

Introduction

1. When I was on sabbatical in Oxford, England, one of my favorite places to go was the Eagle and Child, a small pub around the corner from Regents Park College where I was in residence.
 - a. This establishment was frequented by the famous Oxford Inklings, an informal group of writers that included C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien that met there in the 1930s and 40s.
 - b. I enjoyed sitting at their table, indicated by a commemorative plaque, and thinking about the interesting conversations that must have taken place there.
 - 1) Tolkien, as you may know, was the author of the *Lord of the Rings* series of books that became a major series of motion pictures starting in 2012.
 - 2) C.S. Lewis, an atheist turned devout Christian, authored the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which has also been made into movies, as well as many other insightful works on life and being a Christian.
 - c. Among Lewis's most important works is *Mere Christianity*, which addresses the issue of who is Jesus and what should we believe about him. Lewis wrote, "Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. . . . [W]hat this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips. . . . I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him. 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to" (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 54-55).
2. "Who is this Jesus and who does he think that he is?" were questions in the minds of Jewish leaders who heard Jesus forgive a paralyzed man of his sins and then saw him heal the man's paralysis.
3. **Read Mk 2:1-12.**

A. Jesus Returns to Capernaum (1-2)

1. Jesus returned from his teaching tour of Galilee (cf., Mk 1:38-39) to the familiar shores of the Sea of Galilee and the little fishing village of Capernaum.
 - a. Jesus had "come home" (*en oiko* – lit. "in house") (1).
 - b. We don't know but can suspect that he most likely came back to Peter's and Andrew's home, where he had stayed in the past (cf., Mk 1:29).
 - c. Whatever home it was, the people of Capernaum and the surrounding area knew that Jesus was "in the house" and soon came for a visit, filling the house to overflowing and even blocking the doorway.
2. Jesus ". . . preached the word (Gk., *logos*) to them" (2).
 - a. The people came to see this miracle man and many came to be healed.
 - b. Instead of healing, Jesus brought the word, the good news, the gospel that he had come to proclaim.
 - c. Remember his past preaching, "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15).
 - d. The people listened patiently, but they really wanted to see a miracle.

B. A Spiritual Healing (3-5)

1. Four, faithful friends came carrying their paralyzed friend on a mat.
2. Warren Wiersbe gives a penetrating analysis of these men when he writes, "We must admire several characteristics of these men, qualities that ought to mark us a 'fishers of men.' For one thing, they were deeply concerned about their friend and wanted to see him helped. They had the faith to believe that Jesus could and would meet his need. They did not simply 'pray about it,' but they put some feet to their prayers, and they did not permit difficult circumstances to discourage them. They worked together and dared to do something different, and Jesus rewarded their efforts. How easy it would have been for them to say, 'Well, there is no sense trying to get to Jesus today! Maybe we can come back tomorrow'" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 32).

3. These four friends literally, “unroofed the roof” (Gk., *apestegasan ten stegen*). (4)
 - a. The roof of Peter’s house was most likely accessible by an exterior stairway.
 - 1) Often families would use this space as an open-air deck.
 - 2) It was also a place to build temporary shelters for the Feast of Booths, which was held each year during the harvest season to commemorate God’s provision for his people during the Exodus.
 - b. The roof was made of wooden beams covered with sticks and a layer of clay tiles or perhaps sod.
 - c. Imagine the reaction of those in the room below as sticks and dirt began to rain down on them.
4. But “. . . Jesus saw their faith (Gk., *pistin*) . . .” (5).
 - a. Certainly, the four friends had shown their faith in Jesus by their action in bringing their friend to him.
 - b. However, the paralytic also must have had faith to make the trip and then to be lowered through the roof coming to rest just at Jesus’ feet.
 - c. He like many of the others in the room came to Jesus for physical healing not forgiveness of sins, but Jesus gave him what he needed first—forgiveness.
5. Jesus said, “Son (Gk., *Teknon*), your sins (Gk., *sou ai hamartiai*) are forgiven (Gk., *aphientai*)” (5).
 - a. The Greek word *teknon* (literally “child”) is not necessarily an indication of the man’s age but of the compassion and care of Jesus for the man as if he were his own son.
 - b. The word used for “sins” in Greek literally means “missing the mark.”
 - 1) Paul used this same word in Ro 3:23 when he said, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
 - 2) We all miss the mark of God’s ideal for us to live righteous and holy lives to his glory.
 - c. William Lane notes, “The pronouncement was startling because it seemed inappropriate and even irrelevant to the immediate situation. It is intelligible, however, against the background provided by the OT where sin and disease, forgiveness and healing are frequently interrelated concepts. Healing is conditioned by the forgiveness of God and is often the demonstration of that forgiveness (cf., II Chron. 7:14; Ps. 103:3; 147:3; Isa. 19:22; 38:17; 57:18f.)” (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 94).
 - 1) We must remember that illness is not always the result of personal sin.

“As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him’” (Jn 9:1-3).
 - 2) However, sinful actions often do result in physical, emotional, or mental illnesses.
 - 3) Perhaps this man’s paralysis was the result of personal sin. We do not know.
 - 4) However, we do know that sin is a spiritual sickness that afflicts all human beings—both those that are physically ill and those that are physically well.
 - 5) Jesus provides the only cure for sin—forgiveness.

C. Reaction of the Teachers (6-7)

1. “some of the teachers of the law (Gk., *grammateon* – “scribes”) did not like Jesus’ pronouncement (6).
2. The teachers didn’t say anything out loud, but the thought in their minds was that Jesus was “blaspheming” (Gk., *blasphemen*) God. (7)
 - a. Jesus, as fully God, could have known their minds, but that was probably unnecessary based on the expressions on their faces and their body language.
 - b. This charge of blasphemy would be the one that ultimately was brought against Jesus at his trial before the Sanhedrin (cf., Mk 14:64-65) and which would lead to his crucifixion.
3. The conflict with the teachers over the forgiving of this man’s sin is the first of five such encounters that appear in Mk 2:1-3:6.
 - a. We will address each of these five conflicts over Jesus’ identity and actions in the weeks ahead.
 - b. Also, there is another set of five conflicts with Jewish leaders that appears at the end of Jesus’ ministry as recorded in Mk. 11:27-12:37, which we will also examine in due course.
 - c. Conflict with the Jewish leadership began early in Jesus’ ministry, continued throughout his ministry, and ultimately led to his arrest and crucifixion at the end of his ministry.

4. What was the source of their charge of blasphemy?
 - a. Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness was made using a passive verb (Gk., *aphientai*).
 - b. Jesus acted as spokesman for God. His words are ambiguous to some extent. They do not necessarily indicate that he was the one who had forgiven the man's sins. Although we know in hindsight that he is God and did forgive them.
 - c. Lane writes, ". . . there was nothing which suggested his personal power over sin. The reaction of the scribes does not imply that they have understood otherwise. They object to Jesus' conviction that he can speak for God. Jesus did exercise the divine prerogative but in a veiled way that could be recognized unambiguously only after the resurrection" (Lane, 95-96).
 - d. That Jesus would take on the role of a prophet—one speaking for God—was shocking to these spiritual leaders of Israel.
 - 1) To them his pronouncement of the man's forgiveness was presumptive and both dishonored and disrespected God.
 - 2) Blasphemy in Jewish law was punishable by death (cf., Lev 24:15-16).

D. Response of Jesus (8-10)

1. "Immediately (Gk., *euthus*), Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts . . ." (8).
2. Jesus addressed the elephant in the room—the thoughts of the teachers—by asking a powerful question.
3. "Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'" (9)
 - a. Forgiving sin and healing a physical illness are both difficult tasks.
 - b. James Brooks notes, "Ironically, the scribes evidently thought it was easier to affirm the forgiveness of sins than to heal because the former could not be verified and the latter could. For Jesus and Mark, however, the granting of healing and forgiveness are equally the work of God" (James Brooks, *Mark*, 59).
 - 1) Healing a physical illness may seem to be the harder task since there is visible evidence in the fact that the person is either healed or not.
 - 2) However, forgiving sins, an inner spiritual matter, while easy to proclaim is hard to prove.
 - 3) I think forgiving sins is much harder than physical healing, since human (e.g., doctors) can heal physical illness but only God can completely forgive sins.
 - 4) Lane concurs when he writes, "It is the declaration of forgiveness which is the more essential – and the more difficult – of the two actions" (Lane, 96).
4. Jesus fans the flames in the minds of the teachers regarding blasphemy with his next statement: "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (10).
 - a. Now, he has gone over the line with the teachers. He has claimed to be the Son of Man, one empowered by God to forgive sins.
 - b. The reference to the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13-14 would have been clear to the Jewish teachers. "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14).
 - c. This title points both to the humanity and suffering of Jesus and more importantly to his exalted and powerful position in the end-times.
 - d. Akin shares, "Only in the present text is the forgiveness of sins linked to the divine title 'Son of Man.' By implication Jesus does this again in [Mk] 10:45 when He weds the Son of Man of Daniel 7 to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, thereby redefining who the Messiah is and what He came to do. He is God, a divine heavenly figure who will receive an everlasting kingdom. That kingdom, however, will be realized through suffering service that will climax in death on a Roman cross" (Akin, 42).
 - e. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).
 - f. How ironic it is that Jesus' death for all humanity on the cross would be precipitated by charges of blasphemy lodged against him by the Jewish teachers, Pharisees, and priests.

E. A Physical Healing (11-12)

1. What Jesus does next in healing the paralytic is a powerful confirmation of his declaration of the forgiveness of sins and of the word he had been teaching about the coming of God's kingdom and the need for people to respond with repentance and faith.
2. Jesus gave the paralyzed man a faith filled call to action with the command, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" (11).
3. The man responded immediately (12a).
 - a. The Greek word *euthus* is not directly translated in the NIV text but is present in the Greek.
 - b. The man acts on faith as he arises, takes his mat, and walks out Peter's front door.
 - c. I can just imagine his four joyous friends joining him for the jubilant journey home.
4. The physical healing acts as confirming evidence that the spiritual healing has also taken place. Jesus said he was healed, and he was. So, if Jesus said his sins were forgiven, then they were.
5. The reaction of all present to this visible miracle was like that of previous witnesses of Jesus' teaching and healing (cf., Mk 1:27).
 - a. Amazement – "This amazed (Gk., *eksistasthai*) everyone . . ." (12b).
 - 1) The Greek verb *eksistasthai* literally means "stand beside oneself." They were beside themselves, out of their minds with awe and joy over what had just happened.
 - 2) I think the "everyone" here also includes the Jewish teachers who were incredulous at Jesus' words but amazed by their powerful result in healing the man.
 - 3) How much greater should their amazement have been over the fact that the man's sins had been forgiven.
 - b. Praise – ". . . and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'"
 - 1) Forgiveness of sins and physical healing should always result in raising praises to God.
 - 2) The purpose of Jesus' life and ministry was to restore the broken relationship between man and God and to restore their joyous life together.

F. Lesson for Us

1. Spiritual healing, our need for God's forgiveness, is a reality that we each must face in this life.
2. Jesus is the only one who can forgive our sins.
3. God honors our faith and trust in him with his presence, compassion, and healing.
4. While physical healing is important, it is not the most important thing. Spiritual healing through God's forgiveness in Jesus is the most important need in everyone's life.
5. We must seek the word from God even more eagerly than we seek healing by God.
6. Spiritual healing is always immediately available when you come to Jesus in faith.
7. Sometimes our physical sickness (e.g., addictions) come from poor choices and yielding to temptation.
8. Jesus has compassion on us and has given all of himself to bring us the healing that we need just when we need it most.
9. Jesus knows what is in our minds and hearts. So, we might as well talk with him about it.
10. We need to be faithful friends to those who are in need both spiritually and physically. Follow the example of the paralytics' friends.
 - a. Be deeply concerned for the needs of others.
 - b. Provide help not just words.
 - c. Believe that Jesus can meet the needs even if you can't.
 - d. Take action. Don't just promise to pray.
 - e. Don't be discouraged by difficult circumstances or difficult people.
 - f. Work with other believers to get needs met.
 - g. Dare to do something different when the situation demands it.
 - h. Be persistent in reaching out to those in need and finding ways to help them.
 - i. Give the glory and praise to Jesus when the need is met and rejoice with the ones who are helped.
11. Daniel Akin well concludes this lesson when he says, "Jesus is the God who forgives sin. The questions you must answer are clear: Is He your God? Has He forgiven your sins?" (Akin, 45)