

Called to Heal

Bible Background • Mark 2:1-12

Printed Text • Mark 2:1-12 | Devotional Reading • Psalm 103:1-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will STUDY Mark's account of Jesus healing the man who was paralyzed, APPRECIATE how one's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are intertwined, and PRAY for God's healing grace to touch us at our particular point of need.

In Focus

Brenda listened to the small group's prayer requests. They were going to pray for Lee's cousin who had cancer, Jordan's knee replacement surgery, and Georgie's nephew who had an opioid addiction. Brenda thought hard, but her family was blessed with good health at the moment. She had just video-chatted with her parents a couple of days ago and everyone was happy and healthy.

Especially in the face of the other serious prayer requests, she felt embarrassed to ask about what was really weighing on her heart. She often suffered from mild Seasonal Affective Disorder. She had felt it settling in over her once Christmas vacation back home in Mississippi was over and she had come back to Virginia where she worked. When it was her turn, Brenda took a deep breath and shared, "I feel silly asking this, but could you guys pray for my mental health?" Brenda met the small group's sympathetic gazes. "I usually have seasonal depression and I'm worried this year will be worse than usual since this is my first winter here away from my family."

"No need to feel silly at all, Brenda. Thanks for letting us know how to help you," the small group leader Jordan said. "I've had some bouts with depression myself and I am happy to talk with you about it, if you want."

God cares about our wholeness in all aspects of our beings—bodily, mentally, and spiritually. How can we work as the church to make sure we minister to the whole person?

Keep in Mind

"Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk?'" (Mark 2:9, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Perceived (Mark 2:8) epiginosko (Gk.) — To know, recognize, or acknowledge; to be fully acquainted with
B. Amazed (v. 12) existemi (Gk.) — To be put out of one's wits, be beside oneself; to be astounded, astonished, or insane

Say It Correctly

Capernaum. kah-PEER-nah-um.

Palsy. PALL-zee.

KJV

Mark 2:1 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.
2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.
3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.
4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.
5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.
6 But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,
7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?
8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?
9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?
10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)
11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.
12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

NLT

Mark 2:1 When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home.
2 Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them,
3 four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat.
4 They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus.
5 Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."
6 But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves,
7 "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"
8 Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts?
9 Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'?"
10 So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said,
11 "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"
12 And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!"

The People, Places, and Times

Palsy. This disability is due to the loss of motor function of muscles or certain nerves. It refers to all forms of paralysis. The word "palsy" translates the Greek word paralutikos (pahrah- loo-tih-KAHSS) from which we derive the English words paralytic and paralysis. The man in this week's Scripture is paralyzed, hence he is unable to walk by himself to meet Jesus. Matthew records the Capernaum centurion asking Jesus to heal his servant of paralysis, which causes him terrible suffering. (Matthew 8:5-6). The apostles also healed those who suffer from this condition (Acts 8:7; 9:33-34).

Scribes. Often called lawyers, doctors, or teachers of the law (Matthew 22:35), they were not considered a Jewish sect or a party, nor were they priests. The title scribe referred to their capacity as transcribers of the Hebrew Bible. They would copy the entire Old Testament by hand onto new scrolls when a new copy was needed. This careful, precise copying of the entire Law, Prophets, and Writings gave them great knowledge of the Scriptures. Mark presents the scribes as often in the company of Pharisees and of the chief priests and coming from Jerusalem.

Have you had special training or a profession that gave you expertise in a subject? How do you and others value that skill?

Background

The news of Jesus, the worker of miracles, spread throughout Capernaum. This was an exciting time. The community had never experienced a healer and teacher like Jesus. No wonder Mark 1:32-33 speaks of the townspeople bringing all the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. And in Jesus' great compassion He healed every one of them, but He too needed a time of restful healing. So the next morning He departed to be alone with the Father.

The Scriptures do not tell the length of Jesus' solitude, but His time was shortened by the disciples' appearance. Jesus did not appear to be irritated by the disciples' presence, but informed them that He must preach in other places: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (from Mark 1:38). Of a certainty there were more people in need of healing in Capernaum, but Jesus knew His mission was to spread the Gospel to everyone, so He traveled to other towns.

Do you make time to recharge with periods of solitude?

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Preaches (Mark 2:1-4)
2. Jesus Pardons (vv. 5-9)
3. Jesus Heals (vv. 10-12)

In Depth

1. Jesus Preaches (Mark 2:1-4) When Jesus entered Capernaum (v. 1), He preached "the word," meaning the Gospel of God's kingdom. Mark's description of the enthusiastic crowd that gathered suggests that it filled the house, jammed the doorway, and spilled out into the street. What a tribute to the ministry of Jesus!

Four men carrying "one sick of the palsy" joined the crowd but were unable to access Jesus through the doorway. Therefore, to get within touching distance of Jesus, they carried the paralytic up the outside stairway to the roof of the house. The oriental house structures in those days were one or two stories, built in a rectangle or square. They had one door that opened into an open space called the porch. Often the porch contained a stairway that led to the roof. So these friends saw the roof as a means to reach Jesus. They tore the roof open and lowered the paralytic on his bed down through the opening to where Jesus stood preaching. What a scene!

Share about a time you have worked hard to help a friend hear the word of God.

2. Jesus Pardons (vv. 5-9) Jesus knows this extraordinary action was based on extraordinary faith. He pardons the crippled man's sin. The teachers of the law said nothing but were outraged as they pondered Jesus forgiving the sins of another. Based on Old Testament laws (Exodus 34:6-7), the scribes knew only God had the authority to forgive sins. In their view, Jesus had committed blasphemy (Leviticus 24:15-16), a serious charge that was punishable by death. Even though the scribes do not voice their concerns aloud, Jesus knows their thoughts, which serves as further proof that He is the all-knowing, all-powerful God. Jesus declares His authority as One who is able not only to heal but also to forgive sins. Jesus' words convey to the scribes that forgiving sins are no harder than healing. Since Jesus can heal, as the scribes had seen Him do, then He can also forgive sins.

3. Jesus Heals (vv. 10-12) Jesus turns His attention to the paralytic and commands him, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (v. 11). The healing verified Jesus' claim to grant forgiveness. Since the healing was real and impossible for any but God, the claim to forgive sins is also real. The paralytic immediately arose, took up his bed, and walked out in full view of the crowd. This amazed everyone and they praised God—they had never seen anything like this!

Every healing that takes place is cause for rejoicing and praising God. God still heals, but we all know instances where healing didn't occur. Sometimes in the face of our illness, our faith demonstrates God's higher purpose (John 9) and our relationship with Him. Our faith, despite the absence of physical healing, can recognize the grace of God's peace and strength amid our weakened state. God's healing may be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Even in the absence of healing (2 Corinthians 12:7), we must remember that His grace is sufficient and our faith is the trademark of our relationship with Him—a relationship based on the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with our God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was the main thing that Jesus noticed about the four men who brought their friend to Him? (v. 5)
2. What did Jesus do before He told the man to "take up thy bed, and walk"? (v. 9)
3. What was the reaction of the people when Jesus healed the paralytic? (v. 12) What about when He forgave his sins?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did Jesus perform the miracle of forgiveness before performing the miracle of healing (Mark 2:10)?
2. Given their commitment to upholding Jewish law, were the scribes justified in their accusations against Jesus? What motivated their thinking?

Liberating Lesson

Illness and infirmity in body, mind, and soul afflict everyone today. May those who have not yet found physical healing continue seeking it in the faith, believing that God does heal physical illnesses. Yet He does not heal in every situation. Whether God offers you healing to overcome your illness or strength to continue despite it, you have witnessed the power of God in your life. Paul tells us that God comforts us so that we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:4). The testimony of God's presence in your life at a time when healing or deliverance was needed, provides an opportunity for you to share how God sustained you through that time. Whether He has brought you out or continues to help you through, simply sharing with other hurting people helps them know they are not alone.

Application for Activation

Think of someone you know who is suffering from a physical illness. Pray that God might grant wisdom and a deeper understanding of the role of faith in their healing process. Dare to believe that when physical illness prevails, there is more to pray for than a cure. We can pray for God to give us grace and increased faith amid our pain.

Make a list of the times God has healed you physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Reflect on how that healing changed your life and deepened your faith. If you are still awaiting healing, reflect on the blessings He has given you during your situation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Mark 2:1–12 The first chapter of Mark records the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, a ministry characterized by teaching, healing, and miracles. People noticed his teaching at the synagogue was better than that of the scribes. He cast out a demon while there at the synagogue, then went to Peter’s house and healed his mother-in-law. With these remarkable happenings, Jesus’ fame spread all over the region. As a result, people from all walks of life came to Jesus bringing the sick, both to hear Him and to be healed. Among them when Jesus returned to Capernaum were four people who brought to him a man sick of palsy.

1 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

Verse 1 states that Jesus “was in the house.” Many scholars assume this is Peter’s house, which became His headquarters in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13; 9:1; Mark 1:21, 29). It does seem the natural base of operations, as He had been there previously, and Peter was a natural leader among the disciples. People were drawn to Jesus—His presence, His words, His wisdom, His actions, His attitude, and the grace of God that rested upon Him. As the Son of God, His nature drew people as well. They desired to be close to Him, to be in His presence, to listen to His words, to hear His voice. They wanted to see Him as He touched the lives of the people.

The Lord Jesus preached the Word of God to them. Mark had previously told us that Jesus’ message was of the coming kingdom and repentance. He preached God’s wisdom, God’s counsel, and God’s compassion. Jesus was both the Messenger and the Message. He was a living example of what He preached and taught. He never spoke or preached a word that He did not live out. He was the living testimony of the Word He preached and taught. He is the Word of God indeed!

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. 4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

To understand the full impact of this passage, one needs knowledge of the Palestinian houses’ layout of this time. It is believed that houses were flat-roofed with railings so that people would not fall off (Deuteronomy 22:8; Judges 16:27; 2 Samuel 11:2). On top of some houses, there was access via outside stairs. These types of houses are still common in the northern part of the African continent, especially in northern Nigeria. Houses there are built flatroofed with mud and wooden beams and thatch covered them.

As Jesus teaches in the small one-room house, four people bring a man “sick of the palsy” to be healed. As they arrive, they discover that there is no room or access through the doorway by which they can get to the Lord. The crowd is too intent on listening to Jesus to allow space for the passage of another person who also desperately needs Jesus. The four helpers are determined, however, and carry the sick man up the outside stairs to the roof of the house. They lower the man down to Jesus. They dig through the thatch or roof tiles (Luke 5:19) and lower the man in front of Jesus. There the sick man lay at Jesus’ feet. Their actions in opening up the roof were not an example of reckless destruction of property. Apparently, they realized that a roof can be repaired. These four men wanted to see to it that this paralyzed man would get to Jesus and receive his healing. They understood that this man’s healing was much more important than a roof. Their actions remind us that people are always much more important than things.

How refreshing, encouraging, and uplifting it is to us when we have Christian friends who touch our lives with their faith. Friends who love the Lord, love us, and support us in prayer and encouragement are special gifts to us from God. Friends who will sacrifice themselves on our behalf are precious. When we have genuine Christian friends who support us in these ways, they are more valuable than gold.

We do not know much about these four men who carried the paralyzed man to Christ, but we can recognize faith at work in them. They are men of great faith. Obviously, they believed that the Lord Jesus could and would heal this man or they would not have made the effort to bring him to the Lord. They were also selfless; they put this man and his needs before concern for themselves and material things. While it is important to keep our attention on Christ, we must also not forget others who are seeking Christ. There is always room for everyone to come to Jesus. We must make sure that our presence does not hinder anyone’s progress to God. Instead, we should open ourselves to inviting them in.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

Jesus is not angry about the hole in the roof. Rather, the Lord Jesus acknowledges “their” faith, the plural indicating not just the man with paralysis, but also the four with him. Their faith is demonstrated in their action—carrying the man to the house and the creativity and perseverance in getting him to Jesus in spite of the obstacles. He responds to their faith first by speaking words of forgiveness to the paralyzed man, whom He calls “son” (Gk. teknon, TEKnon). This address shows the affection which Jesus holds for the man. Even though this is the first time they meet, Jesus addresses the man with the loving care of a father. This term would also be used by a teacher’s followers. Since the man and his helpers have already shown their great faith in Jesus’ ability to heal and their awareness of their great need for Jesus specifically, Jesus does not hesitate to include the man among His followers.

Of course, forgiveness is not what the man or his friends are looking for. It does not mean that the man is particularly sinful. The pronouncement of forgiveness here illustrates the common belief in the Old Testament that every suffering is embedded in man’s alienation from God. To Jesus the man’s deepest need is the healing of the soul (conversion and the forgiveness of sins), then the physical. Jesus, therefore, calls the people’s attention to this need by proclaiming forgiveness to the man. This single act provokes controversy and conflict against Jesus among the scribes and Jewish authorities. It is also, according to Mark’s record, the beginning of the conflict in Christ’s ministry on earth.

6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

Among the crowd gathered in the house to hear Jesus are some scribes—“teachers of religious law” (Mark 1:22, NLT). Their purpose in coming is not made known. However, they might have come out of curiosity upon hearing the news of the nature of His teaching as compared with their own (1:22) and the numerous miracles He had already performed. At other points in Gospel accounts, they come to ensnare Him on theological issues.

This opportunity comes as Jesus proclaims forgiveness to the sick man. The scribes who were present were immediately critical of Christ's action. They thought that Jesus did not have the authority to forgive sins. To claim to be able to forgive sins was blasphemy since the forgiveness of sin is a task for God alone. Blasphemy is ultimately the charge they bring against Jesus to demand His execution on the Cross (Mark 14:64). Indeed, since all sin is ultimately an affront to God Himself, only God has the right and authority to forgive sin. For a mere human to claim such power would be heresy. However, Jesus is not a mere human. The scribes failed to realize Jesus actually did have the inherent authority to forgive iniquities. Jesus was and is God the Son and God Himself, the Second Person of the Triune Divinity. He can forgive transgressions. Praise Him that He does!

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

Through the Spirit, Jesus discerns their thoughts right away. Both actions (vv. 7-8) are simultaneous, as quick as the thoughts themselves. Mark uses the adverb "immediately," *eutheus* (Gk. *yew-THAY-ocē*), a word he uses frequently in his Gospel also which can be translated "forthwith" or "straightway." Mark portrays Christ's ministry as very active. As the scribes contemplate this in their hearts, Jesus through the Holy Spirit perceives it. The word "perceived" is from the Greek verb *epiginosko* (*eh-pee-gee-NOCE-koh*) meaning to recognize or acknowledge. It has the idea of not just being acquainted with but being fully acquainted with or having full knowledge of.

Even though the scribes do not say a word, Jesus understands them completely. This is further proof Christ is the omniscient God. Although they have not expressed their thoughts openly, through His question Jesus implicitly makes them know who He is because only God can know and discern the inner thoughts of people. Humanly speaking, to the scribes, both forgiving sins and healing the man are impossible. Simply saying someone has forgiveness could be easier, since its fulfillment is not verifiable. However, asking a paralyzed man to get up and walk is subject to verification. Jesus criticizes the people for their unbelief. They have already seen Him perform healings that are impossible for any human and yet they still think He cannot do the equally impossible task of forgiving sins.

10 But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

The Lord Jesus points out that He has both the power to forgive sin and the power to heal this man. In receiving Christ's forgiveness, the man has the guilt of sin taken away. In receiving his healing, the man receives from the Lord the gift of wholeness in his body. Jesus reveals His true identity as the "Son of man" to the scribes. The "Son of man" is the title Christ most often applies to Himself. It is an Aramaic way to refer to the "everyman," but it is also a declaration of His divinity because it is an allusion to ancient prophesy (Daniel 7:13). To show them that He has authority on earth to forgive sins—contrary to their belief—He heals the paralytic. The paralytic man shows surprisingly little agency in this healing account. Usually, Jesus talks with the sick person about if and how to heal them. Jesus, however, has already seen that the man with palsy has faith in Him. Christ's actions now intend to grow the faith of the scribes. The man's physical and outward healing corroborates His claim of authority to forgive sins. It makes the crowd realize that since He can do the miracle of healing, which they can see, He can also do the other miracle, which they cannot see.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

The Lord Jesus, with authority and power, commanded the paralyzed man to arise, take up his bed, and go home. The man obeyed. His obedience was an act of faith. Through his faith and obedience, he received his healing. The response of the people who witnessed this miracle was powerful. The people were amazed,

astonished, and they glorified God. This and other miracles of the Lord Jesus were signs that pointed people to the Lord and the salvation that He has provided.

The sick man is restored not just to health, but to strength. Even after a short time without the use of one's legs, muscles begin to shrink and weaken. Jesus heals the damaged nerves causing palsy in the man's legs and goes further to strengthen the legs so that he can "immediately" stand, lift his bedding, and walk through the crowded room. Just moments ago, this feat involved four people and the destruction of a roof. Now the man can do it all by his own power.

The sick man's healing and his response is instant. He picks up his bed, according to Jesus' command, and walks away to the amazement of all in the crowd, including the teachers of the law who have challenged His authority to forgive sins. The word "amazed" comes from the Greek verb *existemi* (ex-ISS-tay-mee) which literally means to be put out of one's wits, be beside oneself, to be astounded, or astonished, or to become astounded, or insane. The reaction of the crowd moves from being "amazed." They praise God because never before have they seen anything like that. The main thrust of this story is not rooted in terms of Jesus' pity on and healing of the helpless paralytic, but on His ability to forgive sins. Sin is the sick man's (indeed, all humanity's) major problem, to which Jesus first declares forgiven and thereby proclaims the presence of the kingdom of God to mankind—the thrust of His earthly mission.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Peace and Healing Will Come
(Isaiah 57:14–21)

TUESDAY

Healed by Christ's Wounds
(1 Peter 2:18–25)

WEDNESDAY

Canaanite Daughter Healed by Mother's Faith
(Matthew 15:21–28)

THURSDAY

Anoint Sick with Oil and Prayer
(James 5:13–16)

FRIDAY

Woman Healed by Her Faith
(Mark 5:21–34)

SATURDAY

The Sick Need a Physician
(Mark 2:13–17)

SUNDAY

Jesus Heals and Forgives the Paralytic
(Mark 2:1–12)