

MARK 2:1-12  
“YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN”

One great way of understanding the Bible story is to imagine yourself actually in the story, as one of the characters; then we can begin to see what's going on and get a feel for the impact Jesus makes. So let's imagine, you are the owner of the house in the story in Mark chapter 2: you have invited Jesus to come and have invited your friends to come and meet Him; you have heard that He is a great teacher and you want to hear Him, but you are surprised by the size of the crowd that arrived and to see people crowding round the windows and the door; it was just amazing. You are all gathered in the front room and Jesus is talking; then there a noise in the ceiling and the plaster begins to fall down on your head and you look up and someone is making hole in the roof! How do you feel? Angry? Annoyed? Curious? What's going on? “Who's doing this to my house? How dare they interrupt Jesus while He's teaching!” The hole is just getting bigger and as the hole gets bigger your anger rises; you're going to have to repair that tomorrow? It's just not fair!

You are one of the four friends; you have another friend who is paralysed, perhaps who has never been able to walk. Now you've heard about Jesus; there are rumours going around the town that he's been healing all kinds of people; it's amazing, miraculous. The four of you have been talking together about your friend; ‘we could take him to see Jesus; maybe Jesus will heal him.’ It's agreed; we'll take him sometime. Then you heard yesterday that Jesus has arrived back in Capernaum and someone in the market place told you where you can find Him; He's going to be at home for a while, where He will be tomorrow, how to find Him. So the four of you have planned to take your friend; you've got him on the stretcher and have carried him through streets to the house where Jesus is, but when get there – what a disappointment; the house is full, the people are crowded outside; there is no way we can get inside! Then you have an idea; you see the steps at the side of the house and decide to climb up and make a hole in the roof and lower their friend down that way; it was a bit risky, but it might just work; I hope we don't drop him; I hope the man who owns the house doesn't mind; we'll put it right for him tomorrow!

You're the man on the stretcher! “No-one really understands what it's like. I can't walk and because I can't walk, I can't work. I have to rely on other people for everything; the only way to get money to buy food is to beg beside the road, but I can only get there if someone else takes me there and leaves me, then comes back to take me home again. I am completely dependent on other people. I've heard about this man going round Galilee; He's called Jesus and He's been healing people; some are saying that the work He's doing is miraculous; yesterday my friends told me that Jesus has come back to Capernaum and today they're going to take me to meet Him to see if He might heal me. Typical; we get there and the house is full; oh well! It was a nice idea; we'll have to come back another time when Jesus isn't so busy. Wait a minute! These friends of mine are mad! They're going to haul my stretcher upstairs and put me through roof; I hope they don't drop me. Jesus seems a nice man; He's got a friendly face, but He's talking about forgiving my sins. I didn't come to get my sins forgiven; I came to be healed and to walk again!

We've read the story so we know how it ends. We know that it ends with the paralysed man rolling up his mat and walking out of the house to go home. The man is healed; his friends' faith and determination is rewarded; Jesus' power and compassion are revealed again; the people are amazed at this new miracle of Jesus. But there is far more to this story than the miracle of a paralysed man being healed to walk again. There is far more about Jesus here than simply a miracle-worker. It centres around the words: “*Son, your...*” (2:5)

There are four things:

**1. Forgiveness – the deepest need** the first thing Jesus said to the paralysed man: “*Son, your...*” (v5) Why did He say that? Why not simply heal the man and let him walk home? Some might draw a connection between sin and his disease, that the disease was somehow a punishment for sin; but the Bible doesn’t teach that anywhere and Jesus never makes that connection anywhere; it’s just not true! Simply, Jesus saw the man’s deepest need; his deepest need was to know the forgiveness of his sins. When God promised, through Jeremiah, to build a new kind of relationship with the world and with His people Israel, the key blessing at the centre of that new relationship – the forgiveness of sins – “*I will...*” (Jeremiah 31:31ff) Later, when Paul is summing up what the gospel is all about, the key blessing is the forgiveness of sins. Your deepest need and mine is the forgiveness of our sins.

Forgiveness is treating people who have faults and failings as if they have none. Forgiveness is not about sweeping things under the carpet, but it is about the healing of a relationship, in this case our relationship with God. We have all made mistakes; we all have faults and failings; these mistakes and failings spoil our relationship with God, and cloud that relationship; they drive a wedge between us and our God. God promises to forgive these faults and mistakes, yet the gospel tells us that God isn’t sweeping these things under the carpet; the gospel tells us that Jesus is the One who bears these sins, faults and mistakes and when He died on a cross, He died as the sin-bearer, carrying our faults and mistakes on His shoulders. It is because Jesus died and rose again that forgiveness is possible and our relationship with God is healed. There is a cost of forgiveness and that was the death of His Son, the death of Jesus. Forgiveness is still our deepest need; we carry around with us a sense of failure and guilt, and it weighs us down as an awful burden, yet Jesus says “*Your sins...*” (v5)

**2. Forgiveness – the cause of controversy** Not everyone is happy: “*now some...*” (v6f) They were right, of course! Only God can forgive; it is His prerogative. Now there are two possible answers to this objection: First of all, that Jesus is indeed making a claim to which He has no right and so what He says is indeed blasphemy; He makes a claim to be God but He has no right to that claim; it is certainly the more obvious answer and is the conclusion to which the religious teachers jumped. Secondly, that Jesus is God; that He speaks the truth; that He is quite right to make the claim and quite right to say what He said. It is an astonishing claim and no wonder that the religious people of the day didn’t jump to that conclusion. We will see in a moment how Jesus answered their objection and how He supported His claim, but for a moment, let’s think about other ways in which forgiveness is controversial. Myra Hindley was one of Moors murderers, killing lots of people, among them young children and burying their bodies on Saddleworth Moor, near Manchester; some bodies were never found; she was described as ‘The woman Britain could never forgive!’ On the other hand, we have heard several families of young people killed in London talking about forgiving those who have killed their children. That is controversial for some because it seems to be taking these crimes far too lightly. How can God keep forgiving when people let Him down so badly; surely that is sign of weakness rather than strength?

**3. Forgiveness – the reason for the miracle?** Jesus healed the paralysed man for two reasons: first of all, because of His compassion – He cared for the man lying in front of Him; it is not said here, but is said in other places where Jesus healed the sick, because He cared about them. Secondly Jesus healed this man to demonstrate His power and authority to forgive: “*Which is easier...*” (v9ff) Quite easily Jesus could say to man “*your sins...*” and no-one would know whether that was true or not; had it happened? There is no proof, no evidence; it is a claim no-one could verify. But “*that*

*you...*” (v10) You can verify the fact that the paralysed man has just stood up and walked out; you can see that the man who was carried in on a stretcher went out with the stretcher tucked under his arm; you can see that; you can know that Jesus did that, Jesus healed him. The healing became a visual aid for Jesus – because He is able to heal the man and make him walk again, Jesus also has the power and authority to forgive. The healing shows the world that Jesus has the power and authority to forgive so that when He says “*Son, your...*” that really happened; it is a real promise; He speaks the truth.

#### **4. Forgiveness – believe!** What do we think?

“I’ve nothing to be forgiven for? I have no major faults and failings!” Congratulations! But I’m sorry to say you’re wrong; only the perfect Man has no sin and no need of forgiveness and there was only One and His name is Jesus. Even if once, you have made one mistake and that it was a tiny fault and that is all you ever did, you still need forgiveness from God.

“God could never forgive me; it might be true for everybody else, but it can never be true for me; my faults are too big and too many!” That too is wrong; Jesus died that we might be forgiven and that is for all of us, no matter who we are and what we have done. He did the impossible thing, healing a paralysed man, to show that forgiveness is possible for all of us.

“I believe in the forgiveness of sins” – that is part of the basic creed of Christian faith called the Apostles Creed. It is the first step along the way, to believe that forgiveness is possible, to believe in theory that the gospel says that sins are forgiven, and to see that this is a key blessing of God for us in Jesus. But there’s another step: “I believe that my sins are forgiven.” This time it’s personal and is about what Jesus can do for us and in us as individuals: how many people carry around a deep sense of guilt in their hearts, a sense of failure, falling short of what they wanted to be in life, very aware of the mistakes they’ve made. It’s not as simple as I’m going to make this sound, but the key gospel answer to all of that is here in the forgiveness of sins and to know that “*Son, your ...*” It is no longer theory, but a personal reality; our sins really are forgiven by God; we really are free from the chains that bind us.

Forgiveness is treating people who have faults and failings as if they have none. That is exactly what God does for us; that is the gospel. He doesn’t sweep our faults under the carpet; He treats them so seriously that the only way to deal with them was to send His beloved Son to be the sin-bearer and to die on the cross. That is the cost of our forgiveness. This is a real promise at the heart of the way in which God deals with us: He does not treat us as our sins deserve, but there is forgiveness in His heart. The paralysed man bears witness to the reality of forgiveness: he heard Jesus say the words and was then healed as proof! The story still stands so that we can hear and see; Jesus is still able to forgive sins. “*Son, your...*” (2:5)