

Jesus' Authority to Forgive Sin

Scripture: Mark 2:1–12

Code: 41-8

Open your Bible, if you will, to Mark chapter 2, and we are going to embark upon the opening twelve verses of this chapter, one of the more wonderful and memorable stories of the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus. Before we look at the account of these twelve verses, however, I want to get a little bit of a running start.

It may seem like a question with an obvious answer, but sometimes things aren't as obvious as they ought to be for some, and so let me ask it anyway. What is the most distinctive benefit that Christianity has to offer the world? What is the most distinctive benefit that Christianity has to offer the world? I suppose there would be a lot of suggested answers. There are some people who think the great legacy of Christianity is a kind of morality, a kind of ethical approach to life.

There are others who think that the great legacy of Christianity is that it provides a certain kind of love and sacrificial affection for people, social responsibility. Others think that it provides a kind of tranquility in life that they call peace. There are some who think that what Christianity really offers people is fulfillment in life or a sense of satisfaction or purpose. Summing it all up, there are folks who think that Christianity's greatest benefit is to provide people a measure of religious happiness.

Well, I would agree with you that there is contained in the pages of Scripture a moral standard, an ethical standard. I agree with you that Christians are marked by love and peace and happiness. I agree with you that Christians express social responsibility based upon a higher motivation than any other people, and there is amazing fulfillment, purpose, and satisfaction in Christianity. But none of those is the great benefit of Christianity, those are simply by-products of the great benefit.

There is one great benefit that the Christian gospel offers that transcends all other benefits and leads to all other benefits. It is a benefit, frankly, that corresponds directly to man's greatest need, and that is where Christianity marks itself out from all other religions on the planet. It alone addresses man's greatest need. There are religions that offer ethics and morality, and social responsibility, and family values, and a measure of love and peace, somewhat a measure of fulfillment, satisfaction, maybe even a certain measure of happiness. But what is man's greatest need?

The greatest need of man, simply put, is to escape the wrath of God poured out on sinners eternally in hell. The greatest need of man is to escape the wrath of God poured out eternally on sinners in hell. Only Christianity, only the Christian gospel offers the benefit that meets that need. Only through the Christian gospel can anyone escape the wrath of God poured out on sinners eternally in hell.

What sends people to hell? You say sin. No. It's not sin alone that sends people to hell. It is unforgiven sin. It is unforgiven sin that sends people to hell. Hell is only occupied by people whose sins have never been and will never be forgiven. Heaven, on the other hand, is occupied by people whose sins have all been forgiven; therefore, what causes people to escape the wrath of God in eternal hell is the forgiveness of their sins. That is man's greatest need, to move him from hell to

heaven.

Christianity alone offers that very benefit, the forgiveness of sins. The greatest need of every soul is divine forgiveness of all sin, and the greatest benefit of Christianity, then, is the provision of that complete forgiveness.

God uniquely presents Himself in Scripture as a God who is willing to forgive, who is eager to forgive, who is by nature compassionate, kind, loving, merciful, and seeks to save sinners from His own wrath. This is the message of the Christian gospel. If you have been assuming that the Christian church or the Christian gospel or the Christian religion has any other message than that, you've been wrong. That is the message.

In Acts chapter 13 and verse 38 we read, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and it is granted to all those who believe." When you believe the gospel, you receive forgiveness of sins.

In Ephesians chapter 1, that familiar statement in verse 7, "In Him," that is, in Christ, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us." That is the message of Christianity: God will forgive your sins. It is God's desire to forgive your sins. Forgiveness is consistent with His nature.

Not just in the New Testament, but in the Old as well. Back in Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7, God introduces Himself, this is God speaking about Himself, and He says, "The Lord, the Lord God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth, who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin." That is God introducing Himself.

In Nehemiah chapter 9, verse 17, we read, "You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness." In Psalm 103, verse 12, that memorable statement, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." Isaiah 38:17 says, "You have cast all my sins behind your back." Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I," says God, "I am the one who wipes out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

That is amazing - that is amazing. There's nothing more offensive to God than sin because He is absolutely holy, and yet He finds glory in the forgiveness of sinners. Nothing is more godlike than forgiveness. Nothing is more foreign to human nature than forgiveness. Nothing is more alien to us than forgiveness because nothing is more consistent with being sinful than being vengeful.

God understands that justice has to be met. God has actually said that it is an abomination for men to justify a sinner. It is equal to the injustice of declaring an innocent person guilty. In Proverbs 17:15, Scripture says, "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord. It is an abomination for men to justify those who are wicked." And yet God does it, and God alone does it, because God alone can forgive sin. It is God, according to Romans 4, who justifies the ungodly.

How can He do that? He can do that because His justice has been satisfied in the death of Jesus

Christ, who is a substitute for the sinner, who dies in the sinner's place. All the sins of all those who will ever repent and believe were placed on Christ, and He died in our place, therefore satisfying the justice of God. God's justice being satisfied by a perfect substitutionary sacrifice, God can forgive sinners who repent and believe. And thus those sinners escape hell and are promised eternal heaven. This is the message of the Christian gospel, that Jesus came to forgive sinners.

Scripture is very clear that only God can do this, that only God, the One who is the judge and the lawgiver and the executioner, God who is the One offended, is the only One who can forgive. And He does and He will and He delights to, and He has and He will continue to do so.

This story is about forgiveness. Let's read it. Follow your Bible along from verse 1 as I read.

"Speaking of 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. 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. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

"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.' And 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.'"

Now, we're only in the second chapter of Mark, but our Lord has already demonstrated His authority over disease, hasn't He? Over all kinds of diseases. He has demonstrated His authority over demons. They must obey Him. He has demonstrated His authority in teaching, by proclaiming the truth and doing it in ways that had never been done before. He has authority over disease. He has authority over demons. He has authority over in the realm of truth. Now He wants us to understand that He has authority to forgive sins - authority to forgive sins. This is what is at the heart of this unforgettable miracle.

Now, the story is full of people. It's all about people. So we're going to kind of look at it as though we were looking at it through the characters that play roles in the story. There is the crowd. There is the paralytic. There is the Savior. There are the leaders. And then we return to the crowd at the end. Every story kind of breaks into three parts. You have a setting, you have action, and you have reaction. As you go through the stories in the record of the life of our Lord, that's kind of how it is. There's a certain setting which gives meaning to the story. There's the action in the story. Then there's the response of the reaction, and that's what we're going to look at.

The setting is the curious crowd. The action involves the believing paralytic, the forgiving Savior, and the hostile leaders - the response again from the astonished crowd. Let's work our way through the story. We'll begin with the curious crowd and get the setting. "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."

Now, "When He had come back to Capernaum" indicates to us that He had been somewhere. He had been somewhere for a period of time, several days had passed. That is a very broad term. In fact, Luke is equally indefinite. Luke says, "And it came about one day," or literally in the Greek, "And it happened."

Now, we know where Jesus has been. Go back to verse 45. He could not enter a city, it says in the middle of the verse, because the man that He had healed from leprosy had been told not to say anything but to be quiet and go all the way to Jerusalem and show himself to the priests and go through the necessary cleansing and sacrifice to reenter society from being an outcast as a leper. He didn't do that, he went everywhere and just told everybody about the healing, and that just stirred up the excitement of the crowds because leprosy was the worst of the worst.

And so instead of obeying Jesus, he spread it everywhere to the extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, stayed out at an unpopulated areas, and they were coming to Him from everywhere. He couldn't go into a city because the crush of the people was so overwhelming. Now, remember, everywhere He went, He healed everybody. And it just became totally debilitating to Him because of the crush of the crowd of people with all their physical infirmities and needs.

Jesus was certainly willing to heal, and He did. But what was more important to Him, go back to verse 38 of chapter 1, He said, desiring to leave Capernaum - He was in Capernaum when He said this: "Let's go somewhere else. Let's leave Capernaum." Why? Because verse 37 says, "Everyone's looking for you." After His healings there, healings of masses of people, as well as Peter's wife's mother, there was just an inundation of people into His life, and it made it hard for Him to preach. Everybody was clamoring to be healed.

And so He said, "Let's go somewhere else, for I have to preach, for that is what I came for." And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, all around the lake, preaching and casting out demons. So for weeks, stretching into months, He's been away from Capernaum, and He's been going all over, and He's been healing and He's been casting out demons and He has been preaching the glorious gospel of salvation, repentance, and faith in God's grace and forgiveness.

Now, things have cooled down a little bit because He's been out in the wilderness for so long. He feels He can reenter Capernaum and He won't be completely stifled. So it's time to go back. So Mark says, "When He had come back to Capernaum." Several days after completing this tour of the lake area, He comes back to, essentially, end of the verse says, what was home.

The home for Jesus during His Galilean ministry, which lasted as long as a year and a half, was Capernaum, and very likely, He stayed in the home of Simon and Andrew, Peter and Andrew. That was His home base. He comes back to this, the largest town on the lake, trade center north and south, east and west, busy, busy place. Roman garrison there, tax office there - significant place. He

comes back.

What had He done while He had been gone? Cast out demons, preached. So He comes back. When He arrives at the home of Simon and Andrew, which is where He was staying, verse 2 says, "Many were gathered together there." That's probably an understatement. It was a mob scene. There was no longer any room for anybody, not even near the door. It was just completely jammed.

Now, you need to understand something, folks, and this is going to be true through His ministry. Crowds were no measure of ministry success. Crowds were no measure of spiritual success. Never does Mark say the crowds were coming to Jesus in repentance and faith. Never says that. Generally, they are curious. That's why I called this first point, "The curious crowd." They're spiritually passive. They're spiritually indifferent. They're spiritually uncommitted. They want the healing, like in John 6, they want the food. But they really are not seeking anything spiritual from Jesus in general.

There, of course, are some true followers and true believers, but they are a small minority. They are the few. The crowd really functions to obstruct Jesus more than anything, to make it difficult for Him to teach because of the clamor of the people who want their physical needs met, because of the crush. If He's on the shore, He has to get in a boat and go offshore, just to get some breathing room from the e crowds. They make it hard for Him to minister, hard for Him to teach. And even when He's teaching, the interruptions must have been constant, such as this amazing interruption where people start digging through the roof in the middle of your lesson.

It's really only in private with His disciples that He explains truth in detail. So crowds are no measure of His success. The curious crowds are drawn by the desire for more miracles. They are generally indifferent to Jesus' teaching, except they note the uniqueness of it, such as back in verse 27 where they say, "It's a new teaching with authority. What is this? We've never heard anything like this." The similar response at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, "We never heard a man speak like this. He speaks with authority." They marked the uniqueness of it.

But they were not particularly interested in the spiritual truth of it. Nonetheless, He was speaking the Word to them. The Word means the gospel, the Word from God, the Word about salvation, the Word about the Kingdom, entering the Kingdom through repentance and faith. It was the same message He gave at Nazareth. And you remember Luke 4 records that He went to Nazareth, His own hometown, gave one message there, told them it was the favorable year of the Lord. He'd come to preach the gospel to the poor, the blind, the oppressed.

He'd come to set free the captives. He had come to proclaim the glorious liberty of salvation. At the end of that sermon, they try to throw Him off a cliff and kill Him. They had no interest in the spiritual message, they were very deeply offended by it because it was predicated on them recognizing their own wretchedness and sinfulness, spiritual poverty, blindness, lack of liberty, spiritual oppression. And they didn't want to see themselves that way, they thought they were the holy.

And so He preached that same message surely in Capernaum. As far as we can tell, there wasn't a reaction as there was in Nazareth. They didn't try to kill Him in Capernaum, so He made it His home and stayed there. So there is the curious crowd.

By the way, just a footnote, Luke adds, "The Pharisees were mingled in. The Pharisees were

mingled in. Comes from a word meaning separated. These are the guardians of the populist form of apostate Judaism. They're the fundamentalists, legalists, architects, and promoters of salvation by works, salvation by self-righteousness. This is the system that dominated the people. Yeah, they believed in the Old Testament, they believed in resurrection. They believed in angels. They believed in demons. They believed in predestination, human responsibility, written law, oral law.

They believed in the coming of Messiah, the Messianic Kingdom. They were non-priests, they were lay people. They were devoted to keeping the people loyal to the Old Testament law, and more importantly, the tradition. They had a complex set of regulations they had developed that sort of became a wall around the law with the idea that it would protect it, and what it did was obscure it and put something in its place. Couldn't see the law anymore, all you could see was the regulations that were around the law. And, of course, it was a damning system because no one could be saved by keeping the law.

There were only about six thousand of them, I understand, at this time, but they were pervasive in their influence in the synagogue system throughout the land of Israel. They began after they returned from the Babylonian captivity in the time of Ezra, about 400 years before this, and they had developed for 400 years this system of legalistic Judaism that was nothing but apostate. And the Pharisees were mingled in the crowd that day in the house because they had started to dog the steps of Jesus because they were already so concerned with what He was saying. They saw Him as a threat. They wanted to trap Him in some blasphemy so they'd have a reason to execute Him.

Now, within the group of the Pharisees, there was also a group called scribes. If you drop down to verse 6, you can see some of the scribes are sitting there also. Now, the scribes were the theologians that belonged to the Pharisees' system. The Pharisees were the preachers and teachers of the system, the theologians sort of put it together. They were the scholastics, they were the scholars. Not all scribes were Pharisees. Not all Pharisees were scribes. There were Pharisees that were not scribes, there were scribes that were not Pharisees. There were scribes of the Sadducees, there were independent scribes as well.

Jesus would even have been considered a scribe, who was completely independent of any of those orders or sects. But the New Testament makes a number of references to the scribes of the Pharisees. Each religious system, whether it was the Essenes or the Sadducees or the Pharisees, had their scholars that put their system together and certainly the Pharisees had theirs. Some of them were sitting there, according to Luke chapter 5, verse 17.

It is the scribes, whether scribes of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, or independent scribes, who were called rabbi, which meant great one. It was a title of honor that they loved to hear. Even Jesus, you remember, was called rabbi. You find that at least five times in the gospel of John.

So they were the teachers and theologians and they were there as well. They were all there, wanting to trap Jesus. Luke 5:17 adds something that's not in Mark. Luke says, "The power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing." Remember, now, He had restricted Himself to the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit was there in full power to heal, and so that's why the people were there, they were there for the healings. But Jesus was teaching the curious crowd.

And we move from the setting to the action. The action begins with the believing sinner. Let's call him

the believing sinner, verse 3, "And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men." This is a common scene, I think. According to Matthew's gospel, chapter 4, verse 24, He healed many paralytics. This is the only actual description of an incident in which He heals a paralytic in the book of Mark, and I think - I don't think there's one in - except this one in Luke, as well. But He healed many paralyzed people, paralyzed by genetic reasons, paralyzed by accident, paralyzed in some way by some disease. This is the only recorded healing of a paralyzed man in Mark and Luke, though He did heal many.

Luke tells us also they wanted to get the man in to Christ. They couldn't get him in. They couldn't get him through the door because it was jammed. So they have brought their friend, this paralyzed man, may be a paraplegic, may be a quadriplegic. Verse 4 says, "Being unable to get to Him" - to Jesus - "because of the crowd," which reminds us again this is a curious crowd, not a particularly sympathetic crowd. I would assume that if you had a healer in there and you knew he was able to heal and you were an able-bodied person standing in the doorway, you might move and let somebody who is a quadriplegic being carried through. But this is a very self-seeking, self-serving, self-indulgent crowd, and they didn't move.

Being unable to get him in - and they tried. In Luke 5:18 and 19, it says, "They tried." A lot of different ways to do it. The crowd forms a barrier. The crowd is always seen as some kind of an obstruction to what has to happen - unyielding, without compassion, indifferent. But these are pretty determined folks. So they removed the roof above Him. And when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.

Now, you've heard that story so many times, it has a certain amount of familiarity. That is a shocking event. To say nothing of a very disturbing one, if you're trying to make a point, if you're the teacher. Anybody who teaches in public knows that you like as few distractions as possible. I'm always glad when I look up and see the crying baby go out the door, you know? I mean it's just the way it is. You're trying to maintain people's attention so that they can stay with you in the process. And here is Jesus and they have gone up on the roof.

Now, let me tell you how houses were made in those days, a one-story house - one-story house, and it would have a large center room or great room, you might even call it today, but one story, flat roof, external staircase. This is the way they did it, not internal. Go up the external stairs. The roof was made out of - well what you would expect, beams, large beams in the roof, and then between the larger beams there would be smaller pieces of wood, sticks, and then there would be thatch. It would be thatch that was made, some kind of a grain, some kind of twigs, whatever it was to constitute thatch, it would go in.

Then there would be mud, and mud after the thatch was really thick. Mud would be laid there as well. And on top of the mud would be some kind of tiles. That's the roof. And that's why it says they dug through the roof because they would have to remove the tiles and then start digging through the combination of mud and thatch to find a place where they could pull some sticks apart and a large enough place to lower a man on a bed through the roof.

So that's what's going on. They went up on the roof and first of all, they had to determine exactly where Jesus was because they didn't want to lower the man somewhere else in the room. So they figured exactly where Jesus was. If they lowered the man anywhere else in the room, then they would have to work their way through the immovable crowd, so they made a good assessment of

where that was. So you can just see the Lord there, teaching, and He's preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and all of a sudden mud starts falling on His head, thatch starts coming down all over the place. People are looking up. This is a horrible distraction.

And these are such determined people to get this guy through and it just - the hole just keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger and - I don't know, how long it would take to dig, say, a four-by-six hole in a roof, but that's what they did, to lower the man down. It is certainly dangerous, if not dirty, a major demolition. Luke says they calculated accurately and dropped the man right in front of Jesus. Mark says, "And when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying."

Now, the crowd has to be focused on this, transfixed by it, certainly agitated by it. We know this about those five men: They believed Jesus could heal. Would you agree with that? I mean, they went to some very extreme points to get him down there. They had to believe that. They had to believe. Certainly the paralytic had to believe it. First of all, he would be embarrassed to be seen in public anyway because any such kind of infirmity was deemed as a judgment of God against the man, and people like that didn't tend to go out in public. So this man really believed Jesus could heal him, and his four friends believed it to some degree, and we know they did because in verse 5 Jesus sees their faith.

That brings us to change our focus from the curious crowd, to the believing sinner, to the forgiving Savior. The people coming through the roof say nothing - at least nothing's recorded - not even, "Excuse me. Hate to interrupt your talk, but." But Jesus speaks, and this is so amazing, in verse 5. "Jesus seeing their faith" - "Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" That is a really interesting statement.

Now, they all had faith. They all had faith that Jesus could heal. How did they have that faith? Was this some - some supernatural kind of faith? No. No, they believed He could heal. Why? Because He'd been doing it. This is natural faith. This is human faith, it's the same faith that allows you to go into the hospital and have surgery. Why do you do that? Why do you let somebody put you asleep? And then they wheel you into a room and somebody slices you open and messes around and - why do you do that? You don't know the guy, you don't know how he treats his wife, his kids, his friends, his enemies.

Well, how do you - what do you think he's going to do to you? Why do you do that? Because you - you have experienced that hospitals are designed to be safe places, and doctors are designed to be safe people. And all the people that surround them, like nurses and anesthesiologists and everybody else, are highly trained and highly experienced and they've done this many times, and you can put yourself in their hands and you can trust - that's human faith - it's human faith.

It's the same faith you exercise when you go to eat in a restaurant. You've never been in the kitchen in your life and probably shouldn't ever go to the kitchen. But there's something about human experience that teaches you that this is something that can be counted upon, and that's exactly why these men did this. There is evidently faith that Jesus can heal. And it's such a strong faith because they think He's going to heal this man or they wouldn't go through all of this. They're going to have to pay for the repair of the whole roof. They're going to have to embarrass the man if it doesn't happen. They have such confidence.

Why? Because Jesus not only could heal, but He healed everybody. We've already learned that. There's no hesitance, so obviously they had whatever that human faith is that drew the masses to Him, confident that He could heal them. They all had that kind of faith. By the way, this is the first mention of faith in Mark and it is linked to action. When it says, "Jesus seeing their faith," it means that. He could see that they had this kind of faith in His healing ability because of what they did. It's that - it's the kind of faith you can see.

By the way, biblically, faith is always linked to action. James put it this way, "Faith without works is dead." Faith acts. Faith overcomes. Faith pursues. Faith strives to its object.

But there was something more with this paralytic than just human faith because although Jesus saw the faith of all of them, He narrows His statement down and He said specifically to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are" - what? - "forgiven." Not the rest, but yours. And He saw in him a faith that was not visible to everybody else. Now, Jesus doesn't forgive sins unless the sinner repents and believes, right? So what did Jesus see in this man? What kind of faith? Not a natural faith, not a human faith, but a spiritual faith. This is more.

This is not just healing, this is salvation. This man's faith was not limited to believing in Jesus' healing power. This man believed that Jesus was the One who offered salvation to those who repent. Jesus saw the real deal. And, of course, according to John 2:25, Jesus didn't need anybody to tell Him what was in the heart of a man because He knew what was in the heart of the man. He saw the real kind of faith, the faith that saves, the faith that doesn't come from experience but comes from conviction and that comes from sovereign regeneration. And He said in a very endearing expression, "Son." Luke adds that He also called Him, "Friend," which is endearing and sympathetic. "Your sins are forgiven."

Jesus knew what he really wanted. He wanted healing, sure. But far more than that, he wanted forgiveness. The other guys didn't seem to care about that, but then again maybe they hadn't really come to grips with their sin because they were able-bodied. The sinner who is paralyzed may have a different view about his own wretchedness and may see that paralysis as a judgment. Certainly they did in that culture. They just connected those and so did the people who were ill.

But whatever the motivation or whatever the stimulation, the man knew himself to be wretched on the inside as much as wretched on the outside, and He wanted not just a healing, but he wanted forgiveness, and he believed that this was the One who could bring him forgiveness from God.

And so Jesus at this moment on the basis of His own personal authority absolved the man of all his sins. Listen carefully, apart from works, right? Didn't do any works and He obliterated the guilt, and this man went from being sentenced to eternal hell to being given the privilege of eternal heaven. The man's heart must have been like the Publican in Luke 18 who said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That man went home righteous, Jesus said.

Well, this is just what the hostile leaders were looking for. So in verse 6, we meet them. "But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?'" By the way, they were right - they were exactly right. Now, here is just the kind of blasphemy they are looking for, a claim to do what only

God can do, forgive sins - this - this is out of bounds, this is blasphemy.

Now, what's fascinating about this - it says in verse 6, they weren't saying this, they were just thinking it. The heart is equal to the mind in the Hebrew thought. We talk about the heart, we usually think about emotion, but they thought about thought. When they were talking about emotion, they talked about splagchna, the bowels or the gut. So He's reading their minds. And they're saying in their minds, not out loud, why does this man speak that way? He's blaspheming. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And they're right. And so here's their conclusion: He's a blasphemer. He's a blasphemer and that is correct. He is either a blasphemer or He is God.

Focus on that, will you? Because that's the point of the whole story. Either Jesus is a blasphemer or He is God. And, folks, that's it, there's no middle ground. Don't come to me that He was a nice, well-meaning teacher. No. He is either the One who can forgive sin or He is not. If He can, He is God; if He cannot, He is a blasphemer and He is saying He can do something that He cannot do and is a fraud and a deceiver. There's no middle ground.

Now, in their minds, He's a blasphemer, and they knew what the Levitical law said. Leviticus 24:10 to 16, later in verse 23, "Kill the blasphemer." "Kill the blasphemer." We now have blasphemy out of His mouth. We have the Levitical law, which sentences Him to death. We got what we want. Now, Jesus knows they're thinking this, so He speaks to them. Verse 8, "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?'"

What a shock that must have been. He read their minds. He read their minds. He's aware of their thoughts. Now, if you're debating whether Jesus is a blasphemer or God, you can start here. Blasphemers don't know what people are thinking, only God does. First Samuel 16:7, "The Lord looks on the heart." First Kings 8:39, "For you know the hearts of all men." First Chronicles 28:9, "For the Lord searches all hearts and understands every intent of the thoughts." Jeremiah 17:10, "I the Lord search the heart." Ezekiel 11:5, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them."

So if you're wondering whether He is a blasphemer or whether He is God, those men had first-hand proof on the spot when He read their thoughts. Well, then it moves to a second reality. Verse 9, "Which is easier to say to the paralytic? Your sins are forgiven or to say get up and pick up your pallet and walk?" Now, on the surface you might say, "Well, it's easier to say pick up your pallet and walk," but that's if you don't consider what it means by "say." What it means is simply this: To say in the sense of verifiable affirmation and truth.

In other words, to say with conviction because it is evidently true, to say in a believable way, "Which is it easier to say, is it easier to say believably so, your sins are forgiven?" Answer? No. Why? How do you prove it? How do you prove that? What's the evidence of that? How do you know when someone's sins have actually been forgiven? That's not verifiable. You can't say it with evidence that it is actually true.

Now, on the other hand, Jesus says, "Is it easier to say, 'Get up, pick up your pallet and walk' and be believable?" It is because if He does it, then you have proven it. Prove you have the power to make it happen, and everybody will affirm that what you said is true. If the man does what Jesus tells him to do, if he gets up, picks up his bed and walks out - guess what? He is God. Right? He's not a

blasphemer.

And if He is God, who can create and cause a quadriplegic or a paraplegic in a moment to be completely well, completely whole, completely restored, He is God. And if He is God, then He can forgive sin, something only God can do. If He displays the power to heal, if He displays the power to do creation miracles, He has to be God. And if He is God, then He has the authority to forgive sin. So if He has said, "Take up your bed and walk," and the man takes up his bed and walks, that is evidence that He is God, and it validates the fact that He said, "Your sins are forgiven." That also becomes reality. Only God can do both.

As the Savior God, He forgives sin and He also has the power to overrule the effects of sin. He has authority over the consequences of sin, disease, and He has authority over sin itself in terms of its power in the life of an individual spiritually. He has power over sin's temporal effects and eternal effects, physical effects and spiritual effects. He has power over demons. He has power over disease. He has power over death. All of that is power over the forces of evil, and the one who has power over the forces of evil also has power over the evil itself. The two are inseparable.

By the way, later He delegated His power over the effects of evil to His followers for a brief period of time, gave them healing power and the ability to cast out demons, but never delegated to anybody the power and authority to forgive sin. So He is proving that He can forgive sin by proving He is God by doing this miracle. And that's what He explains in verses 10 and 11, "But so that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sin." "So that you may know that the Son of man can forgive sin," He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet, and go home.' And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone."

Are you still asking the question? Is He God or is He a blasphemer? Blasphemers don't read minds, blasphemers don't create new limbs, new bodies. He has to be God. If He is God, it is not blasphemy for Him to say, "Your sins are forgiven."

Three separate commands He gave him in verse 11. "Get up, pick up, go home." And He did it. He got up, picked up, and went home. Instant, total, unmistakable display by the Creator God. Luke adds that as he left, he was glorifying God. He got the full package, right? A new body and a new heart, the whole deal. What a day. I'm sure he was eager to make any contribution he needed to to the repair of the roof. You think?

By the way, the Lord refers to Himself here in verse 10 as "Son of man." It's quite interesting to think about that, Son of man. Why does He call Himself that? Why not Son of God? Why not Son of God, doesn't that make the point? He was the Son of God, why not Messiah? Why not the Anointed One? Why not Son of David? Why Son of man?

People say, "Well, Son of man is a Messianic title." Well, it is in one place in the Old Testament, Daniel 7:13 and 14. The only time the Son of man ever refers to Messiah. Every other time you see Son of man in the Old Testament, it means man, just man, just plain man, like Psalm 8:4, Psalm 144:3, Psalm 145:12, Ezekiel chapter 2, about four times there. Ezekiel is referred to as Son of man, meaning He's just human. Why would Jesus choose to use that term? And it's used 80 times in the New Testament, 14 times in Luke.

It really was our Lord's favorite term for Himself. Why? Why did He not call Himself Son of God? Why did He not call Himself Son of David, Messiah, Anointed One, Christ? Well, some people say it's because He was humble. And it's true. It was a title of humility. But it was a title of humility because it wasn't necessarily associated with being the Messiah. It wasn't necessarily a Messianic title. So what does it do? It provides cover for Him so as not to inflame His followers or inflame His enemies if He went around constantly referring to Himself as the Son of God.

He really doesn't want to exacerbate the unnecessary, undesirable, political elements tied to Messianic expectation. And we're not surprised by that because you've already learned in Mark that He told people, "Don't say anything about this," right? And in chapter 3, verse 12, He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was. There's a secrecy factor in His ministry, and Mark points it out again and again and again, that Jesus is trying to slow down the stampede, the rush. He's trying to be able to do what He needs to do, to go to town to town to town to town to preach the message of salvation, the Kingdom.

And the crowds, just as they get bigger and bigger, become obstruction. And they get Messianic expectations out of proportion to reality, and sometimes they even try to force Him to be a King and He has to escape. So I think Son of man was a title that certainly had a Messianic indication in the seventh chapter of Daniel, but for the most part didn't heighten the Messianic expectation, and it did demonstrate His wonderful humility.

So we meet the curious crowd and the believing sinner, the forgiving Savior, the hostile leaders, now back to the crowd, and we'll get the reaction. We've seen the setting and the action, here's the reaction, verse 12, middle of the verse, the man walks out in sight of everybody with his bed rolled up, the little pallet, it's a little soft, flat mat that you rolled up, put under his arm, walked out. They were all amazed, were glorifying God, saying, "We've never seen anything like this," the astonished crowd. That's all we ever seem to get out of them.

Luke 5 says they were filled with fear, phobeō, from which you get phobia, panic - combination of panic, confusion, awe, reverence. But it falls short of repentance and faith. It falls short of acknowledging Him for who He really was. I think Matthew 9:8 is the key verse to understanding the crowd's reaction. Matthew, who writes of this same miracle, as we've seen in Luke 5, it's in Matthew 9. Matthew writes this at the end of the story. Speaks to the crowd, they were awe-struck, and glorified God - listen to this - who had given such authority to men.

What's the operative word there? Men. He was still a man to them. He was still a man. But how could He be a man? How could He be merely a man when He could create? And they had seen it again and again and again and again. And had authority over supernatural demons. How could He just be a man? How can they be so blind? How can they be awe-struck, amazed, astonished, glorifying God, thanking God, if you will, for what they had seen and come to the conclusion that somehow this is a man. Amazed, astonished, awestruck and never more - never more.

They would be better off to be like the demons who were at least terrified because they really knew who He was. They knew. As we heard from the demon in chapter 1, "You're the Holy One of God."

Jesus did all these miracles in order to show that He was God, so that he could say He came to forgive sinners. Not only to forgive sinners, but to provide the sacrifice on which that forgiveness is

based. And by the way, He's still doing it. He still says to spiritual paralytics, "Son, your sins be forgiven." He'll say it to you if you'll repent and believe in Him.

Father, we thank you again this morning for spending a part of a day with our Savior in the house of his friends in Capernaum and having our hearts touched by the power of His life and teaching. We would pray now that you would, in a powerful and unique way, touch every heart here, look into every heart where you see something more than just human faith, where you see that real faith.

Lord, reach down and forgive that sinner, that penitent, believing sinner, and give him the greatest gift that the Christian gospel has to offer, rescue from your eternal wrath in hell. Provide forgiveness. May no one in this place perish with unforgiven sin. May all know the full, complete forgiveness that you offer those who put their trust in Christ. Amen.

END

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