

The Greater Miracle of Forgiveness

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Humanity's greatest need is forgiveness and spiritual restoration.

While meeting with a man at my job for coffee one day, I asked him to share his story with me. Knowing that I was a bivocational pastor, he led by telling me his involvement with the church from a young age. He expressed to me how he came from a line of pastors that stretched back four generations. I then asked him how he came to embrace Jesus as Savior, but he gave me a puzzled look.

Noticing he was confused, I phrased the question differently by asking him about when he heard the gospel, confessed his sins, and embraced God's plan of salvation through Jesus. While looking at me with a blank stare, I could tell he was struggling to answer the question. Finally, he broke the silence by saying he knew God saved him when he was delivered from a car accident.

I probed a little further and asked him to unpack what he meant by that. He then told me a story of when he was driving, rushing to get to his next destination, when he turned too quickly and hit a curb, which forced his car to spin out of control and crash into a tree. He said during the seconds following losing control of the car, he cried out for Jesus to protect him. After his car came to a stop and the dust had settled, he unbuckled himself and crawled out through the missing windshield. He then said he knew he was saved because God answered his prayer by protecting him from death.



Voices from Church History

"Come, and see the victories of the cross...Christ's wounds are thy healing, his agonies thy repose, his conflicts thy conquests, his groans thy songs, his pains thine ease, his shame thy glory, his death thy life, His sufferings thy salvation."¹

—Matthew Henry (1662-1714)



If you were having this conversation with the man, how would you respond to his hope for his salvation? What would you say is missing, if anything?

In this session, we will see that true faith seeks Jesus not only for physical healing but also spiritual healing. Jesus is not only able to heal the sick physically but, being fully God, He is also able to forgive us for our sins and heal us spiritually. The gospel of Jesus Christ is able to heal sinners completely and make them whole.

1. Faith is portrayed as desperately seeking restoration from Jesus (Mark 2:1-4).

¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² 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. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ 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.

Our text opens with Mark providing important background information regarding Jesus, namely, that He was coming off of a preaching/ministry tour and was returning to His home base in Capernaum. In other words, Jesus was returning home in order to rest and recuperate from being on the road for an extended amount of time. While He was on the road doing ministry, He was healing, casting out demons, and preaching in various synagogues. Shortly after Jesus arrived home, word got out that He was back in town and a crowd began to find Him. What we see on display in this passage is Jesus demonstrating absolute selflessness. Jesus was always ready to engage with the crowds of people who sought Him out because He had a deep compassion for the lost.

The crowd now gathered at the home where He was staying obviously knew Jesus would not turn them away. Oh, that we would pray that the masses of lost sheep in our world would seek out and trust the compassion of Jesus. When we engage with the lost, may the compassion of our Savior be felt through our tender words, engaging eye contact, and openness to meet their needs. In doing this, we will reflect our Savior who has loved us in the same way.



What are some excuses and objections we can come up with for not engaging with the lost in order to share the gospel with them?



How does the compassion of Jesus Christ coming to us in the gospel overcome our excuses and objections?

With the stage set for this scene, Mark introduces new characters to the narrative, men carrying a paralytic to Jesus. These men could not enter the house in a traditional way because of the overcrowding. It's amazing that their desire to see the paralytic encounter Jesus fueled the innovative idea to lower him through the roof of the house.

The motivation that drove these men to great lengths to see Jesus engage the paralytic was their desire to see their dear friend healed. These men had strong faith because they truly believed Jesus would restore the man physically. We can learn from these men as it relates to our family members and friends. What lengths are we willing to go to in order for them to encounter Jesus and be restored not only physically but holistically? In other words, what lengths would we go to in order to see those around us healed spiritually, emotionally, mentally, theologically, and even financially?



What motivates you to help people encounter Jesus? Why?

2. Forgiveness is assumed to be a greater need than healing (Mark 2:5).

⁵ *And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

Jesus moved beyond physical restoration to actual spiritual restoration by dealing with the man’s sins. Jesus’ expression of forgiveness for the man’s sins was a bold proclamation that He was God.

It’s easy for us to understand Jesus as full deity and humanity because we have the whole of Scripture to interact with. We know that later in His ministry, Jesus would express this truth publicly, and as a result, the religious leaders and teachers would both charge Him with blasphemy and desire to kill Him (John 5:18; 8:58-59). However, in Jesus’ day, they were not privileged to have the full revelation of God that we have, and there was great tension regarding how people felt about Jesus’ ability and authority to forgive sins.



Voices from Church History

“How can sins be rightly remitted unless the very One against whom one has sinned grants the pardon?”²

—Irenaeus (circa 125-202)

God the Son left the comfort of heaven to seek and save us who were lost and give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Isaiah 53:1-12 provides for us a detailed description of how Jesus dealt with our spiritual state, which included our “sin sickness.” Isaiah 53:4-5 says: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

The primary blessing that is to be received by those who embrace Jesus as Savior is complete spiritual healing for our sin sickness. In light of this, we must understand that while we are not promised physical healing from all sickness on this side of eternity, those who trust in Jesus will never face the wrathful consequences of their sin. Believers will never face separation from God, the outpouring of His wrath, and the eternal sickness and death awaiting those who do not believe (Rev. 21:4).



What are some ways we can help others understand the priority of having our “sin sickness” healed, even over our desire for physical healing?

3. Jesus relieves both temporal and eternal suffering (Mark 2:6-12).

⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ 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? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’ ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” ¹² 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!”

The scribes who were present in the house recognized with a shock that Jesus was claiming He could forgive sins. This claim made Jesus distinct from all other previous teachers and prophets. Because of this, the scribes arrived at the conclusion that Jesus was blaspheming because He was claiming equality with God, who alone can forgive sins. The irony of their accusation is made plain when Jesus backs up His claim to forgive sins by healing the man’s paralysis as well.

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

51. Christ as Priest

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Jesus put His supernatural knowledge on display by addressing the internal thoughts of the scribes. He then challenged them by asking a question about which was easier: heal somebody physically and restore their ability to walk or simply say your sins are forgiven. It would be safe for someone to claim the ability to forgive sin—how could such a person be proven wrong? It’s much more difficult to claim to be able to heal someone’s paralysis because it would require immediate proof of movement, evidence of walking. But if Jesus were to heal the man and provide him with the physical ability to get up and walk, then it would show merit to His claim to have the ability to forgive the man’s sins as well. Therefore, Jesus said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

It is amazing what Mark records next: “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!’” (2:12). Every single person who witnessed this miracle was absolutely astonished. The Man whom they knew to be a traveling teacher now proved He was the Messiah and was equal with God. This Jesus had the power to forgive sins and restore the broken—both physically and spiritually.



How has Jesus astonished you and given you reasons to glorify God?



What are we to believe about Jesus because of His claims and His miracle in this narrative?

The greatest need every human being has is to be forgiven for our sins in order to receive complete spiritual restoration to God. Ephesians 1:7 says, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” Redemption and forgiveness for our sins are only found through the shed blood of Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s plan to save sinners from the wrath we are all due. This is the core message of the gospel.

As we have looked in this text, we have identified the fact that Jesus healed the paralyzed man in order to demonstrate His authority and power over human suffering and sinfulness. It must be understood that when Jesus claimed to forgive the sins of the paralytic, He was making the public declaration He is equal to God. In doing this, He was signifying to the witnesses at the house not only His deity but also the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies they had been waiting for. Jesus alone was qualified to heal them from their spiritual sickness entirely.

All of these truths should ignite passion in our hearts to bring nonbelievers into contact with Jesus. He is the only one who can heal our spiritual sin sickness by forgiving us of our sins.



How does this miracle of Jesus encourage you to be bold in sharing the gospel for the spiritual healing of others?



Voices from the Church

“The announcement [of forgiveness] and presentation of radical healing to a man in his entire person was a sign of the Kingdom of God drawn near. The paralytic experienced the fulfillment of God’s promise that the lame would share in the joy of the coming salvation.”³

—William L. Lane

Conclusion

Returning to my conversation with the man who knew he was saved because God answered his prayer by protecting him from death in a car accident, I pressed him further and asked how he knew Jesus had dealt with his sin sickness, not just protected him from physical death. He asked me what I meant by the phrase “sin sickness.” His response allowed me to walk him through the gospel according to the Scriptures, expressing how every human being needs to cry out to God for salvation from sin through Christ alone.

He began to weep. After he regained his composure, he looked down at the floor, balled up his fist, and began to hit himself on his thigh, screaming out, “*Why...why...why!?!?*” I was startled and had no idea what was going on. So I asked him if he was okay. He looked up at me, wiping tears from both of his eyes, and said, “Why is this the first time in my life I have ever been told that I have sin and am in need of forgiveness?” He began to share his frustration with being raised in the church and never hearing this message before.

I comforted him by expressing that it was God’s grace that our lives had intersected at this point in time so that he would be able to hear the good news that Jesus alone can restore spiritually. After a few more moments of answering questions regarding the gospel, he asked me if I could help him place his faith in Jesus Christ.

There is a world filled with people who have never heard the good news of Jesus, even people who attend church. Many of them have no idea that they have inherited a sin sickness from our first father, Adam. We should personify the compassion of Christ by seeking to engage with the lost and sharing with them the good news of what Jesus has done to remove their sins in order to reconcile them to God and give them a new life in Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Through His healing of the paralyzed man, Jesus demonstrated His authority over human suffering and His authority to forgive sins. By claiming to forgive sins, Jesus was putting Himself on par with God—the only One who can command disease and wipe away our wickedness.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to be active in bringing people to Jesus—the only One who has the power to heal our physical infirmities and forgive our sins.

1. What should we aim to help people understand and believe as we share the gospel of Jesus Christ?

2. How can our group/church live on mission in our community and prioritize the message of forgiveness in Christ without ignoring people's physical needs?

3. What avenues, other than Jesus, might people go to in order to find forgiveness of sins, and how can we redirect their paths?

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