

The Forgiving Power Of Jesus

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- [0 : 0 0] All right, thank you very much, Elliot. Good morning, everybody. Y'all doing well? Wow, this is like very responsive. This is gonna be a fun time.
- If you are new with us, glad that you are here today with us on Daylight Savings Time. It's a little bit rainy, but glad that you made it. If you're listening to this online, glad that you're able to listen.
- If you have your Bibles with you, your old school, you got it on your lap, go ahead and flip over to Mark chapter two. If you don't have it, don't worry. There is going to be verses up on the screens as well.
- And this book that we are in, the Gospel of Mark, it is a story of Jesus's life and ministry. It's a story that talks about who he is, and it's given to us so we can grow and learn who Jesus is.
- So we don't have to wonder and guess and come up with versions of it ourselves because we are terrible at that. And it's also a story about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.
- [0 : 5 9] And so where we are at in the Gospel in chapter two is we're in full swing of Jesus at the front end of his ministry. He's already gaining a ton of influence and notoriety.
- People are coming from all across the rural region of Galilee because they're hearing about this guy that when he teaches, it is this teaching that they've never heard before.
- It has authority. It has clarity. It feels like God is speaking to us again. And not only that, he is a guy who was able to do miracles. They're hearing about the miraculous healings that he is doing, casting out demons.
- And so far what we've seen in just a few short days of his ministry, it's not like he healed a guy one time. Like people are coming in droves and he's healing the blind and the lame and the sick and the whatever.
- And that is what's happening. And so more of that's gonna be referenced in this passage, Jesus' teaching and Jesus' authority to heal. But there's also something unique to these two particular stories that we're gonna read today.
- [2 : 0 1] And Jesus himself tips his hat to another authority that he has. And let's see if we can pick it up as we read. So Mark chapter two, we'll jump in verse one.
- It says this. And when he, Jesus, returned 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. 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. And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.
- And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. Now, some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like that?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? 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?

[3 : 07] Which is easier to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven? Or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk. But that you may know that 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 immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw anything like this.

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, follow me.

And he arose and followed him. And as he reclined that table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

[4 : 16] I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. This is God's word. So before we jump in and start unpacking this, the first thing I want to do is bring us into that first century context.

We have to realize, when the gospel of Mark was written, he was writing to a people that really were familiar and understood the times and days and how things happen in society.

And one of the things they would be familiar with is homes and how little towns were built and what that looked like. And so you didn't need much of an imagination, but we do.

And I think we can help ourselves by just understanding how houses were very small in those days, very much smaller compared to ours. One room was never bigger than 50 square feet.

And houses, they may have had a few rooms for different purposes, depending on family size, but not much more than that. And in these towns, homes were built really close to one another.

[5 : 18] Like there was no value of, let me have my house and a big yard to buffer myself from my neighbors with a white picket fence around it so there was clear delineation of where my plot ended and where everyone else's was, right?

That wasn't there. They were close by and the way they were built created small alleyways through which you would walk through homes. And so the fact that this house was overcrowded, it doesn't mean that thousands were being gathered together, but it also doesn't mean that it was just tens of people there either.

It's a sizable and dense crowd, enough so to overflow this home's capacity and block any alleyways to get to the house. I mean, they weren't able to get through there.

And those furthest out, guess by the crowd size, the kind of the edges of the crowd was far enough away where if they were to yell, Jesus probably couldn't hear them, which means that they're all on the edges of the crowd, probably had a hard time hearing Jesus.

It conjures up the remembrance of Monty Python where the people are saying, did he just say blessed are the cheesemakers? So whatever the crowd size was here, we know it was substantial enough to prevent these four friends of this paralytic to get access to Jesus.

[6 : 35] And it's also worth mentioning that these first century homes were one story and had a flat roof on top built for work and sometimes to sleep on. So it's made of very sturdy stuff.

And it was supported by wooden beams, which means to make a hole in a roof, which these guys did, would have been a serious undertaking and a major racket. And that's the picture Mark's painting.

That's a picture we need to step into in that first century context because it shows the extent these friends were willing to go to. And here's why it's important for us to consider that.

Because before anything happens, before Jesus does anything, he actually acknowledges what they did. Look at verse five. And when Jesus saw their faith, Jesus saw what they did.

His eyes are on the friends and all that they had done for him. Jesus sees it. He honors it, which should encourage us that faith in Jesus and love for people creates potential for Jesus to do amazing things.

[7 : 38] Before we move on to the rest of what happens in these stories, I want us to acknowledge what these friends did matter. Jesus said so. I'm a sovereignty of God guy through and through.

I believe he has the power to do what he wants, when he wants, and how he wants. But the mystery that we're shown here and throughout the Bible is that God's sovereignty does not eliminate man's responsibility.

And he sovereignly decreed for it to be this way, which doesn't diminish his sovereignty at all. Our responsibility is wrapped up in his sovereign will and decree. R.T. Kendall, he was a preacher in the 20th century over in England, and he gave this great picture of how to understand God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

And God's complete sovereignty, he says, and man's responsibility are like two great mountain peaks of truth, whose foundations are covered in cloud.

They seem to stand alone, one against the other, opposed to one another, irreconcilable. And we can't see in our limited understanding how the two can harmonize or intersect because it's shrouded in mystery.

[8 : 52] But somewhere in God's perfect, hidden, incomprehensible wisdom, those two peaks come together hidden in the clouds of his redemptive plan.

We don't know how they do it. We don't know when they do it, but we both know those things are true. God is absolutely sovereign, and yet we have responsibility. And if we overpress God's sovereignty and deny man's responsibility, we can become religious fatalists at best.

Kind of que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be. And we can be spiritually lazy. Why do anything? Because God's gonna do whatever he wants to do anyway.

Why does he need me? But the other side of that is we can swing the pendulum too far the other way. We can overpress man's responsibility at the expense of man's sovereignty.

We can fall into the error of works righteousness. Or another error we can fall into is that if I do all the right stuff, or if I have the right faith, God must respond to what I've done in the way that I want him to.

[9 : 59] And passages like this, they are not passages that underwrite, name it and claim it, or word of faith theology. They just don't. Because you can say things with perfect faith, and in a demanding way like you already have it, and still God gets to decide according to what he knows best.

Which means sometimes he will say no. And you can do the most loving, charitable works for years upon years without end, and not see a person's heart change.

So you might be asking, Jesse, if that is true, then what is the point? Well, I wanna say this to all of us in the room, whether you are a Christian, or whether you are just looking into this and trying to figure this out.

Faith is not a formula. It's not a formula of specific words and actions to get God to do what we want. Faith sees that God is good.

It sees that his ways are good, and doing what he wants is good, but the outcome is in his hands, according to his good and perfect will that he has determined from time past.

[11 : 09] Which means he doesn't always respond in the manner that we want. And we see that actually in the story of the paralytic. Look what Jesus did. Verse five, it says he sees their faith, and then he goes on to say to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, I'm reading between the lines here, but if I'm the paralytic or one of his friends, I'm asking Jesus, is there anything else you wanna say on top of your sins are forgiven here, right?

It seems like Jesus really missed the point of all their effort, but he leads with this because Jesus is sovereign, he is wise, he's all-knowing, and he knows what is best.

He has a better plan than ours for this moment. He also knows that sin and paralysis aren't disconnected. He knows that we are powerless under both, and only Jesus can break sin's power.

Now, what's interesting about this story, where it comes in Mark's gospel, it's right after the story where Jesus heals a leper and commands him to go show himself to the priest, and what Jesus did in that story with the leper is that he is strictly following Levitical law for how a leper would be restored back into society, but even more so for a leper to be restored back into being able to participate again in synagogue and temple worship.

[12 : 29] What he was doing, he was giving that man, that leper, his full life back. He was being fully restored. In that story, the leper's body was healed first, then restoration to God and the people.

But in this story, Jesus starts by forgiving this man. He starts with restoration to God by forgiving his sins, and by doing so, he is declaring a prerogative reserved for God alone, which is why the religious leaders in their hearts are freaking out.

They are saying, wait a minute, this guy just said something that only God can do. He is blaspheming. He is saying he is God. He is diminishing God. He is slandering God by claiming to be God.

You can't help but think what Jesus did here. He may be just being a little cheeky and a little ornery. It feels like he's setting them up by switching the order of this miracle, right?

Because it's a lot easier to do a miracle first and then say your sins are forgiven because who's going to question that? If you got the power to heal a paralytic, like in that manner, you know what?

[13 : 34] I'm probably gonna give you the benefit of the doubt when you say your sins are forgiven, like, well, maybe you got this, you know? But Jesus doesn't work in the manner we always wanted to. He gets that right as God, yet he always gives us enough evidence to show the scope of his authority.

And his statement to the religious leaders who question his authority is pertinent to us, to you and me here today. See, they doubted his authority to forgive sin.

They weren't easily convinced. Man, we're like that. We're not easily convinced. It's easy to write off Jesus and what he claims because he claims some impossible things, right? He said some things about himself that's like, man, man can't do that.

But then again, he just kept on doing the impossible over and over again. Verse nine, which is easier to say to the paralytic, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk, but that you may know that 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 immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all so that they were all amazed and glorified God saying, we never saw anything like this.

[14 : 53] Jesus showed his power to forgive by showing his power over sin's effect. See, there is no paralysis but for sin.

There is no sickness but for sin. There is no death but for sin. All of creation, we are told, is under sin's curse.

Creation itself groans under its futility, we're told in the book of Romans. And since we're all under sin's curse, that includes you and me. We feel that, we see that.

It's all around us, isn't it? But Jesus's power is greater than the curse. In this moment, he flexes with two powerful declarations.

Son, your sins are forgiven. I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And in this story, the natural miracle proves the spiritual miracle, which is this.

[15 : 54] Jesus's power over sin is complete and it is immediate. That man immediately rose. He picked up his bed and walked away, right?

He didn't, he wasn't like, hold on guys, just give me some time to stretch out my hamstrings. They've been sitting here, like they've been really tight. He didn't go for two months to rehab before he could fully walk again.

He wasn't like a freshly born foal that kind of stands on its legs wobbly and is trying to find its way. It's immediate. Jesus healed him in full by that short, simple phrase.

So it stands that his forgiving power is like his healing power. Our sins are paid in full once for all by the blood of Jesus.

On the cross, he cried, it is finished. That forgiveness is immediate. That forgiveness is complete.

[16 : 52] You don't have to earn it and you don't have to pay it off. Jesus didn't say to the paralytic, okay, you're healed now, you're forgiven now, but you need to go and you need to make sure you get into church, you need to tithe, you need to read your Bible, you gotta pray three times a day and if you don't do those things, the healing is gonna relapse.

He doesn't say that. He says, sons, he said to his son, son, your sins are forgiven. End of story. And this forgiving power has life-altering implications for him and for us.

That paralytic lived differently right away. He got up, he picked up his mat, he walked on his own two feet. He didn't tell Jesus, man, thank you so much for healing my legs, but you know what?

Man, the past so many years I've been a paralytic, you know, I've kind of enjoyed this bed that I've been laying on, not me on. I'm just gonna stay right here and not change anything. He changed, he walked away, totally healed, totally forgiven and it changed the way he lived his life.

And yet, there's even greater purpose to Jesus forgiving our sins than this. It says in verse 13 of Mark chapter two, he went out again beside the sea and all the crowd was coming to him and he was teaching them and as he passed by, he saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, follow me and Levi rose and followed him.

[18 : 22] And as he reclined at table in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to the disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Now this story on first examination doesn't seem to fit with the previous one very well, but actually Jesus's words, the very end draw the connection again between sin and sickness.

His power is not just to make us better though. In this story, his forgiveness means something else entirely. Jesus's forgiveness means we get to be with him.

See, back then, eating and drinking with people was more than just a good way to pass time and fill your stomach. Back then, eating was an intimate thing.

It was an act of fellowship. It was a statement of, I accept you. We are on friendly terms. And Jesus, the holy, righteous son of God, is eating and drinking with sinners here.

[19 : 43] And don't think of like sinners of like, oh yeah, these people probably did some stuff, like, you know, kicked the dog or got, you know, like mad sometimes. No, these are people who were known by the scarlet letter of their sin.

Like, they didn't like, they didn't like visibly have a sign hanging around their neck saying like, I've done this, this, this, and this. But figuratively, figuratively they did.

Everybody knew their business. Their sin was out in the open. They were known, they were judged, they were condemned by their neighbors.

But Jesus is willing to eat with them because his forgiveness is that powerful. It doesn't just heal us in the moment like the paralytic. It removes the stain of our past that marks us.

That scarlet letter is no more. And what does he say to the paralytic before your sins are forgiven? What's the first word out of his mouth to him?

[20 : 47] He calls him son. He says, son, your sins are forgiven. That's the forgiving power of Jesus. He takes sinners, rebels, enemies of God and he makes them sons and daughters of the king.

Sons and daughters of a heavenly father who loves us. And here's the thing, friends, Jesus isn't afraid of our mess. He will always enter into our mess because Jesus comes for the sinner, not the self-righteous.

One of my favorite authors is Paul Miller. He wrote a book I absolutely love and recommend probably way too much but it's called Love Walked Among Us and it is a look at the person of Jesus through the gospels.

And he says this in his book. He says, self-righteousness is like bad breath. Everyone else can smell it but you. There is a blindness to self-righteousness.

It looks down on others. It says, why aren't you more like me? It leans into judgment and it demands justice without mercy.

[21 : 59] I want us to think about our present day and age, the political climate that we live in. there's a lot of self-righteousness in politics. A lot.

It's justice without mercy. The self-righteous feel obligated to receive their rewards because I've earned it. The self-righteous dogmatically elevate rules over relationship because following the rules make them better.

Which makes the self-righteous terribly judgmental towards others. You're thinking like, man, Jesse, that's a lot of amazing insight into self-righteousness. How do you know this?

Because I'm the chief self-righteous guy. One of the ways I recognize self-righteousness in myself is that I get angry. I get angry in passive-aggressive ways.

Anger is the fruit. Self-righteousness is the root. Now, I want to say there is godly anger that is righteous, but let's be honest, we're not stepping into that too often.

[23 : 11] These scribes here, they are the epitome of self-righteousness. They never stopped judging Jesus and they never stopped judging the people in these stories. Jesus kept breaking their rules.

They were appalled at that. They were appalled that Jesus would fraternize with bad people, with known sinners. They're saying to themselves, man, we would never do such a thing. So Jesus, you shouldn't either.

And you know what's interesting? Like, from this point on, this is the beginning of them getting more and more irritated and angry with Jesus because they can't go of their self-righteousness.

And that anger grows and grows and grows until they decide, you know what, the best thing to do is just kill them. Let's get rid of them. The scribes placed their confidence in themselves, their righteous deeds and their knowledge of the scriptures.

They sought a righteousness they had to earn and put God in their debt. So they don't get how Jesus could sit with sinners and tax collectors. They're thinking to themselves, his teachings are so good.

[24 : 15] He is doing miracles. God is with this guy. How could we say it's not? He's one of us. He's closer to us. Therefore, he should be eating with us, not them. He should be accepting us, not them.

He should be near to us, not them. But they were so wrong. Because Jesus is far from the self-righteous. And the reason is is they can't see, the self-righteous can never see their need for forgiveness.

They're blind to their sin and they're far from repentance. But here is the good news for you and me of how our self-righteousness gets killed.

And it's this. We have to realize who we truly are and we have to realize who Jesus is. We are the paralytic in this story.

Powerless. We are the sinner and the tax collector needing forgiveness. And we are also the scribes. The self-righteous, arrogant scribes.

[25 : 16] It's not the self-reliant, self-confident, self-absorbed, self-justifying, others condemning people that Jesus draws near to.

It's the sinner. It's the unlikely. It is the poor and powerless. Those who see themselves as spiritually impoverished. That's who Jesus came to seek and to save and to heal.

And when you and I realize that that is our only hope, that Jesus is our only hope, when we realize we are more sinful than we could have ever imagined, when we realize that we have no power or control, when we are ready to give up and surrender every position of power, Jesus is near to you and me more than ever.

And he has all the power that we really need. The question for you and me today that Jesus is gonna ask us is this, how desperate are you to come to me?

And as the band comes up, we're gonna respond. I've been thinking about this passage and actually the end of this sermon in light of the Asbury revival that just recently ended.

[26 : 30] And is it a surprise that God showed up to a generation that seems to be falling apart? There has never been higher levels recorded of anxiety, depression, and loneliness among a peer group.

But that's who Jesus showed up to in a powerful way just recently. He met them right where they were at. And maybe it's because they stopped being blind to their brokenness and they have finally reached the end and gave up on all the other remedies that weren't working.

And maybe that's what we need here today. What are you and I holding on to that we need to let go of?

If you're here and you're not yet a Christian, I want to say to you, man, let go of your life. Come to Jesus. Come to him. He is here and he wants to save you.

And he is the only one who can because he is the only one who can forgive you. He is the only one that can wash away your sins. And he did that by dying on the cross for you. He is the Savior who died in your place.

[27 : 44] And he's also inviting you to see him and accept him as king with all authority who you come and you surrender your life to to follow him. If you're here and you're already a Christian, I want to ask us, man, what are we holding on to?

What do we need to let go of? How is God calling you and me to respond? And he's inviting us to come just lay it at his feet. And in that place, when we let go of those things, his spirit comes in its place.

In a moment, we're going to take communion, but before the Bible commands us to examine our hearts. And we're going to do that. And there's good reason that we do that.

In 1 Corinthians 11, 27 to 29, we are strongly warned as Christians, do not take communion in an unworthy manner. Examine your hearts. Examine yourself before God.

If there's repentance that needs to take place, repent. If there's forgiveness that needs to take place, forgive. Come to him with whatever you have. And he will forgive and he will heal.

[28 : 55] He will restore. He has all the power you need. If you're here and you're thinking, man, this person, Jesus, Jesse, I've never heard of this before.

I want to, man, I want to step into that relationship with him. I don't have it. There's going to be a prayer as we go into just 30 seconds of quiet examination and prayer.

There's going to be a prayer up on the screen that you can pray. And I want to encourage you to pray that. So let's all take 30 seconds right now, bow our heads, close our eyes, and let's do business with our king.

Let's do business with our king. our sin is great.

Your grace is greater. As a truth that we hold on to and never let go. Thank you, Lord, for the power of your forgiveness.

[30 : 27] Amen. If you would stand with me