

# “Forgiveness and Healing”

Mark 2:1-12

2/20/2000 – Maryvale Drive Presbyterian Church, Philip Siddons

After Jesus had completed a teaching circuit of the synagogues in that region, He returned to the town of Capernaum. Life in Palestine was rather public and information traveled quickly by word of mouth. As soon as people figured out the location of Jesus’ home, groups of people visited Him. Obviously having discovered Someone as brilliant and as powerful a Healer He was said to be, people came to Him for all kinds of reasons. They received healing, astonishing discussions and sage advice on life and religion. We would imagine that Jesus’ life was filled with crowds of people from morning to midnight. He would fall, exhausted, into bed every night.

On one morning,<sup>1</sup> Jesus was, once again, surrounded by people struggling to hear what He was saying, . . . trying to get close enough to perhaps be healed of their infirmities. Some religious authorities were waiting nearby in hopes that He would slip up and say something against the Priest’s Temple cult or the Pharisee’s love of the Law.<sup>2</sup> People were jammed into that house like sardines in a can. Into that scene came four men carrying a close friend on a stretcher – probably other friends and relatives were accompanying them as well. The man had been paralyzed and had obviously lost all muscular control.

The invalid obviously had four creative and very determined friends. They would not be denied and the lengths, to which they went to get

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<sup>1</sup> or whatever time of day it was

<sup>2</sup> defined by the Pharisees as not only the Jewish writings of the first five books of the Old Testament (like the Priests and Sadducees) but also their entire way of life of prescribed number of daily prayers, their tithing, their giving alms to the poor and scrupulous adherence to their oral pronouncements on specific rules governing their behavior throughout the day.

their friend to Jesus, were remarkable. If he were your friend or relative, you might do the same.

Seeing that the house was packed with people, overflowing into the street, they headed for the outside staircase. These Palestinian first century homes had flat roofs and usually an outside staircase going up to this second level. They’d use this upper deck for rest and, perhaps, drying their washed clothing.

As home owners, most of us would imagine that if it were our home, we’d be upset they were tearing open our roof. “Hay you people, . . . you’re ripping our roof apart – this is a new couch down here and we didn’t get the waterproof warranty, you jerks. You’re wrecking our house. Jesus do something, will ya!”

But career Biblical scholars and historians tell us that the nature of the construction of those homes made for easy access through the roof.<sup>3</sup> So as Jesus is probably in mid-sentence, talking to someone who had just asked a question about one thing or another, all of a sudden there’s dirt, grass hunks and rubble dropping out of the ceiling on to the packed crowd of people in the room. You can just hear the ‘Os’ and the ‘Ahs,’ maybe a few shrieks and ‘Oh my God’s’ from the crowd (as they stumbled backwards out of the front door, . . . pushing and shoving). Some people were falling and tripping on others in fear that the building was collapsing.

So Jesus looks up and sees the faces of the men

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<sup>3</sup> The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall, perhaps three feet apart. The space in between the beams was filled with brushwood packed tight with clay. The top was then marled over. Very largely, the roof was of earth and often a flourishing crop of grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian home. It was easy to dig out the filling between two of the beams and did not damage the house much. See Barclay, *Mark*, p47.

digging their way through the ceiling. Then there's the end of the stretcher, with the paralyzed man strapped to it, edging through the opening (at a hopelessly precarious angle). One of them, up there, is calling down, asking Him to heal his friend (there in the stretcher).

And the look on Jesus' face must have been a mixture of laughter and compassion because of what He said next. He looks at the whole group of them and the guy tied up in the stretcher, (awkwardly dangling from the ceiling amidst the small avalanche of rubble, wood and dirt they're making right on Him). And seeing their faith and determination and childlike 'we've got to do this' unselfconscious trust,

. . . Jesus says, to the paralyzed man . . . (who's probably spitting out dust from his face but still looking at Jesus, because this is his last desperate chance to get help), . . . Jesus says to him, "Son, you're forgiven."

But in that split second, Jesus was very aware of His immediate surroundings, however surreal the scene is at that moment. He knew that with everyone packed into that room and all the movement and commotion going on, seven feet away, out of the corner of His eye, He saw the gasping chagrin on the faces of the guys with the fancy tassels on their cloaks – the religious lawyers<sup>4</sup> belonging to the Pharisee sect. He looked right into their hearts and saw their resentment and judging negativity. Jesus knew exactly what they were questioning within themselves,<sup>5</sup> about how 'only God could forgive sins' and how they were judging His words as outright 'blasphemy.' Miraculously, Jesus was reading their minds. (*Jesus reads our minds too, you know.*)

<sup>4</sup> The Scribes, the highly respected group of Pharisees who dedicated their lives to the fine points of the oral law of their sect.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew picked up on Mark's detail and wrote "Jesus knowing their thoughts, . . ." Matthew 9:4

But in that moment, Jesus raised His eyes, just above the face of the bound man (comically dangling from cloths from the ceiling), looked right at these Scribes and asked them rhetorically, "Why do you dare<sup>6</sup> to question this in your hearts?" Because everything about their judgmental outlook on life said that 'people who suffer are somehow getting punished by God for something.'<sup>7</sup> The Rabbis, then, had a saying that 'No sick person could ever be healed unless they had all their sins forgiven.'<sup>8</sup>

Sure, some of our conventional wisdom tells us that *some* of our suffering is caused by our own stupidity and selfishness. But these legalistic and judging religious authorities were not fit to be around anyone but themselves.

"What do you think is going on here," Jesus continued, "that I'm just casually mouthing the words that this man's sins are forgiven? Or would it be just as easy for Me to say to him 'get out of your stretcher, pick it up and begin walking?'"

"Just so *you* will know that the Son of Humanity has absolute authority on earth to forgive sins, . . ." (And here Jesus turns back to the man and His face softens in compassion), He says to the man "Get up, pick up your stretcher and go home." And he does it.

The man slowly gets up, bends down with an amazing rejuvenation of his spinal chord and limb range of motion, picks up the stretcher and starts to move out of the room. With probably nothing but amazement and gratitude, beaming from his face, the man looks up through the hole in the roof at his friends (who are now scrambling off the roof to go down to him). And as the people in that

<sup>6</sup> "Dare" is not in the text but I put that in as a paraphrase to catch the probably sardonic tone Jesus obviously was using with these smug and judging negative religious leaders.

<sup>7</sup> Like one of Job's comforters who said "Are the innocent ever going to parish?" Job 4:7

<sup>8</sup> See Barclay, p47.

room are pawing him to see if he is real, he starts to make his way out. And as he slowly moves through the crowded room, in gratitude, he looks over his shoulder at Jesus and smiles as the houseful of people go crazy with excitement. “And they were all amazed and glorified God, saying ‘We’ve never seen anything like this.’”<sup>9</sup>

What do *you* expect out of life, for the unknown number of years you have left? Life is never an uneventful sail from one point to another. As much as a planner as you might be, however you chart your course and no matter how many provisions you have in stock to meet future need and counter loss, you meet obstacles. You experience loss. At times, your life takes radical departures in ways you’ve never even dreamt.

All of us have made and adapted to necessary changes in our lives – sometimes we’ve made radical changes in direction with no guarantees that we’ll ever end up where we hope to be. You may have planned to be an architect and ended up being an accountant. Perhaps you longed for children and grandchildren and ended up being single. Or you might have vowed never to have the demands of children and ended up with a houseful. You may have aspired to be an athlete and became sidelined with an injury, early on, which eliminated you from the sport.

But there’s an entirely different way to look at life and this is different than those judging religious lawyers who only looked at the negative. You see, they only talked about what shouldn’t be and what is wrong with life in their opinion. They went through their entire lives with their glasses not only half empty but with an

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 2:12. Although Matthew and Luke (and their other source referred to, in Biblical scholarship as “Q”) know of Jesus’ “authority,” Mark is the first one to directly associate this concept of Jesus’ powerful authority with His title ‘Son of Man.’

attitude that life isn’t fair because they deserved more.

In great contrast to them, these determined and creative friends of the paralyzed man showed us a faith in the providence of God in Christ. This was absolutely delightful to Jesus. Our Christian faith should be giving us a totally different outlook on life from everyone else around us.

Instead of laying down a list of expectations for what your life should be (that it isn’t), maybe it’s time to discover and celebrate what your life is meant to be. It’s time to remember to trust in God’s unfolding miracles – the yet-to-be-seen realities of what God is doing that *already* makes up your life.<sup>10</sup>

Do you see that your life is an unfolding miracle? It’s about the old word “providence.” It’s about trusting in God and *expecting* God to be actively working in and through your life – through you. Do you *expect* God to bring about beauty, healing, hope and love through how you are with others?

It’s not about everything in our lives being planned out, in a fatalistic, predetermined and iron-clad fate. Neither is it about us stumbling through life with a seat-of-the-pants scramble, . . . being totally surprised that out of all the chaos and un-connectedness, we somehow land on their feet with grace and poise.

Instead, we live with a sense of expectancy and a trust in the providence of God. We look for the positive to happen. We expect and look for the best in others. We live with not a jaded and negative outlook on people but we know that the One Who made us also made *the others* whom we seem so determined to talk about. We know,

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<sup>10</sup> See an excellent piece on this subject in Kinkade & Buchanan *Lightposts for Living, The Art of Choosing A Joyful Life* (Warner Books; 1999) ISBN 0-446-52522-7

without any shadow of a doubt, that like us, *they* have deep innate value and *they* have the nobility and holiness in them that God put within them as God did with us.

We can move along through our lives, as best we can, paying attention to what and who is around us. We can look for glimpses of God's powerful hand in the lives of people right next to us. We can *expect* to see that God has and is working definite changes in the hearts and the souls of the people who are right here in our lives. We can *expect* to learn a deepening sense of grace and forgiveness and gentleness toward others – a sense of grace that we too quickly forget and let become overcome with bitterness, criticisms and resentment. We give up too soon on people but expect no one to *ever* give up on us.

It's about *expecting* God to transform your personality, your outlook on life and the specific ways you relate or don't relate to others whom God has made and placed in your life. Is how you are relating to others in your life *now* the way you always want to be remembered after you die?

Something amazing happens when you learn to live with a trust and an anticipation of the good that God is about to do in your life. When you trust in how God is unfolding miracles in your life, it frees you from the need to have all the answers. It sets you free from having to provide and insure against every single possible loss in your life. It totally frees you from having to control and predict everything that might come your way. Mostly because you discover that you can't. Mostly because you find that you don't have to because you are finally getting around to trusting in *God's* providence and God's total unconditional love for you as a person.

When you finally let go and embrace the providence of God, you can be healed. You are healed from that pressing sense of urgency to

control that totally ruins your nervous system and directly affects your blood pressure and circulatory system. You change to focus only on what *you* are doing in the moment and you refocus your attention on *your own* circle of excellence that *you* are trying to accomplish – instead of trying to control the sphere of influence of others. God works in wider circles than you can immediately see. When you trust (*beyond* what you can influence) and invest your emotional energy in the providence of God, you get something else. Not only do you eliminate the stress of trying to control what you can't, you discover how to live at peace with yourself and at peace with others. You find peace with God when you trust in the power, the wisdom and the holiness of God.

So what do *you* expect to be coming along next in your life? Are you focused on what is wrong or are you truly looking for some miracles to unfold? The beautiful and the depressing thing is that you're going to get what you expect. That's because if we live denying that God can bring a redemptive and compassionate outcome to something – we'll end our days missing the amazing power and love of God (that is shown in changed lives).

But when you live with expectation, you look for how God is at work in your life. You live with peace that makes you feel interconnected with the web of life (in which God is alive and doing remarkable things in and through us, . . . if we're open for it). ■