

Mark 2:1-12

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[0 : 00] It has been an immense pleasure for my wife and I to be here in these past days. It is a catalyst conference. The singing together has lifted our souls up to the Lord repeatedly throughout the day.

And then hearing the word of God, well, I heard it in three different sessions. And then preaching myself. And then the fellowship of the gospel, people who know and love the Lord Jesus, is the kind of thing just to elevate your soul.

It's been a beautiful, elevating week. We are very privileged to have been able to participate in this. As you heard the scripture read this morning, you thought if you were engaged, as I think you were, you probably had your mind go back to when you were young and there were flannel graphs and you had the four stretcher bearers and the whole story.

This is a story that everyone knows. And we've known it since we were children. And it lends itself to great teaching of spiritual truths.

It is a story that is freighted with some very heavy theology as it is unpacked. And so as we move through this this morning, you'll find that it gets more intense and more beautiful and more pointed as it goes on.

[1 : 34] So we're going to get into that story this morning. Now, Alpine hikers have told me that when caught in a brewing storm, they've seen the hair on the heads of their fellow hikers, say hi in the Alps or the Sierras, stand out in a radiant crown from their head.

The metal flames of their backpacks in the days they had them would begin to glow with kind of a blue, eerie, neon light blue called, if you know the words, St. Elmo's Fire.

And that term, I don't want you to look up on your phones right now, but you'll have fun if you check it out, has been recorded since ancient times. Sailors would see the mast of a ship getting into a squall and see an eerie light moving back and forth with St. Elmo's Fire.

Airline pilots today say they sometimes see it on the windscreen of their planes if they're getting into a storm. In all cases, it means the air is charged with electricity and lightning is about to strike.

If you're a hiker, especially in those days you discard your pack, take cover, because you could be struck with lightning. I think this St. Elmo's Fire, this electricity in the air, conveys something to the atmosphere in Capernaum as we come to our text this morning, because there is a kind of spiritual fire hovering over those who jammed in that little house in Capernaum.

[3 : 20] It's invisible, but it's palpable. And people there could sense it. And verses 1 and 2 give us sort of a feel for the situation.

And when he came to Capernaum, after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door.

And he was preaching the word to them. Now, the home, most of us think, is probably that of the Apostle Peter's mother-in-law. And when word got out that Jesus was back and staying there, people began to show up at the door.

And almost immediately, the home in which Jesus had stayed is packed with people. So I'm just curious. You can imagine having heard about this rabbi, his preaching, his miracles.

Others were new bright-eyed disciples who gazed on Jesus, locked in on Jesus, hung on his every word, watched his every move, wanted to engage him.

[4 : 35] And then important people began to show who looked a bit edgy and nervous, avoided eye contact with the crowds around. And as always the case, crowds attract crowds.

And so pretty soon, it's impossible even to get to the door. And so outside, there is dust and noise and heat and disease and jostling and crowding.

And still more people are pressing to get into that house. If you've been to that area of Capernaum, you can picture this very clearly.

Yet with all this great crush and hubbub and noise and dust and jostling, there are only two dominating presences. First, as a parallel account, Luke tells us, there were the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

It already gathered there. It may be to the unsuspecting crowd that it looked like the spiritual life conference was taking place.

[5 : 42] The heavyweights had come. But in actuality, it was an investigative committee seeing what they could get on this young rabbi.

And there is only standing room. It tells us the Pharisees were sitting. Now Jesus, as a rabbi teaching, would be sitting also.

So the picture you have is a packed place. The Pharisees seated before Jesus. Jesus seated. Them with their suspicious looks. Just waiting for a slip up by Jesus.

Interpersonal fire in the air. The other presence, of course, is the Lord Jesus.

Himself calm. Unperturbed. In absolute control. And it tells us he was preaching the word to them.

That is the gospel of God, according to the opening chapter, about the nearness of the kingdom and necessity of faith and repentance.

[6 : 47] And I, this is my opinion, but I personally think that expectant crowd sensed the tension. Not that they exactly knew what it was, but they sensed that something was going to happen.

Luke's parallel account. Luke 5.17 says about this account, that the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

He'd been healing. People were looking for healings. They expected healings. And Luke says, the power is with him to heal. So, the room is charged.

The relational atmosphere crackled. And then a disturbance began. One we all know from our childhood. Mark continues in verses 3 and 4.

And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him.

[7 : 59] And when they had made an opening, they let the bed down on which the paralytic lay. Now, filling in the lines, and I think it's fair to do this with this, is that four men struggling with the litter on which the helpless paralytic lay approached the friends of the pressing crowd.

We'd have to understand that their few attempts to get through proved futile. I think it's fair to say, maybe they put the stretcher down, mopped their brows, looked around, conferred, and then picked up the stretcher and moved around to the side of the flat-roofed house.

Possibly an outside stairway existed, as some houses did in Capernaum. Or perhaps they ascended the roof of another house through a stairway and then climbed over on the other roof.

Whatever the situation, after a lot of hauling and tugging and effort, they got their friend on the roof, rested for a moment to catch their breath, and did the most astonishing thing.

They began to tear a hole in the roof. Now the typical Galilean roof is constructed of timbers, as we would with roof joists today, and then across that, smaller timbers, and then on top of that, branches and leaves and other plant matter, and then a foot of mud on top of that.

[9 : 33] So the typical Galilean roof would be up to two to three feet thick. So they're digging into this roof, tearing into it.

You're inside the house. Got this much roof above you. And as they dig in, dust begins to fall. A little light perhaps starts to show between the beams.

Debris would have begun to fall on those as the crack widened to the size of man. The Bible doesn't say this either, but I can be fairly sure that there were some words exchanged between those sitting below and those tearing the hole in the roof.

And if Peter was there, then you know there were some words exchanged because this was his mother-in-law's house. Then the paralytic's bed slowly descended on ropes.

This man is a desperate, helpless paralytic. What a scene! Above with the light streaming in and dusty beams is the stretcher descending slowly.

[10 : 58] And below, the Pharisees and the scribes grimacing, shaking dirt off their robes. In the midst sits Jesus, the Prince of Peace, with the paralytic now lowered before him.

What a scene! And history would remember this. The church remembers it. We recite it again and again, and we all know what happened.

But for a moment, as we move into this passage, let's concentrate on those four friends. What about them? You have to say, they really loved him.

There's no way they'd be put off by the crowd. They abused someone else's property that they would have to repair to get him to them. They ignored the protests and judgments of those around, the indifferent crowd, for the sake of their pathetic friend.

Say, this kind of love, what was it? Well, perhaps it was family. Loved brother or uncle. Maybe simply a childhood neighbor that they played with and knew and loved in the Capernaum area.

[12:13] But whatever, they loved him. So whatever happened today, whether it was healing or rejection, whatever, he was a very rich man because he had something people pay millions for, culturally today, and can't buy.

They have friends like that. And so, because of the love of their four friends, something was going to happen in his life that day. Their remarkable love is paired with something I think is even more remarkable and that's their faith.

There was no way that they would have gone to such outrageous extremes of action if they did not implicitly believe that Christ could heal them and would heal them.

I mean, a wavering faith would have demurred. Perhaps, when they were hoisting the stretcher up on the roof and began to tear through the roof and a wavering, one of the guys could have said, you know, you'll have to finish this yourself.

I've got some other things to do. But they truly believed. And the faith was not a vague, passive thing like so many imagine it, subjective thing.

[13:37] It was persistent. When they got their friend on the roof, there was no stopping them. They didn't say, well, the door's closed.

I guess this isn't God's will. They didn't leave them there either. They didn't leave them to a committee. He'd still be there.

And Jesus loved this. In fact, he lauded this kind of action in an enigmatic saying. And perhaps you've heard this saying and wondered, really, what is the thrust of this saying?

It's a saying that is recorded in Matthew 11, where it says, from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

When those four determined men tore through the roof, they took the kingdom by violent, determined, graced force. the kind of force that unleashes God's power.

[14:49] It's the kind of thing that Jesus loves. It is the kind of force that sent missionaries out by the droves in the 19th century all over the world.

It drives foreign missions today. It drives pioneer missions today. It drives those that will go and spend the time in a culture that is very difficult to understand that perhaps doesn't want them so they can share the gospel.

That's taking the kingdom by force. It's a beautiful thing and Jesus loves it. And in taking the kingdom by force, they were all so creative.

There are undoubtedly people standing around saying, why didn't we think of that? Reason they didn't think of that is that they didn't love like that or believe like that.

And their faith was sacrificial. Somebody had to pay for the roof and someone would. But price wasn't a consideration. And perhaps you're new to the fellowship of this church and you wondered what it is to put your faith in Christ.

[16:08] And there's a snapshot here and it's about action. Gospel Mark tells us faith's not just knowing the facts, it involves action. And so the faith of those four friends meant that no one could keep them from bringing their pitiful friend to Jesus.

They just found a way around the callous crowd and the roof they just ripped it off. If you were to put this in the context of contemporary life it would be like you heard a chainsaw start up on the roof and then a blade came through the roof and then sawdust began to fall.

It is a beautifully graced violent act to get them to Jesus because they believed. now as Christians speaking to the choir this morning we believe that Jesus is the only person who can change our lives forever.

Is that what we believe? I think that's why we're here. We believe that Jesus is the only person who can change our lives forever.

He's the only one who can meet our deepest needs. We believe that He's our only hope. And we passionately believe that.

[17 : 32] That's why we're here. I just want to say if you're here today because some friends have invited you and may even pestered you to be here.

It's because you have faithful friends and you are a blessed person with true friends who love you. If you want to step back the real paralytics were the Pharisees and scribes in contrast to the four treasure bearers they're just sitting there.

Even if they are there to find something on Jesus they could have certainly welcomed the man down had a prime exhibit and helped things but you find they're just sitting there indifference criticism and of course the Lord Jesus saw everything more clearly than we do so he decided and this is it in this charged electric moment with a paralytic before him to make a point and what Jesus said and what Jesus did is absolutely shocking it's a bolt of lightning as he said to the paralytic my son your sins are forgiven you say shocking yes for two reasons first because your sins are forgiven is so irrelevant here's a guy pathetic paralytic in aching desperation brought to Jesus lowered down before him and Jesus says my son your sins are forgiven

I mean everyone in the room could see what his greatest need was and it wasn't that you know thanks a lot Jesus I didn't come here for a sleight of hand take me home well that's not what happened but if Jesus is the son of God we'd better listen carefully because he never indulges in irrelevancies when Jesus looked down at this man he saw his many needs he saw shriveled appendages arms and legs a man who surely felt himself a burden to others a man who is aching prisoner of his body but he looked down on that pitiful man he saw his greatest need which was the forgiveness of sins and when he went beyond that man's surface need to his greatest need he addressed the need of every person in that room it's possible that that paralytic could have been a notorious sinner it's unlikely to be notorious because his condition mitigated against doing what are considered to be the big bad sins adultery and theft and abuse or murder they're beyond him he couldn't do the big bad stuff but

Jesus point is clear sin is not just about our actions it's about our hearts and the fact is he may have been the biggest sinner at Capernaum because he still had this but his spiritual need was far more desperate than his physical need and if he cured the man of paralysis maybe he's midlife he could have had 20 or 30 years of health alleviate decades of misery but when Jesus forgave the man's sins he delivered him not only from his sins but in eternity apart from God from hell itself!

[21 : 43] it would be a beautiful thing if you never considered this maybe even if you know the story to understand that what Jesus says is your greatest need is not an education or a spouse or your health it is the forgiveness of your sins that is the greatest need of every person in this room now that's shocking what Jesus did but Jesus further shocks here for a second reason and this is it it's what he says about himself tells us in verses 6 and 7 now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning their hearts why does this man speak like that he's blaspheming who can forgive sins but

God alone you see the scribes knew their Bibles they were horrified because he was making the appalling claim that he's God according to Bible and they knew their Bibles sin is essentially and ultimately against God we see this clearly in the life of King David who understood this when after sinning with Bathsheba in adultery and Uriah in homicide he cried out to God in repentance I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me against you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight all sins whether against others anything else are ultimately against the holy God who alone can forgive sin so when they heard this they knew that he was claiming to be God incarnate there was no doubt about it and that deserved death and of course from the shock on their faces and the disgust on their faces he knew exactly what was going on in their minds and so you read in verses 8 and 9 and immediately Jesus perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves said to them why do you question these things in your hearts which is easier to say the paralytic your sins are forgiven or to say rise take up your bed and walk so which is easier well I think from ground level I think it would be much easier to say your sins are forgiven than to say rise take up your bed and walk from ground level I mean there have been billions spent by research communities today to solve the miseries of paralysis with very little to show far easier to say your sins are forgiven no one can check that no one knows but does anyone have the temerity to go tell

Johnny Erickson Tata who is just about my age today and has been paralyzed since she was a teenager from the neck down take up your bed and walk I don't think so God can do it but I don't think so but here what Jesus does shocks again and it's like lightning he says in verses 10 through

12 but you may know the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins he said to the paralytic I say to you rise pick up your bed and go home and he rose and picked up his bed and went out before them all so they were all amazed and glorified God saying we never saw anything like this now I just want us to step back for a!

this is not some television healing this is an immediate healing of a man fully paralyzed who's been paralyzed for some time the paralytic crooked bones straightened and assumed tendency his tendons flexed and stretched his atrophied muscles inflated his sagging skin became taut and at once he rolled off his bed and stood illuminated by a dusty shaft of light radiating from the hole above in full glowing health and then bent down took up his bed hoisted it high in his shoulder and strode joyfully through the parting throng that once blocked his way out into the sunlight where his four faithful friends joined him now

[27 : 15] I think they were likely leaping and hooping it up I mean these are Hebrews they know how to rejoice now listen very closely for Jesus it was an easy thing to say take up your bed and walk that's nothing just a thought just a mental emanation from Jesus and it's done and the power goes out to heal him without any diminution of his power his infinitude!

remains infinite it's nothing for Jesus to do that it was easy but the hardest thing of all was to say my son your sins are forgiven because that meant his death on the cross in the garden and this is just the 14th chapter of Mark it's just a few chapters following the prospect is so horrific that it tells us in verses 33 through 36 of Mark 14 and he began to be greatly distressed and troubled and he said to them my soul is very sorrowful even to death remain here and watch going a little farther he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass from him and he said Abba Father all things are possible for you remove this cup from me yet not what I will but what you will and when the hour came he did it by dying the lowest death of all even death on a cross in retrospect the apostle Paul described the whole thing in 15 words in the Greek a few more in the English in 2nd Corinthians 5 21 when he said for our sake he that's God the father made him Jesus to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God now listen very closely Jesus was sinless through all his 33 years as he knew no sin and he remained sinless as he became sin for us so

Christ became sin while remaining inwardly and outwardly impeccable he became sin he became sin and on those three dark hours on good Friday his heart so to speak became a sea which poured the mountains of our festering sin so in those three hours the loathsome mass of our corruption poured over him there on the cross our sins were focused on Christ as he bore the fiery wrath of God having become a curse for us Galatians 3 13 so that Jesus the incarnate son in full lucid consciousness writhing like an impaled serpent in the gloom and this is it took your sins and my sins with a unity of understanding that only the incarnate son could have a unity of understanding and the weight of pain that no one can fathom we cannot fathom the horror of this he did the hardest most painful thing ever done in time and eternity to say my son my daughter your sins are forgiven

I mean that's the point this children's story as we think of becomes very intense at this point and his death means he's committed to forgiving you as you turn to him us preachers always can find something to quote from Spurgeon and if you want a cosmic imagination here it is Spurgeon wrote about the man being healed he said I think I see him he sets one foot down to God's glory he plants the other to the same note he walks to God's glory he carries his bed to God's glory he moves his whole body to God's glory he speaks he shouts he sings he leaps to the glory of God he probably had it right what a display before the wandering!

[32 : 31] crowd who's to say the paralytic and four friends kind of moved in rhythm as they moved out there towards the house I mean they are Hebrews they're not Bostonians as he went home he bore something far more impressive than his bed and here it is and this is what it is it was a clean heart the greatest miracle of all is that there was no guilt none none his sins had been forgiven no guilt no bitterness no tension that's the reality complete forgiveness complete removal of guilt forgiveness freedom perhaps he felt like he could float having that burden taken away now someday those restored limbs would wither at my age I know a little bit about that but there would remain in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life

I want to say and you know this the Lord can do anything he wants he can heal any disease he pleases but the greatest miracle the only one eternal is that he forgives sins and has he ever said to you my son my daughter your sins are forgiven I don't mean an audible voice I mean has he ever

said it to you so that your inner being absorbs it has he ever said to you my son your sins are forgiven my daughter your sins are forgiven well as we noted earlier Luke tells us Dr. Luke tells us the power of the

Lord was with him to heal so that the room was full of expectation and it happened and I really think today that's why this is such a famous section of scripture whatever this text is preached and opened up I think if we could see the spiritual realities we could see that certain of us here and there are backlit by a glow of spirit's fire this imagination don't get me wrong as a graced bolt of lightning is about to strike a soul with healing life I mean if you could see it because if you hear those words if you believe that and you hear him say to you my daughter my son your sins are forgiven if you've never heard it before you've just been struck by a bolt of lightning a miracle is taking place our greatest need today is still the same we need our sins forgiven and Jesus Christ has done the hardest thing ever done in time and eternity that ever will be done to say those words it's what you need the most and the question is for everyone here old and young do you believe it do you believe it let's pray