

# Which Is Easier?

Galilean Ministry Part 9  
Mark 2:6-12 1/13/2018

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Summary: In this, the first of the 5 conflict stories, Mark presents three parties' responses to Jesus and his reaction to those responses. First, faith, which Mark presents as active trust in Jesus. Second, hostility (which is rebuked even though it is only in their thoughts). Jesus then provides proof that he has authority to forgive by doing the healing. Third, mere amazement, which is evidence of a hard heart.

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**Mark 2:1** A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. **2** So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. **4** Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. **5** When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." **6** Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, **7** "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **8** 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? **9** Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? **10** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, **11** "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." **12** 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!"

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# Introduction

## Five Conflict Stories

If Jesus were anything like what most people think he was, his life would not have ended with the masses screaming for his blood. Jesus was not only rejected by his people, but *violently* rejected. There was a reason for that, and all four of Jesus' biography writers go out of their way to show us that reason. Chapter 2 and the first paragraph of ch.3<sup>1</sup> form a very distinct section of the book of Mark, where Jesus collides with the authorities 5 times. Jesus had lots of run-ins with the Jewish authorities, but Mark picks out five of them and describes them one after another in this section to show us how that hostility began, and why it progressed.<sup>2</sup>

And this is important for two reasons. First, seeing how those authorities and other people responded to Jesus, and then seeing the results of those responses, teaches us a lot about what the real, historical Jesus was really like. And second, those responses give you a clearer picture of not only what Jesus is like, but of what you are like. The way you think and feel and act in response to Jesus' words and actions reveal what kind of person you are, and so every time you read any of these accounts, always ask, "Where do I fit in this story? Which one of these characters in this account is me?" So, of these 5 events that Mark is going to show us, event #1 takes up the first 12 verses of Mark 2. And in these 12 verses, Mark shows us three different responses to Jesus by three different parties. The first response was faith.

## Response #1: Faith

### Mark 2:5 Jesus saw their faith...

And how is their faith described? Action.

## God Allows Obstacles

They persist in bringing their friend to Jesus. When they first arrive, the scene is unbelievable - they have a guy on a stretcher, and no one will let him through! It's like people refusing to move over for an ambulance. There is no way in. It's amazing how much hardship and difficulty God allows to get in the way of bringing people to Christ. God doesn't just cause obstacles to part like the Red Sea just because someone is trying to get to Christ. Obstacles are needed to sort out fake faith from real faith.<sup>3</sup>

## Faith is Active Trust

These four guys try to get their friend to Jesus, the crowd won't let them through, so they hoist the guy up onto the roof, tear a hole in the roof above Jesus, and lower the guy down right in front of Jesus. No record that they said anything, no comment on what they believed or thought – only a description of what they did. That's how Mark introduces the concept of faith to us. This is the first time the word *faith* is mentioned in Mark, and it's linked with action. Faith is active trust in Jesus. Now of course, faith does

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 2:1-3:6.

<sup>2</sup> There is no indication about when these events happened. Mark just picks five events from some time in Jesus' life and groups them together here to show the development of the conflict.

<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon makes a point about the fact that it took 4 men to get this man to Jesus. You might go to an unbelieving friend and hear his story, and you're able to show him great compassion for the things he's gone through. But it turns out that's not enough to reach him. Someone else comes alongside you and gives the guy instruction from God's Word, and answers questions that explains things. And that gets the person few more steps also to Christ, but still not all the way there. So you have another friend who comes along with a strong warning exhortation and the ability to stir up emotion. And a fourth person also joins the effort with persistent prayers of faith for the guy. And it's only when you combine all for those efforts that it finally gets the person up the stairs down through the roof in front of Jesus where he can be healed and forgiven.

involve knowledge and beliefs and feelings to be sure, but beliefs aren't really beliefs until they drive your actions, and so Mark first introduces faith as *active* trust in Jesus.

And that's why that whole "let go and let God" philosophy doesn't work. That phrase, "let go and let God," implies that in order for God to work, you have to not work. Those people teach that the more faith you have, the less human effort is involved. That is the opposite of what we see in this passage. Greater faith results in more intensive activity, not less.

But the activity is an effort to draw near to Christ. The more I trust him to be good and to be powerful, the harder I will work to get past any obstacles that try to keep me or my loved ones at a distance from him.

There are scholars who have advanced degrees in theology and know Greek and Hebrew and can clobber anybody in a theological debate, but they would never tear through a roof to get to Jesus. They wouldn't even walk across the room to get to Jesus. They have tons of Bible knowledge, but that knowledge is worthless because they don't use it to move toward Christ.<sup>4</sup>

I think if Mark were a seminary professor teaching a class on theology, he would spend the whole semester teaching all kinds of great doctrine, and then the final exam would be one question: How passionate is your prayer life?

## Jesus' Response to Faith: Forgiveness

So of the three responses to Jesus we see in this passage, this the right one – faith. And that's clear from how Jesus responds. Jesus sees their faith and gives the greatest gift there is - he forgives the guy's sins.

And following the pattern of the rest of the miracle stories, you would expect this account to end after v.5. He gives us the setting in vv.1-2, then tells about the person in need of healing and the approach in vv.3-4, and then Jesus' response in v.5. End of story. But that's not the end of the story. In fact, this is where the story just starts getting interesting.

## Response #2: Hostility

In fact, all that just set the stage for the main point Jesus wants to make, which is the beginning of the hostility of the Pharisees and Scribes. This is the second of the three responses to Jesus. The first one was faith, the second one, hostility. That hostility begins here in v.6, but only in their thoughts.

**6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**

The word translated **thinking** is actually the word for arguing. Who are they arguing with? Jesus. They are arguing with Jesus, but only in their own minds.

Have you noticed how you can dominate anyone in an argument, as long as you keep it all inside your own head? That's what they are doing. They don't have the guts to say anything out loud, but they are having these thoughts.

**8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit<sup>5</sup> that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?"**

So silently, in their own minds, they think, *Why does he talk like that?* And Jesus immediately says out loud, "Why do you think like that?" They must have been thinking, *Wait a minute, did I just say that out loud?*

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<sup>4</sup> They are like the Scribes in Jerusalem when the Magi came to find the newborn Messiah. They knew the biblical answer from Micah 5:2 – Bethlehem. But they don't even join the Magi in going there!

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the word spirit is used here instead of heart to imply that this is more than just the natural kind of reasoning that the Scribes were engaged in. It points to supernatural insight.

## ***Because I thought I was just thinking it to myself* Jesus Sees into the Heart**

Jesus can see everyone's heart in this account. He knows what's in the paralytic's heart, all four friends, and now the Scribes.<sup>6</sup> Nobody but Jesus says anything in this whole incident. And yet Jesus gives the paralytic full forgiveness and rebukes the Scribes.

**8 ... "Why are you thinking these things?"**

### **Thought Life**

If you think you're ok because you had enough self-control to avoid saying what you were really thinking, think again. Whether you say it or keep it inside – the measure of what you are is not just what you do and say. It's fundamentally what's in your heart – what you think and how you feel and what you desire.<sup>7</sup>

Be very careful about your bad attitudes toward people you don't like. Repent as quickly and as thoroughly as you can, because it is a very serious thing to be a murderer, even if it's only in your attitudes and thoughts. Now, as readers of the book, we get to see what no one else there could see except for Jesus and the Scribes. We know their thoughts. But imagine what it was like for everyone else in the room. They are all just sitting there listening to the sermon, some debris starts falling from the ceiling, Jesus stops preaching, and everyone watches these guys unroof the roof and lower their buddy down with ropes. The guys lowering one side go a little too fast, and the thing tips, and he almost slides off, but the other guys quickly lower their part and level him out. Finally they get him on the ground safely, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief.

Then Jesus speaks: **Son, your sins are forgiven.** [Then he points] "Hey, why are you guys thinking those things?" You're sitting in the crowd and you're thinking, *Wait, what? Did I miss something?*

Then Jesus proceeds to destroy their mental argument. Can you imagine what this was like for the Scribes? I don't know if they were hoping to keep a low profile at this point, but Jesus calls them out in front of everyone. What would it be like to be listening to a preacher and he says something, and you think, "This guy is a nut job" and the preacher immediately looks you straight in the eye and says, "Why did you just think that?" That had to be pretty unnerving.

And it says Jesus said this **immediately** – No sooner do they have these thoughts than Jesus knows them. The second the thoughts cross their minds Jesus answers them. They can't even win an argument with Jesus *in their own minds*. Jesus did that fairly often – answering people's thoughts, and I'm thinking it must have really freaked people out.

So now these guys are really up against a wall, and they don't answer. These men are shell shocked. They are reduced to absolute silence in the face of Jesus overwhelming authority.

They look at him, and it was like Jesus was saying, "Yeah, this is going to happen. We're doing this, right here, right now – *out loud.*" Jesus won't let them keep this in their own minds, because he wants to make a point.

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<sup>6</sup> The ability to read people's hearts is a mark of the Messiah. **Isaiah 11:3 he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.** Isaiah was saying that when the Messiah comes, he will not have to rely on what he sees and hears – he will know people's hearts so he can judge perfectly. This is a sampling of how Jesus fulfilled that.

<sup>7</sup> And what is in your heart will eventually come out in your actions anyway. That is seen in the progression in these 5 events. Incident #1 - **2:6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,** **7 "Why does this fellow talk like that?"** Incident #2 **2:16 the teachers of the law who were Pharisees ... asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"** Incident #3 – Jesus questioned on why he doesn't fast like they do. Incident #4 – **2:24 The Pharisees said to [Jesus], "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"** Incident #5 **3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.**

Incident #1 they are just thinking thoughts. And by 3:6 they are taking action to murder Jesus. What's in your heart will eventually come out in your words and then in your actions. But that's not where it becomes evil. It's evil right from the beginning.

So what was it they were thinking? First they give their conclusion, then they give their reason.

## **7 “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming!”**

That’s their conclusion. They conclude that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy.

## **Blasphemy**

We throw the word “blasphemy” around all the time, but at that time, the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning (Lv.24:10-16, Nm.15:30ff). It was a very serious issue. The Jews at that time were so afraid of inadvertently speaking God’s name in vain that they just avoided saying the word “God” at all just to be safe. Skip ahead to ch.14 and you find that they ultimately end up formally convicting Jesus of blasphemy in a court of law, and that’s why they sentence him to death.<sup>8</sup> The irony is that it’s the Jewish authorities who were guilty of blasphemy. In ch.15 it says they blaspheme Jesus while he’s on the cross<sup>9</sup>, and in ch.3 we’re going to see Jesus warn them about taking their blasphemy so far that it ends up being the unforgivable sin.<sup>10</sup>

So the reader of the Gospel of Mark has to deal with the question of who is blaspheming. Someone is blaspheming: it’s either Jesus or the Jewish leaders. You can’t escape that. Either Jesus is guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be God, or they are guilty of blasphemy for not worshipping him as God. The debate about who Jesus is is a high stakes debate.

### ***Only God***

They conclude he’s a blasphemer because he’s claiming to do something only God can do – forgive sins.

## **7 ...He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sin but God alone?**

They are right about that – only God can forgive a person’s sins. Only God can forgive sin, because he is the one sin is committed against. When David confessed his adultery and murder, he said:

### **Psalm 51:4 Against you, you only have I sinned.**

All sin is ultimately against God – that’s what makes it sin. Only the one sinned against can forgive that sin. What would you think if someone punched you in the nose, and then I walked up to that guy and said, “It’s ok – I forgive you.” You’d say, “What do you mean *you* forgive him? He didn’t punch you; he punched me!”

Remember, forgiveness is the restoration of a broken relationship, and so only the offended party can forgive, because only the offended party can restore the relationship on his end. So when Jesus forgave this paralytic’s sins, Jesus was saying that all the sins this man had committed his whole life had been committed against Jesus.

That’s why they call it blasphemy. And that is blasphemy – if you’re not God. So there’s no question – either Jesus is God or he is a blasphemer. Those are the only two possibilities.

Someone might say, “Those Scribes just misunderstood. Jesus was just saying that God the Father had forgiven the guy, not that Jesus himself had that authority.”<sup>11</sup> Could that be what’s going on here? Look at Jesus’ response. Does he say, “Oh, no, no no! You misunderstand. I didn’t mean to say I have that authority?” Is that what Jesus says?

## **10 ... the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.**

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<sup>8</sup> Mark 14:63-64.

<sup>9</sup> Mark 15:29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 3:22.

<sup>11</sup> This is what several of the commentaries are saying when they call Jesus’ words to the paralytic in v.5 a “divine passive.” They are suggesting that Jesus was only saying, “God has forgiven your sins.”

He's claiming that authority. And he specifies – **on earth**. It used to be that the only way to have sins forgiven was to look to heaven. But now there is someone walking around on the earth who has the authority to forgive sins committed against God.

So when they accuse him of claiming to do what only God can do, he didn't back off. He doubled down. "You'd better believe I can forgive sin."<sup>12</sup>

### *Son of Man*

Not only that, but look how he refers to himself: **the Son of Man**. If Jesus printed up business cards, that's the title that would be on it. It's by far Jesus' favorite title for himself. He calls himself that 14 times in Mark. He calls himself that far more often than any other title, but nobody else ever calls him that, because it comes from Daniel 7, and the Jews had overlooked Daniel 7 as a messianic passage, so they didn't have a lot of preconceived ideas about it. That made it the perfect title for Jesus to use, because it didn't have all the baggage and misconceptions that the people had attached to all the popular messianic titles, like "Messiah" or "Son of David." So it's perfect - it avoids all the political and military baggage, it emphasizes his humanity, and also his deity. It's the most exalted messianic title Jesus could have picked.

**Daniel 7:13 ... there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. ... 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**

No one rides on the clouds in the Old Testament other than God. No one has eternal glory and sovereign power except God. And no one is to be worshipped but God.

### **Claim to Deity**

So in one sentence, **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**, Jesus was making two claims to deity. If you ever doubt whether Jesus claimed to be God, just try putting Jesus' words in anyone else's mouth and see how they sound. What if I walked up to someone I never met and said, "I can see faith in your heart, and since I'm the great Son of Man who rides on the clouds in Daniel 7, I have the authority on earth to forgive people's sins against God."? Hopefully Jerry and Fred would be close by to take me down, but they probably wouldn't have to because it would be so obvious to everyone that I had lost my mind. If Jesus is not God, don't follow him, because anyone who makes those kinds of claims and isn't God is a lunatic.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Forgiveness of sins was a mark of the arrival of the New Covenant. God had always been a forgiving God. Perhaps the most fundamental and oft-repeated descriptions of God in the OT is the one given to Moses when God's glory passed by him. **Exodus 34:6 he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."** That description is repeated many times throughout the OT. So the people then knew God as a forgiving God, to be sure. But the promise of the age of the Messiah was described as something greater. **Jeremiah 31:31 "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers ... 34 they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**

<sup>13</sup> CS Lewis: "I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either he was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (from *Mere Christianity*)

### *Trying to Catch Jesus*

Now, Luke tells us that these Pharisees and Scribes came from all over the country to be there that day. Why do you think they were there – because they wanted to learn something? I don't think so. These men were the authorities on interpreting Scripture. They were the scholars. And now this guy Jesus shows up without any education or training, and right before Jesus left town the people were all saying he speaks with greater authority than the Scribes (remember that in ch.1?). And so when Jesus gets back into town, the Scribes show up to his first sermon. They are thinking, "We'll be the judges of whether his teaching is sound or not." No doubt they were listening for some mistake in his teaching. *The crowds can't pick up on his errors, but we are trained in theology – we'll listen with a discerning ear and we'll be able to pick up on the hidden, subtle errors in his theology.*

So there they are, scouring his words with a theological fine tooth comb, trying to pinpoint some little technical misstep in his teaching - some little thing most people would miss, but they could pick up on and expose him as a novice or even a false teacher. So they are leaning forward in their seats, scouring his teaching. And Jesus says, "Here, let me make it easy for you. How about this: I'm God. I'm the Son of Man from Daniel 7 who will reign forever, and I have authority to forgive sins." They are looking for some subtle error, and Jesus drops the most outrageous claim ever made right on their heads.

### *Unique Claim*

Nobody had ever made that claim before. Not Abraham, not Moses, not David, not Elijah. No founder or leader of any major world religion has claimed the ability to forgive sin. Not Mohammad, not Buddha, not Confucius. The closest any leader of a world religion has come has been the Pope. But even the Pope – all he claims is the right to pronounce whether or not God has forgiven someone. He doesn't claim to be the one to actually forgive, as if the sins were committed against him personally.

So this is unique. You can't even find a reference in the OT or in Jewish teachings about the Messiah being able to forgive sin.<sup>14</sup> The OT describes some pretty grandiose, glorious things that the Messiah will do, but I don't know of any OT passage that speaks of the Messiah as forgiving sins. When the people in Capernaum said Jesus spoke with authority unlike anything they had ever seen, this gives you an idea of what they were talking about.

## **Jesus' Response: Proof**

### *Which is Easier?*

So the Scribes think they are having these thoughts in the privacy of their own minds, and Jesus immediately calls them out. And he does it by putting them on the spot with a question that I'm sure they had never thought of before. Jesus was the master of teaching with questions.

**9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?**

That's an interesting question, isn't it?

### *Easier to Heal*

Is it easier to forgive sins or to heal? One answer might be it's easier to heal. It's much easier to heal than to forgive, because the moment Jesus forgives this guy's sins, he seals his own fate. He makes it so that when he prays, "Father if there's any way, let this cup pass from me," the answer has to be, no, there

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<sup>14</sup> Edwards, 78.

is no other way. There is no other way because when Jesus forgave that paralytic's sins, and my sins, and the sins of everyone else who has ever been forgiven, he made the cross an absolute necessity.

So it's easier to heal than to forgive. However, that's not the question Jesus asked. He didn't say, "Which is easier to do...?" He said, "**Which is easier to say...?**"<sup>15</sup> And the answer to that question is simple – it's easier to *say* "your sins are forgiven" because it can't be disproved. I could walk around all day and claim to forgive sins, and it would be impossible to disprove. But saying, "Get up and walk" – that's a little harder. It's a *lot* harder. If I went around saying that to paralyzed people it would only take about 2 seconds for everyone to see I'm a total fraud, because none of them would get up and walk.

### ***Proof of Authority***

Jesus had forgiven this man's sins, but that was invisible. No one there could see what Jesus could see - not even the man. No one could see the countless thousands of sins on this man's record, and the massive mountain of guilt just instantaneously evaporate the moment Jesus forgave him. No one could see God the Father go from being furiously angry with this man to being fully reconciled and favorable toward him the instant Jesus forgave him. None of that was visible, and Jesus acknowledged that. He said, "I realize you can't see any of that, and I don't expect you to just take my word for it. So I'm going to prove it." And he does something else only God can do, and it's something they can see with their eyes. He heals this man.

And look at the response:

### **12 ... We have never seen anything like this!**

Other people have had healing ministries, but never anything like what Jesus did. Jesus' miracles were unique

Last week I asked a question that I never got around to answering: What is the relationship between physical healing and spiritual healing? Why all the physical healings and then Jesus calls himself a doctor for spiritual illnesses? Answer: the miracles are proof of Jesus' ability and authority to perform spiritual healing.<sup>16</sup> So in this first run-in with the authorities, Jesus accommodates their unbelief. He gives them a very mild rebuke (**why are you thinking these things?**), but then he goes on to provide proof. He had already provided plenty of proof prior to this, but he is willing to go even further and provide more.

God never, ever expects you to believe on blind faith. He always gives adequate, abundant compelling proof. And that's what Jesus is going to do here.

### ***The Healing***

So Jesus says, "I realize it's easy for me to make these claims. But just so you can know for sure that I do indeed have the authority that I'm claiming..." And at that point it drives the commentators crazy because Jesus doesn't finish the sentence. But he does finish it – just not with words. He finishes his sentence with action.

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<sup>15</sup> Notice, their complaint was about Jesus' words (**why does this fellow talk like that?**).

<sup>16</sup> Most commentators assume that the point Jesus is making here is that the man's paralysis was the result of sin in some way. So Jesus forgives him first to get the sin problem out of the way so he can heal him physically. But that is not the connection the passage itself makes. Mark tells us exactly what the connection is between the physical healing and the forgiveness. It's the main point of the whole account. The relationship is this: the physical healing is proof of the spiritual healing. Jesus claims to have healed this guy spiritually, the Scribes doubt it, and so Jesus says, "So that you may know that the spiritual restoration really did happen..." And then he heals the guy physically. Miracles for the purpose of proof is a very common theme in the NT (see, for example, Jn.5:36, 10:24-38, 14:11, Acts 2:22, 10:37, Heb.2:3-4).

The logic that I read in one commentary after another was this: the reason we know that this man's disease is connected to some sin is that in order to heal him, Jesus had to first forgive him. That reasoning assumes that the primary objective was for the man to be healed physically, and forgiving his sins was simply a step in the direction of getting that done. That is exactly the opposite of what this passage is teaching us. The point of forgiving him first is to show that spiritual healing is primary.



**10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . ." He said to the paralytic, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."**

And if you had been in the room and happened to be looking at this guy's legs at that moment, you would have seen them go from skinny, atrophied little sticks to suddenly having muscles. God created muscles on this guy's bones. And not just muscles, but Jesus also provided all the muscle memory he needed so he could walk. Jesus altered his brain and gave him muscle memory. And he could balance – even to the point where he could carry his bed. That bed that had carried him all those years; now he's carrying it.

And I mention all that because of a mini-series I once saw on the life of Jesus where they depicted this miracle. In the movie, Jesus comes up to the guy, covers his legs with a blanket, and then starts manipulating the guy's legs through the blanket. And he does that for a long time, and the guy is screaming in pain the whole time. Then Jesus says, "Get up and walk." The guy can't get up – some people have to lift him up to his feet. They let go and he wobbles and stumbles and then falls on Jesus. That's the "miracle."

I'm watching this thing on TV and I'm thinking, *What's up with the blanket?* Why does he put a blanket on there? What's the deal with the blanket? That's not anywhere in the Bible – there's no blanket.

The reason they do that is because that's what magicians do. Magicians, when they do a trick, what do they do? They cover it up with a blanket or something so you can't see the trick. It's not really magic; it's a trick, and if they didn't cover it up with something, you'd see the trick. They cover it up, divert your attention, do the slight of hand, then remove the cover and it seems like magic. In the movie they make the whole thing seem like a trick.

God knew that's how we would think, so each error in that movie he specifically deals with in this miracle. There was no blanket – the whole thing was done **in full view of them all**. The guy doesn't need help up. There was no wobbling, no stumbling, no falling. That's the point of having him carry his bed – he can walk just fine. He's stable; he's strong, and he can walk all the way home.

I love it that this guy does exactly what Jesus tells him to do.

**10 ... He said to the paralytic, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out**

Unlike the leper, who did the opposite of what Jesus told him to do, this guy obeys. And it's at the moment he obeys that he is healed. That's a good lesson – we don't get strength from God until we decide to act in obedience.

So now this guy has to elbow his way through the crowd to get out of the house that his friends were not able to get into earlier. And he carries that mat home. I don't know if he finally got home and then thought, *Wait a second – why did I schlep this stretcher all the way home? I don't even need this thing anymore. I should have just ditched it behind Jesus' house somewhere.* But the point is, he obeys Jesus.

### **Response #3: Amazement**

Ok, so the first response was faith, resulting in forgiveness. The second response was hostility, resulting in Jesus rebuking them and then providing more proof. Now one more: the response of the crowd. Crowds play a very prominent role in the Gospel of Mark. Mark mentions the word "crowd" 38 times in his book. And it's fascinating to watch how Jesus responded to them.

In most of those 38 times, the crowd is not portrayed in a positive light. The crowds are not presented as a measure of success in ministry. Anyone can draw a crowd. You videotape a panda bear sneezing and eight million people will download it. The huge crowds in the gospels do not represent ministry success. In fact, most of the time, like here, they just get in the way of ministry. We need to be careful about just trying to draw huge crowds into church, because unreceptive people hinder ministry. They take up space that should be occupied by receptive people. The seeker movement was all about drawing the unchurched, and in many cases all it accomplished was churching the undrawn – taking people who were not being drawn by the Holy Spirit, and who aren't really interested in the gospel, and

getting them to come to church for other reasons. But that doesn't work because what you win them with is what you win them to.

## Crowds

### 12 This amazed everyone and they glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

At first that sounds like a great response – they glorified God. But I don't think Mark is using the term "glorified" in the fullest theological sense here. Sometimes to glorify God just simply means to give God the credit for something that happened. To acknowledge God as the source of it.<sup>17</sup> And I think that's the point here. The crowd had to admit that Jesus' power was from God. There was no other possibility.

But that's not as good a thing as it sounds like at first, because of the first part of the sentence. They were amazed. In Mark, that's not a good thing. It doesn't just mean they marveled at Jesus' power. It means they didn't know what to make of it. And the reason that's not a good thing is because Jesus told them exactly what to make of it.

It had to be from God – and yet Jesus was doing it. Hmmm - that was baffling. It's not baffling at all if you just accept the fact that Jesus is God. But they didn't accept that. Instead, they were content to just go away baffled.

So their amazement was evidence of a hard heart. A little later, when Jesus walked on water, it says the disciples **were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.**<sup>18</sup> Jesus told them who he was, so continuing to be perplexed when he did miracles showed hardness of heart because it was a refusal to truly accept the truth about Jesus. Alexander MaClaren: No emotion is more transient or less fruitful than gaping astonishment; and that, with a little varnish of acknowledgment of God's power, which led to nothing, was all the fruit of Christ's mighty work. Isaiah's words really do apply to them:

### Isaiah 29:13 they honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.<sup>19</sup>

So the third group responds with amazement – what is the result of that? Mark doesn't say just yet. He's going to let that unfold as we go through the gospel. But it's not good. I'll let the cat out of the bag - no city heard more of Jesus' preaching or witnessed more of his miracles than Capernaum. And yet Jesus ended up cursing them for rejecting him (Mt.11:21-23).

## Conclusion: Where Are You?

So where are you in the story? The natural response is to think, *Obviously, I'm in the first category – the response of faith. I mean look at me, here I am on a Saturday - my only day off. I drove all the way up to Dacono and I'm sitting on a hard folding chair listening to another one of Darrell's interminable messages. That's how much I love the preaching of God's word and I'm gobbling it up. Clearly, if I had been there that day I would have been among the four friends.*

But remember, clamoring to come hear Jesus words - all that does is put you in the crowd. You're not one of the four until you start digging through roofs.

So let me leave you with this: seeing Jesus' actions and hearing his words is like litmus paper the reveals the truth about your heart based on the way your heart reacts. Think of Jesus as being water. There are three kinds of hearts in this passage. One is like potassium. If you drop a small piece of potassium into a pan of water, you'll get a large explosion. Some people have an explosive, angry reaction against Jesus. That's the Jewish authorities.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, see Ro.1:21

<sup>18</sup> Mark 6:51-52.

<sup>19</sup> Jesus applies this verse to the Pharisees in Mark 7:6.

Other people are like rocks. If you put a rock in water, nothing happens. The outside of the rock gets a little wet, but quickly dries off once you take it out of the water. Nothing about the rock changes. That's the crowds.

Other people are like sponges. The water permeates them. That's faith – a heart that, when it's exposed to the truth about Jesus, *will not stop* until it has had an encounter with Jesus so profound that it absorbs into itself the very life of Christ.