

MARK 2.1-12: JESUS WAS NOT JUST A GOOD MAN!

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Suppose you were unwell and went to see your doctor. And suppose that the doctor, instead of writing a prescription, turned to you and said, ‘*Your sins are forgiven!*’.

What would you do? Complain to the surgery? Report him to the BMA?

You expect a doctor to deal with your medical problem – not talk about your sin.

But this is exactly what happened when four friends brought a paralysed man to Jesus for healing. Instead of dealing with the presenting problem, Jesus declared. “**My son your sins are forgiven!**”! What kind of man was this?

On these autumn Sunday mornings we are looking at some of the objections people raise against the Christian faith. My sermon this morning was in the first place inspired by the objection, “Jesus was just a good man”. Really? Do good men go around forgiving other people’s sins?

Of course Jesus was a good man, but he was far more than that

- He was an amazing preacher. Unlike the teachers of the Law, says Mark, “**he taught with authority**” (1.22) – his preaching packed a punch
- He also had amazing healing powers – according to Mark, the last time he had been in town, “**Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons**” (1.34)

As a result everybody wanted to see him. When he came home “**so many people came together that there was no room left, not even out in front of the door**” (2.1,2)

Like a Hollywood film star or an Arsenal footballer, everybody wanted to see and hear this new preacher boy with a difference.

This was the context in which four men decided to bring a paralysed man to Jesus. Needless to say, they didn't want their sick friend to see a good man – nor to hear a powerful preacher - they wanted him to be healed.

But, there was a problem. The crowd was in the way – and nobody would let them through.

What would you have done in this situation? Given up? Tried another day?

Not these four - they were men of determination - men of initiative.

If they couldn't get to Jesus from ground level, then they were prepared to approach him from roof level. Indeed, they were willing to raise the roof itself.

In a Western context this was ridiculous.

Could you imagine someone breaking into your home through the roof?

But things were very different in 1st century Palestine:

1. Palestinian houses were flat-roofed - with only the slightest of tilts for the rain water to run off.
2. The roofs of Palestinian houses were not very solid – they were composed of beams laid wall from wall - in-between filled in with close-packed twigs and mortar. It was the easiest thing in the world to take out the packing – indeed, it was not unknown for large coffins to be

taken through the roof.

Even so, it must have taken some courage to have removed roof:

- Almost certainly twigs and mortar would have fallen on crowd below - I don't imagine some of the ladies appreciated their hairdos being mucked up.
- Nor do they seem to have asked permission of Peter, who appears to have been the owner of the house (see 1.29). I can't imagine Peter or his mother-in-law being pleased to have their home messed up.
- Furthermore, lowering a man on a bed is quite different from lifting up a coffin - the bed could have tilted at a wrong angle - indeed, the cord might have snapped – and the man might have fallen out.

It took courage - for friends; it also took courage, of course, for the paralysed man.

But it took more than courage - it took faith.

Indeed, it was their faith which motivated their courage.

They believed that Jesus could help.

They believed that, for Jesus, there was no such thing as a hopeless case.

And how right they proved to be. For Jesus on seeing their faith, forgave the man and then went on to heal the man. The man "**got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away**" (2.12a)

Not surprisingly we read that the crowd "**were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'**" (2.12b).

What does this all say to us?

1. OUR DEEPEST NEED IS TO BE FORGIVEN

The very first thing Jesus said to the man was: "**Son, your sins are forgiven**".

At first sight the paralysed man's problem must have appeared to be physical.

But Jesus, who could see into the hearts of men and women, recognised that there was an underlying deeper problem.

Precisely what that problem was, we are not told.

It may be the actual physical problem was the result of the spiritual problem - that somehow the paralysis had been brought about by sin.

Certainly there's often a close association between a mental state and a physical reaction.

Think of that sinking feeling you used to have in the pit of your stomach when you had to stand outside the head teacher's study!

Or think of the lie detector used in the States, which depends on the fact that disturbances of thought and conscience alter a person's heartbeat and blood pressure.

A Swiss physician Paul Tournier in his *Doctor's Case Book* tells of a girl who had been treated for several months for anaemia, but without much success. Then all of a sudden, for no apparent

reason at all, the blood count dramatically changed and the girl was right as rain.

Puzzled, the doctor asked, *'Has anything out of the ordinary happened in your life since your last visit?'* 'Yes...' she replied, *'I have suddenly been able to forgive someone against whom I bore a nasty grudge; and all at once I felt I could at last say 'Yes' to life!'*
Her mental attitude changed, and the very state of her blood changed along with it.

What am I trying to say? If sin was the paralysed man's basic problem, it is not so strange that Jesus started his consultation with the words, "**My son, your sins are forgiven**".

But it was not just the paralytic for whom sin was the basic problem.
Nor is it just those suffering from psychosomatic illnesses for whom some sin is at the root of their trouble.
Sin is the basic malaise affecting us all. Sin is at the root of all that is wrong in life.

A few years ago a nationwide survey was conducted asking "*What main thing do you think is responsible for the state of the world today?*"

Greed and selfishness came top with 35.5%
People came next with 12.3%
The government & politicians scored 11.7%
Lack of discipline got 10.5%
Lack of religion got 4.6%
Religion 0.75%

The Bible speaks of the human heart being the root problem
"**There is nothing else so deceitful**", said the prophet Jeremiah; "**it is too sick to be healed**" (Jer 17.9). Or in the words of another version, the human heart is "**devious**" & "**perverse**" (NRSV 17.9). Jesus put it this way: "**From a person's heart come the evil ideas which lead him to..... rob, kill, commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride and folly**" (Mark 7.21-22).

What's more, we all suffer from this heart problem
We all are spiritually sick – we all are tainted with that egoism which the Bible calls sin
Indeed, it has been said that "*all human beings struggle with a sense of guilt, else they have ceased to be human*" (Butterick).

What's more we cannot get rid of it. Rationalise it, psychoanalyse it, tranquillise it – the guilt remains. Or to quote a piece of children's doggerel:

*Chop it, cream it, boil it, bake it
No matter how you make it,
It's still spinach.*

However, you may seek to define it or reject it, sin remains sin
All of us are therefore in need of healing - all of us need forgiveness.
The fact is: our deepest need is to be forgiven.

2. JESUS MEETS OUR DEEPEST NEED

The Good News is Jesus can deal with sin: "**Son, your sins are forgiven**".

As Christians we're so used to Jesus claiming to be able to forgive people, that we sometimes fail to see the revolutionary nature of this claim.

But not the religious leaders of the day; they immediately saw the implication and were up in arms. "**How does he dare to talk like this? This is blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins**" (2.7).

Significantly the Jews didn't even expect the Messiah to be able to forgive sins – that was God's business. So when Jesus said, "**Son your sins are forgiven**", "*They were stunned. The roof had fallen in on them twice!*" (Martin Jones)

It was a remarkable claim. How can Jesus forgive sins - unless he is the Son of God?

If you were to tread on Leesa's toes as you leave the church this morning, and as you apologised I were to butt in and say, "Don't worry; it's quite alright" - you would look at me as if I were bonkers. How could treading on Leesa's toes have any relevance to me?

But Jesus told people their sins were forgiven without consulting the injured party.

He behaved as if he were the person chiefly offended. This only makes sense if he were the Son of God, if he in some way were identified with God whose laws were broken, his love being wounded.

You see, it is not enough to say that Jesus was just a good man.

For goodness is no qualification to forgive sins. Only God can forgive.

And to prove that he had God's authority to forgive sin, Jesus said to the paralysed man, "**I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home**".

The forgiveness of sins is something internal – you can't see it; but healing a paralysed man, that was for all to see. The very healing validated the claim of Jesus to forgive.

What is more: not only could Jesus forgive the paralysed man - he can forgive you and me.

This is the reason why this story included in the Gospels. Mark and his fellow evangelists were not just in the business of writing history - they were in the business of sharing the good news that "**The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins**" (2.10).

Sin and guilt need not have the last word – for Jesus can forgive the worst and direst of sins

Today counselling is very much in vogue. It's a boom trade.

Got a problem go to a counsellor - better still, go to a psychotherapist, if you can afford it.

In preparing this sermon I read of a lady who kept returning to a psychotherapist, for she was burdened with a heavy sense of guilt. In the end the psychotherapist said what she needed was an experience of forgiveness. The lady was indignant: "*I could go to church and get that advice and for nothing*". The psychotherapist, who happened to be a Christian replied, replied: "*Well, perhaps you should*". There is a place for psychotherapy - but what no therapist can offer is the absolution of sins - only Jesus can offer true forgiveness.

And to prove that Jesus does indeed have authority to forgive sins, God raised his Son from the

dead. Sin and death did not have the last word – God did.

And that last word is a word of forgiveness. **“My son, your sins are forgiven”**

3. FRIENDS OFTEN HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY

One further thought: without his friends we would never have heard of the paralytic.

For it was they who brought the sick man to Jesus.

It was they who refused to give up - it was they who persevered - it was they who lowered the man through the roof.

It was they who were responsible for his healing.

To be precise, it was their faith which was responsible for his healing. Listen carefully to Mark's account found in 2.5: **"Seeing how much faith THEY had, Jesus said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'"**.

Presumably the paralytic also exercised faith - he had to be willing to be taken – and you could argue that he put his faith into action when he got up and picked up his mat.

But without the faith of his friends, he would never have been healed.

His friends played a key role in his healing.

Some years ago (1992) the Bible Society published the results of a survey of 500 Christians entitled: *Finding Faith Today. How Does It Happen?* According to this survey the most significant factor in people coming to Christian faith were Christian friends: people came to faith not because of reading the Bible, not because of listening to a preacher, not because of attending Alpha – in the first place they came to faith because of friends..

What sort of a friend are we? Do we bring our friends to Jesus?

Do we have the faith and the courage of those four friends.

Yes, it does sometime take courage to talk to a friend about Jesus or about church – it can take courage to invite a friend to church or to an Alpha course.

Yet it's not just courage that's needed - it seems to me that what is needed above all is faith.

The question therefore arises: Do you believe that Jesus can help anybody?

Do you believe that with Jesus there is no such thing as a hopeless case?

Do you believe that if Jesus could heal and forgive that paralysed man, he could also transform the lives of your friends?

Let me encourage you to exercise faith and courage and bring friends to Jesus.

It is not too late to invite somebody to Alpha – we had the introductory supper last week, but the Alpha course proper does not begin until tomorrow evening.

Or what about just inviting your neighbours to church?

True, there is no guarantee that friends will find Jesus through our invitation - they need to be willing - they need to be open - but are we playing our part?

Remember: friends have a key role to play if they are to discover that Jesus was not just a good man! Jesus is the Son of God – he can meet our deepest need – he can forgive sin.

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