

Mark 2:1-12

Jesus Forgives Sins

² When Jesus again entered Capernaum some days later, people heard that he was home. ² So many people were gathered together that there was no more room, not even by the door, and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Some people came to him bringing a paralyzed man, carried by four men. ⁴ Since they could not bring the man to Jesus because of the crowd, they dug through the roof above where he was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralyzed man was lying. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ But there were some experts in the law sitting there and thinking in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this fellow speak like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except God alone?”

⁸ Jesus immediately knew in his spirit that they were thinking this way within themselves. He asked them, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier: to tell the paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your stretcher, and walk?’ ¹⁰ But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralyzed man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

¹² At once the man got up, picked up the stretcher, and went out in front of everyone. So they were all amazed and glorified God. They said, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Your Greatest Need

I.

You probably have already noticed the title of today’s sermon on the screen today. What is your greatest need? Perhaps in your mind’s eye you have begun the inventory process. You’ve started listing your assets, and perhaps have compared them with your liabilities. Maybe the process is quite satisfying. Maybe it leaves you feeling nervous or intimidated about the implications for your future.

Maybe you are one of the unselfish ones. As soon as I asked that question you started thinking about some of your friends that are experiencing more difficulties than you are right now. What is your *friend’s* greatest need?

That was the attitude of the group of friends in our text today. Four of them considered the plight of a fifth man. He was paralyzed.

There was no medicaid to pay for the care of a physician. There was no disability insurance to give him some kind of income that would help him cope. There was no Social Security to provide even a pittance on which to live—no low-income housing assistance, no programs of any kind to help him. He had to live off the generosity of his friends and perhaps holding up a sign at a street corner—“Paralyzed, anything will help.”

What is your greatest need? If you asked this paralyzed man or his four friends, his greatest need was to walk—to be healed.

Jesus had developed a reputation in Capernaum. He had healed so many people. *Jesus* could help their friend. He could give him his life back. He could make it possible for this man to be a productive member of society.

The four friends picked him up, mat and all, and off they went to see Jesus. So many people had come to see Jesus that it was next to impossible for an able-bodied person to shoulder their way through the crowd. There was no way to get their paralyzed friend through the door and in to see Jesus!

They were determined to find a way. Whether you like skylights or not, I'm sure if you were the homeowner you wouldn't appreciate just having a hole cut in your roof without warning, but that's what the four decided to do. "Since they could not bring the man to Jesus because of the crowd, they dug through the roof above where he was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralyzed man was lying" (Mark 2:4, EHV).

Now he's there! Now everything is going to be all right! Jesus is going to take care of everything their friend needs! "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5, EHV).

A long silence must have followed. Now... wait just a minute, here! Is *that* all Jesus is going to do, just mutter a few words about forgiveness? After all they went through to get their friend to Jesus, this is it? How about a little healing here, Jesus? How about giving him back the use of his legs?

There's the rub, isn't it? We're sitting in a church. We're listening to a sermon. When you're in church or Bible Class or Sunday School or Catechism Class or some other churchly thing, you know the answers that are expected of you. Almost always the answer is supposed to contain "Jesus" or "forgiveness."

But when the rubber meets the road—when you're asked "What is your greatest need?" *outside* of church, the first thing that comes to your mind might be quite a bit different. When you're sitting at home and contemplating that question, you might be thinking about your health or your treatment plan for whatever physical ailment you are facing right now. You might think about your 401k or your 403b and your meeting with your financial advisor. You might think about the discussions you are having with your accountant or your lawyer about issues you might be dealing with in life. You might just be thinking that your greatest need is a little peace and quiet when the little voice asks: "but *why*?" for the thousandth time today.

Even when we come to church and hear the question: "What is your greatest need?" we want Jesus to provide an "out" for our physical problems. Sure, it's nice to hear about forgiveness and all, but there are so many other things that paralyze us—so many other things we want Jesus to fix—so many concerns he could just address for us.

Jesus, just give us healing, or at least tell us exactly what to do to get better or exactly what exercises will *really* help us. Just give us a better marriage, or at least tell us exactly what to do to fix things between us. Just give us a raise, or show us the way the budget is going to work out to stretch the dollars we have to pay all the bills before the collection agency calls *again*!

And what does Jesus do instead? "Son, daughter, your sins are forgiven." What we *want* is to be free from the consequences that come from living in a fallen world—disease, disability, failure. What *Jesus* wants is to take us out of sin's grasp. He intends to forgive us.

II.

Many people—maybe even *most* people—these days aren't looking for forgiveness. People are looking for meaning in their lives. They are looking for sustainability. They are looking to find out how they can live vital lives and be important to other people, or maybe just to themselves.

Really, that's just the old sinful human trait of self-justification. We make excuses for our sins—sins that affect our lives or the lives of others. What is your greatest need? Now, just as it always *really* is, your greatest need is to hear the words Jesus spoke to the

paralyzed man: “Your sins are forgiven.”

That simple sentence evokes a serious charge: “But there were some experts in the law sitting there and thinking in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this fellow speak like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except God alone?”” (Mark 2:6-7, EHV).

These experts in the law had good reason to think that way. Even *Moses* didn’t forgive sins. None of the prophets forgave sins. Even the Prophet Nathan did not forgive King David, but merely announced: “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die” (2 Samuel 12:13, NIV84). According to everything these experts in the law knew about God from Scriptures, forgiveness was *God’s* business, and he wasn’t about to franchise that out to anyone. They couldn’t *believe* Jesus was able to forgive sins.

It’s a problem for many today. Some think God is just generically “nice.” There’s not really any need for forgiveness because God has given up on the fire and brimstone judgment program. He understands us better now. We don’t really “sin,” we just “make mistakes.” All those issues we talk about on Life Sunday—abortion and euthanasia and end-of-life decisions—those are just “choices” we make. We aren’t God’s enemies living apart from faith in Jesus, we’re good at heart, just misguided sometimes.

But God isn’t really generic, is he? He is personal. Jesus—God himself—get personal with the paralyzed man. “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5, EHV). *Your* sins. Those so-called “experts in the law” picked up on Jesus’ insinuation that *they* needed his forgiveness, too. That was insulting. That was *too* personal. He intends to get personal with you and me, as well. *We* are sinners whom he forgives.

How does Jesus *prove* that he is able to forgive sins? “[Jesus] asked them, ‘Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?’ ⁹ Which is easier: to tell the paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your stretcher, and walk?’ ¹⁰ But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralyzed man, ¹¹ ‘I tell you, get up, take your stretcher, and go home’” (Mark 2:8-11, EHV).

The man was no longer paralyzed. He got up and went home. Jesus healed the man to show that he has the personal power to grant forgiveness.

Do you want proof of his power to forgive *you*—today? Look to the cross and Jesus’ resurrection.

On the cross Jesus suffered your ultimate rejection from God. He provided *for* you his own perfection to make you acceptable to God. He filled your greatest need. By his death on the cross he forgave the sins for each one of us and released us from the self-justifying ways of our sinful nature—our nature that constantly confuses us about our *real* needs and constantly questions whether we really need *anyone* to rescue us at all.

In Jesus’ resurrection the Father decisively answered the question about who Jesus is and his authority. He is the eternal Son. He is God in human flesh. He has the authority to speak his personal word of forgiveness to all who come to him in faith.

Isn’t it odd how the one thing we Christians need—forgiveness—is still such a hard thing to include on our list of needs? We come to Jesus with all kinds of wants—many of which he grants us. But we have this confidence—when we come to him in faith he will always say to us the words that address our greatest need: “Son, Daughter, your sins are forgiven.” Amen.