church can get so caught up in drawing crowds that we neglect our mission to make disciples. **Crowds are easy to form.** Just feed their appetite. Find out what they want – what they're looking for – and give it to them. **But disciples are not so easily made.** Disciples need to repent of their sins and put their faith – not in a famous celebrity – but in a crucified Savior, despised and rejected by this world.
- ❖ Now we're told in v4, that because the crowds were obstructing the doorway, the four friends climbed onto the roof and made an opening right above Jesus. **Just picture the scene. He's in the middle of teaching, when chunks of mud and twigs start falling around him.** Getting stuck in his hair. Suddenly a shaft of light comes streaming into the room. And everyone sees a bed being lowered down from the roof with a man lying on it.
 - You would think the home owner would be upset at the roof damage. But roofs, in those days, were constructed with reeds, branches, and dried mud. All of that had to be replenished every fall, so there would've be a new roof every year. So a hole could've been easily repaired.

- ❖ But it was still a lot of work for those four men to get their paralytic friend onto the roof. To create the hole in the roof. And to lower him down in front of Jesus. That was no small feat. And Jesus recognized that. Look at v5. Notice how it says Jesus saw “*their faith*.” **I think it’s implied that the paralytic himself had faith.** I’m sure he wanted to be brought before Jesus and was praying for healing. **But Jesus also acknowledged and responded to the faith of his friends.** Who shared the same faith that Jesus is good and great. That he’s merciful and powerful enough to heal their paralytic friend.
 - Notice how it says that Jesus *saw* their faith. He’s watching them dig a hole through the roof and lower their friend. **And yet it didn’t say he saw their actions or he saw their efforts. He saw their faith.** The implication is that the internal reality of faith can be outwardly detected through actions, through works. True faith acts. It works.
 - **Friends, don’t be content with a faith that’s merely a matter of the mind.** Faith can’t be reduced to simply knowing the right answers during a baptism interview. Or being able to regurgitate a gospel presentation that someone explained to you. **I should be able to see your faith. Not just hear you profess to have faith.** Jesus saw their faith – a faith manifested in their works.
- ❖ But what he goes on to say in v5 is shocking. It’s audacious. Look at it with me, “*And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*” I’m sure the paralytic and his friends were shocked. They were looking for a healing not a pardon.
 - And by hearing a pardon, I don’t mean they heard an assurance of pardon like you hear every Sunday as part of our liturgy. When we confess our sins together and hear the assurance of pardon, it’s a reminder that God has forgiven our sins by his grace. If that’s all Jesus meant, it wouldn’t be all that audacious. OT priests could issue the same kind of assurance of pardon if you offered up the required sacrifice.
- ❖ **No, when Jesus says, “Son, your sins are forgiven,” he means, “Son, I forgive your sins.”** That’s what the scribes heard. That’s why they start questioning and complaining in their hearts (2:6-7). Now to be honest, it is a strange thing for Jesus to say.
 - Imagine if I’m waiting at an intersection, and I witness two drivers get into an car accident. They get out of their vehicles and start yelling and arguing about who’s to blame. **Wouldn’t it be strange if I were to walk up to them and say, “I forgive you”?** They would be totally weirded out. They would be like, “Who are you? You’re not the hurt party. Why do we need *your* forgiveness?”
 - Do you see how strange it sounds? Jesus is saying to a man he just met, “Son, I forgive your sins.” Which is crazy talk – unless Jesus was being serious. **Which means he’s suggesting that *he* is the hurt party. That he’s ultimately the one who was sinned against.** Because he himself is God.
- ❖ The scribes understood Jesus to be making that very claim. **The scribes had good theology.** They knew that only God can forgive sins. Since all sins are ultimately committed against him. **And the scribes took Jesus’s words literally.** Believing that he meant what he said.

- ❖ **But nonetheless, they remained blind to his true identity.** They saw him as a mere man blaspheming against God. Claiming to possess an authority that belongs exclusively to God.
 - Again, let this serve as a good warning for all of us. **Apparently, like the scribes, it's possible to have good theology and to take Jesus's words literally – and yet remain spiritually blind.** Again, that's because disciples of Jesus aren't just people who know the right answers in their heads. They're the ones who trust him and submit to Jesus in their hearts. Which translates into action – into doing what it takes to be closer to Jesus. Just like you see with this paralytic and his four friends.

The Authority to Offer Forgiveness

- ❖ Friends, let's heed this warning and avoid being in the same boat as the scribes. They're experts in the law, and yet they're blind to Jesus's identity. **They accuse him, in their hearts, of being a blasphemer – of claiming to possess the forgiving authority of God.** But, if we keep reading, Jesus responds and proves, in spectacular fashion, that he truly does possess this authority. This is the second thing I want to show you: Jesus's authority to – not just pronounce forgiveness – but to actually offer it.
 - Let's pick back up again starting in v6, *“⁶Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷“Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” ⁸And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts?””*
- ❖ **The irony is that these scribes are questioning Jesus's claim of divine authority in the privacy of their hearts, and all the while Jesus is using that authority to read their hearts.** Now since he was able to read their hearts and perceive what they're thinking, he could've corrected them if they were misinterpreting his words. They heard him claiming to possess the forgiving authority of God. But if all Jesus meant to convey was a simple assurance of pardon – nothing more than that – he had ample opportunity to correct them.
 - But he doesn't do that. Because they were right. That *is* what he's claiming. And he goes on to prove it. But first he asks them a question in v9, *“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’”*
 - **Now he didn't ask which one is easier to do. To forgive or to heal. Just which one is easier to say.** If Jesus meant which one is easier to accomplish, then healing the lame is far easier than securing the forgiveness of sins, which would involve the cross. But he just said which one is easier to *say*.
- ❖ And the answer is that it's easier to say, *“Your sins are forgiven.”* **Because it's easy to make a theological pronouncement that a person's sins are forgiven.** You're describing an inner reality within the soul. You can't empirically observe if it happened or not. So anyone can just say, *“Your sins are forgiven.”*
 - But if you say, *“Rise, take up your bed and walk,”* and the paralytic is still lying there just as lame, just as crippled, just as unable as before, then you're either a lunatic or a liar for saying what you said.

- ❖ **But if the paralytic immediately jumps to his feet and starts walking, then Jesus proves to all that his words have the authority and ability to accomplish what he says.** Whether it's to heal a back or to forgive sins. Jesus proves that he's the Lord.
 - So he goes on to say in v10, *"¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—¹¹"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹²And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"*"
- ❖ Notice how Jesus says, *"That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin."* **This is the first of fourteen references to the Son of Man in Mark's Gospel.** All coming from Jesus. It's a self-referential title. No one else calls him that. It wasn't a commonly used term back then. Which meant that Jesus could fill it with his own meaning.
 - And by the way he connects the term "*Son of Man*" with "*authority on earth*," it's clear that Jesus was making a clear reference to Daniel 7 and the mysterious "*one like a son of man*," who receives authority on earth from the Ancient of Days. Listen to **Daniel 7:13-14**, *"¹³I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away."*
- ❖ **Jesus understands himself to be this Daniel 7 Son of Man who has been given dominion and authority on earth.** As he goes around casting out evil spirits, healing the sick, raising the lame, and forgiving sinners – Jesus is pushing back against the darkness in this world, dethroning its prince, reversing sin's curse, and making sad things come untrue.
 - Now I think it's reading too much into it if we think Jesus was suggesting this man's paralysis was a result of his sins. As if forgiving his sins was the treatment for healing his back. We have to be careful *not* to draw straight lines of correlation. **Jesus makes clear in John's Gospel, when he heals the man born blind in John 9, that we can't always draw a clear causal link between sickness and sinfulness.**
- ❖ Now that was certainly the prevailing thought among Jewish people in those day. They would've assumed this paralytic was a great sinner; otherwise why else would he be in this sad, pitiful state?
 - But just as Jesus said of the man born blind – **sometimes sickness and paralysis aren't the direct consequences of sin but rather unique opportunities for the wondrous works of God to be put on display** (Jn 9:3). So that people will be amazed and glorify God saying, *"We never saw anything like this!"*

- ❖ **Just think of this man's testimony, and how, from now on, he'll be giving thanks to God for his paralysis.** Because if it weren't for that dreadful condition, he would never have met Jesus in the first place. He would still be paralyzed with a broken back. And even worse, he would still be bearing, on his back, the burden of sin.
 - But everything has changed. He has been forgiven. **The burden of his sin has been lifted. And all he has to carry now is his own bed mat, as he walks away on his own two feet.** And strangely enough, he has his paralysis to thank for that.
 - I know many of you have a similar testimony. **That hardship, that trial, that sickness or disability that had burdened you for all those years – it was the very thing that eventually brought you before Jesus.** Where you experienced his love and compassion and the forgiveness of your sins. And strangely enough, now in hindsight, you can give thanks for that hardship.
- ❖ Friends, that could be your story. **What once was, to you, a crippling trial that brought you much pain can be transformed, by grace, into a powerful testimony that brings God much glory.** You just have to go to Jesus. And don't let anything hold you back. Push past any obstacle that gets in your way.
 - And remember the paralytic in our story had a lot of help from his friends to get to Jesus. So ask yourself: **Who has God placed in my life who needs Jesus? What can I do to bring them to Jesus despite the obstacles in the way?** And let's be honest, sometimes the biggest obstacle is our own fear – or own hesitancy to speak up and invite them to meet Jesus. These four friends serve as inspiration and great examples for how we ought to love and serve our own friends and family who need Jesus.

The Audience That Receives Forgiveness

- ❖ So we've seen how Jesus possesses the authority – not just to pronounce someone forgiven – but to actualize and offer that forgiveness. Let's move on to the next episode, and we'll see the audience that receives Jesus's forgiveness. The kind of people he came to save.
 - In the previous chapter, we saw Jesus coming for local fishermen. We were introduced to Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John. **They were the first set of disciples.** It's not surprising at all that Jesus would surround himself with such men. Fishermen were representative of the Jewish populace. **But here in chapter 2, starting in v13, Jesus calls into his inner circle a social and moral outsider.** *“¹³He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.”*
- ❖ **In those days, tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Romans, collecting taxes from their own people on behalf of an oppressive nation.** So tax collectors were considered traitors. And not only that, tax collectors had the reputation of skimming off the top and profiting off their neighbors. So they were traitors and extortionists. That's why “*tax collectors and sinners*” became a catchphrase to describe the cheats and scoundrels of society. The kind of people that decent, religious people would do well to avoid.

- ❖ And yet an outsider like Levi – better known as Matthew – was the kind of person that Jesus sought to draw near to. **He calls a person like that into his inner circle of disciples. He even makes a point of fellowshiping with a whole house full of them.**
 - Levi invites Jesus over to his house for a meal. And it says in v15, *“And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.”*
- ❖ Jesus enjoyed their company, and they enjoyed him. But the scribes grumbled. Look at v16, *“And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?””*
 - There’s a large contrast between Jesus and the scribes and their vastly different approach towards sinners. **The scribes sought to avoid sinners; while Jesus sought to be around them.**
- ❖ **Jesus challenged the religious norms of his day by his willingness to share table fellowship with those generally considered to be deplorable sinners.** And that’s what aggravated the scribes. They wouldn’t have cared if Jesus had showed mercy by feeding hungry sinners on the street. Their problem is *not* with showing mercy to sinners in general. Their problem is sharing table fellowship with sinners.
 - **Because in first-century Jewish culture, to share table fellowship is to extend friendship, to express acceptance, and to exhibit unity.** Jesus’s willingness to share a meal with *“tax collectors and sinners”* communicated a willingness to call them his friends, to call them his family.
- ❖ Now, on one hand, that makes sense to anyone who has the eyes to see Jesus for who he really is. **He is the Christ, the Messiah, whose mission is to heal and save sinners by calling them to repentance and faith.** That’s what he came to do. So if that’s his job, then of course, you would find him regularly surrounded by tax collectors and sinners. There’s nothing scandalous about that at all.
 - **Would you be shocked to meet a doctor who is regularly surrounded by sick people?** Would it be considered scandalous if she enjoys spending time with her patients? No, you would consider it a sign that she’s a good doctor who has a clear sense of her mission in life.
- ❖ The same is true of Jesus. **He had a clear sense of mission. He understood his calling as a Physician.** V17, *“And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*
 - **Jesus self-consciously saw himself as a physician.** A doctor, like many of you. While most of us try hard to avoid being around sick people – because we don’t want to catch whatever they have – it’s amazing that you doctors purposely draw near to them. In the same way, the scribes tried hard to avoid sinners. **But the Great Physician purposely drew near to those who were spiritually sick with sin.** He didn’t come to call the righteous, but sinners.

- ❖ **Now that doesn't mean the scribes are righteous and have no need of the Great Physician.** *"Those who are well"* in Jesus's metaphor refer to those who are so self-assured that they're healthy that they *think* they have no need of a physician. **In the same way, if you're self-assured that you're righteous before God, then it's no surprise if you think you have no need for a Savior.** No need for Jesus.
- ❖ **But the gospel, that Jesus came preaching, teaches that everyone is sick and everyone needs him.** The Great Physician has diagnosed us all to be great sinners in great need of forgiveness. Without it, we stand condemned and doomed to die a spiritual death.
 - **But the good news is that our Great Physician is also our Great Redeemer who died for our sins on the cross.** He secured our forgiveness at great cost and with great effort on his part. But for us, it's a free gift of grace. We just have to trust his Word and respond in faith.
- ❖ That's what the paralytic did. Imagine how long he was confined to that bed. And how hard he must've tried in the past to rise, to take up his bed, and walk. **He could've taken offense at Jesus's command to do what he knows he can't do.** He could've taken it as a cruel joke.
 - But no, he trusted Jesus to do what seemed impossible. **And you could actually see his faith – in the way he propped himself up in bed and tried to put weight on those frail, atrophied legs.** That's what faith looked like for him.
 - So what does faith look like for you? **What is Jesus asking you to do that seems impossible?** You might've given up by now and concluded that things are never going to change. But remember, it's the Son of God commanding you, and he has received all authority on this earth and in your life. Trust him and respond in faith and obedience.