

JESUS FORGIVES AND CALLS SINNERS

Mark 2:1-17

Key Verse: 2:17

“On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

We have been introduced to Jesus’ ministry as the Messiah: preaching, teaching, healing and driving out demons. In last week’s passage Jesus healed a man with leprosy with a merciful touch and a pronouncement: **“I am willing. Be clean!”** Jesus came to save, cleanse and heal us from our disease of sin. Praise be to Jesus Christ our Great Physician!

In today’s passage there are two events: one involving a paralyzed man and one a tax collector. These men were very different. One man was powerless to help himself. The other was powerfully selfish. They looked quite different but they at least two things in common: they were shunned outcasts in their societies, and they were both sinners in need of forgiveness. Sometimes it seems that what people need more than anything is a better life situation: like a good job, a godly spouse, a compassionate friend or obedient children. These are all good to have. But all people have a more urgent, common need—a need that we cannot fulfill for ourselves or for anyone else—a need that only God can provide and fulfill. It is the need for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to bring the forgiveness of sins. But it doesn’t stop there. Not only does Jesus have the authority to forgive our sins, but He also calls us to a new life of following Him. May the Holy Spirit convict us of our most urgent need and Jesus’ authority to provide it. May we each also hear and respond very personally to the Lord’s call for our lives.

I. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man (1-12)

Look at verses 1-2. **“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.”** As we recall, Jesus had already taught in the Capernaum synagogue. There he drove out an impure spirit from a disturbed man. Then he went to Simon and Andrew’s home, where he

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healed Simon's mother-in-law from a fever. After sunset Jesus healed many with diseases and others who were oppressed by demons. Then Jesus traveled throughout Galilee preaching and healing the sick and the demon-possessed. Now Jesus came back to Capernaum, most likely to Simon and Andrew's home again. This was Jesus' home base for ministry. People came to the house and packed it so there was no room, even outside the door. It was standing room only.

What did Jesus do? Verse 2 says **“he preached the word to them.”** Jesus' focus and priority was on preaching the word. At the same time, Jesus did not ignore their practical life problems. Tending to people's practical needs is good and necessary. But it is not enough. People also need the word of God to guide, direct, encourage, sanctify and give life (Ps 119:105; Ro 15:4; Jn 17:17; Heb 4:12). Preaching the word of God ministers to people's minds, hearts and souls. But there is a danger that we might just try to give a Bible verse to solve someone's problem, without caring for them personally. “Take one Bible verse and don't call me in the morning.” The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day knew their Bibles quite well. But they did not have the love of God in their hearts (Jn 5:42). We are to love not merely with words, but with actions (1Jn 3:18). Jesus rebukes those who put burdens on others but who are not willing to lift a finger to help them (Lk 11:46; Mt 23:4). Our faith must involve action and love. Jesus is looking for faith, not only to help ourselves but to help others. We see this kind of faith in verses 3-4. **“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.”**

These men first tried to push their way through the crowd. But no one would let them through. “Hey, we got here first! Wait your turn! Come back some other day.” Humanly speaking, these four friends of the paralyzed man were rude. They intruded in 3 ways: they damaged someone's roof, they put their own friend's need ahead of others who were there, and they interrupted Jesus' preaching. But these four friends did not mind taking criticism if only they could get their paralyzed friend to Jesus. I assume that they were willing to pay the damage repairs for the roof.

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So many people cannot get to Jesus on their own. So many people are not even trying to get to Jesus, since they don't think they need His help, or that He cannot help them. They are looking for help or fulfillment in many wrong places like clubs or self-help programs, that is, from other sinners. But sick people cannot heal other sick people. They need a doctor. And they need someone to bring them to the doctor. Sometimes they need four people to bring them. If only they are brought to Jesus, they can be healed. Are you bringing anyone to Jesus through your words, prayers, kindness, friendship, or a loving challenge? Are you willing to pay the cost to help someone to get to Jesus?

Look at verse 5. **“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”** Jesus saw the paralyzed man and the four friends helping him. But he saw something else. He saw their faith, through their actions and their hearts. Jesus spoke unusual and shocking words: **“Son, your sins are forgiven.”** Jesus loved this paralyzed man as if he were his own child and Jesus a father to this man. What is most surprising is Jesus' words **“your sins are forgiven.”** To this man and his friends, it would seem that his most urgent need was healing of his paralysis. Jesus did not address his paralysis. Jesus addressed his sins. Many people come to Jesus for some benefit, like healing or prosperity or a restored relationship with someone, or maybe just to overcome loneliness. And surely Jesus can help us in these areas. But our most urgent, serious need is the forgiveness of our sins. We need the forgiveness of sins more than anything else.

Why? One reason is that sin separates us from God. **Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”** Sin cuts us off from God so that we lose the meaning or joy of life. Sin makes us think: “My life has no point or direction or purpose. I don't know what I am doing, or why I'm alive! My life is lacking significance. Does my life make any difference?”

We need the forgiveness of sin because sin paralyzes us from doing the good God created us to do. Sin makes us spiritual paralytics. James 4:17 says, **“If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.”** Again, Romans 7:19-20 says, **“For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if**

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I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”

We all need the forgiveness of sins for our salvation. Who is Jesus that He can pronounce the forgiveness of sins? He is the Son of God, the Messiah. It would cost him his life to secure our forgiveness. It was a price He willingly and freely paid on our behalf. This forgiveness is credited to all who repent of their sins, confessing them to God and turning away from them, and putting their faith in Jesus for salvation. Acts 3:19 promises: **“Repent, then and turn to God, that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...”** Acts 10:43 says about Jesus, **“All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”** And again 1 Peter 3:18a says, **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”** This is the good news for all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ words were not easy to swallow by some of his listeners. Look at verses 6-7. **“Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** Their point was quite valid. If Jesus was a mere man, to declare that a man’s sins are forgiven would be blasphemy, for sins are against God. Jesus was claiming to know the mind and heart of God. Even prophets of the Lord do not declare by their own authority, “your sins are forgiven.” Even the prophet Nathan, after David repented of his sin, said to David, **“The Lord has taken away your sin”** (2Sa 12:13). Only God can forgive sin, since sin is ultimately against God.

Jesus addressed the inner objection they had in verses 8-9. **“Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?”** How do you answer Jesus’ question? Actually, both are impossible for man to speak with effect. Humanly speaking, medical technology could possibly enable a paralyzed man to walk. But medicine or science cannot forgive anyone’s sins. Jesus did not hesitate to prove his point. See verses 10-12. **“But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”** So

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he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!” Jesus showed them the power of God. By enabling this paralyzed man to walk, Jesus proved that he has the power and authority to forgive sins. Jesus can enable a paralyzed person to walk. Jesus can take away all our sins. Praise be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ who has the power to heal and forgive our sins! Praise Jesus who gives paralyzed sinners the power to get up and walk in His name!

II. Jesus Calls a Tax Collector to Follow Him (13-17)

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them (13). Here again, we see Jesus teaching. Jesus taught in the synagogue. Jesus taught in private homes. Jesus taught out beside the lake. The place didn't matter. Jesus taught everywhere he went. And the crowds came to him. Now look at verse 14. **As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.** Who was Levi? He was a tax collector. At that time, tax collectors were notorious as public sinners, along with prostitutes. They were regarded as traitors of their Jewish people, since they worked to collect taxes for Rome, their pagan oppressor. Levi's tax booth was by the sea, perhaps to collect taxes from fishermen like Simon, Andrew, James and John. These men would naturally not be so happy that Jesus called him to be one of Jesus' disciples. They must've thought, “Oh no, not him! Jesus, please choose someone else!”

Jesus did not see Levi as a troublemaker or as a useless man. Jesus did not judge him as a hopeless person. Jesus saw Levi with faith, hope and love. Jesus sees us, in spite of all our sins and weaknesses, as hopeful servants of God and lovely children of God. Jesus calls not just a certain kind but all kinds of sinners to follow Him. In Jesus, we have hope.

Jesus' call to Levi was a call to discipleship, just as Jesus called the two sets of brothers who were fishermen: Simon and Andrew, and James and John. Jesus said to him, **“Follow me.”** Jesus did not explain with many words. Jesus simply called Levi with the words, **“Follow me.”** And Levi responded in obedient faith: he got up and followed Jesus. He did not ask

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Jesus if he could put in a two week quitting notice. He gave up his worldly job to follow Jesus. Anyone who would be Jesus' disciple must follow Him. To follow Jesus we are not given the option to follow something or someone else. Something or someone else easily becomes an idol that hinders one from following Jesus.

What about me? Am I following Jesus? Essentially, yes. I left the yuppie dream of living for money, pleasure and family as of first priority in order to dedicate my life to follow Jesus and live for Him based on my life key verse, Mark 8:35, **“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”** This is my daily prayer for my children: that they may love Jesus and live for Him. Even so, I find myself following Jesus in my own way, according to my own convenience and schedule. Lord, forgive my stubborn pride. I resolve newly by your grace, to follow you. Please help me and my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to follow you and to give a godly influence to our children and many others to follow you in their lives. Revive our nation that many may follow Christ as of first priority.

Levi threw a dinner party at his house for Jesus. He invited many tax collectors and “sinners” to his party, since they must have been the only friends he had. Jesus did not mind hanging out with sinners, not because he wanted to indulge in sin, but because he wanted to help and bring them into new lives. Again Jesus faced severe criticism as we see in verse 16: **When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”** Their critique did not come directly to Jesus. Rather they criticized Jesus to his disciples, perhaps to plant doubt in the disciples' minds. These law teachers didn't like and didn't agree that Jesus associated with sinners. Perhaps they quoted several good Bible verses about avoiding sinners or being holy. How did Jesus reply? Let's read verse 17 together. **On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”** Healthy people need no doctor. It is sick people who go to the emergency room and get medical help. Jesus is the Doctor who came to heal the sinsick world. The problem is: not everyone thinks or knows they are sick. Many think they are fine, though they are dying of sinsickness. Jesus has the

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antidote to stop the harmful effects of sinsickness. Jesus is the Great Physician who can heal our diseases and forgive our sins.

Righteous people don't need healing. Of course, there are no righteous people before God, not even one, except Jesus. Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, **“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”** Jesus did not come to call the righteous, or those who think they are righteous. Jesus came to call sinners, that is, those who recognize they need forgiveness of all their sins. Jesus came to bring forgiveness of sins and new life in His name. Jesus came to call sinners. Have you personally repented of all your sins and trusted in Jesus alone for the forgiveness of your sins? No one else can save you—not your Bible teacher or pastor or parents or favorite preacher. Jesus, and He alone has authority to forgive your sins. Acts 4:12 says of the name of Jesus, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”**

Jesus has authority to forgive our sins. But he does not leave us there. Jesus calls us to a new life in Him. Jesus calls us away from a life of chasing things in this world—treasures, pleasures and vanities on earth—to pursuing His kingdom, His glory, His honor and recognition. He calls us away from living for our own glory to living for his glory. Have you heard the call of Jesus upon your life? Have you responded? Jesus calls sinners saying, “Follow me.” It may be that you have received his forgiveness and calling in your life, but you have become habitual and dry like a desert, and you need a renewal of His forgiveness and a revival of His calling, like renewing your marriage vows.

Jesus forgives and calls sinners—that includes you and me. Jesus wants to bless us. Not only that, Jesus wants to make us a blessing in His name as we follow Him and help to bring others to Him.