

Your Sins Are Forgiven

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace and no one so bad they can't have it and that's why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. We're starting in Mark chapter 2 this morning and you'll remember that Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection and we're asking two questions as we go through the Gospel of Mark.

Question 1, who is Jesus? And question 2, how do we respond to Him? Who is Jesus and how do we respond to Him? And when we left off at the very end of Mark chapter 1, we saw Jesus healing a leper and so our answers were this.

How do we respond to Jesus? We make sure that we come to Him with our need. Those who truly recognize their need will run to Jesus. They'll risk coming to Him with their hurts and their needs.

And then when we asked, who is Jesus? We saw that Jesus touches the untouchable. There is nothing so far gone that Jesus won't heal it and there's nothing so gross or repulsive that Jesus won't touch it.

[1 : 2 9] That's where we left off at the end of chapter 1. We're coming now to the beginning of chapter 2 and so we're going to continue this idea of need. Yes, we come to Jesus with our needs and we want to make sure we never do that at the expense of our greatest need.

And so Jesus is going to show us that this morning. He's going to show us what it is that we need more than anything else. Jesus is going to show us what we need more than anything else. And with that, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to Mark chapter 2.

You can turn in your worship guide near the end. You can turn in your Bible or you can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey.

Even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting chapter 2, verse 1. And when He 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. Verse 3. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men.

[2 : 3 6] 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?

Verse 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? 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.

[3 : 42] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in Heaven, we just thank you again for bringing us together, and we thank you for giving us your Word, that you do speak to us, you don't leave us alone as orphans in a merciless universe to figure things out on our own, but instead you guide us and you instruct us.

We ask that you would do that this morning by your Word, that you would show us who Jesus is, and you would help us to know how to respond to Him with joy. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Okay, when we left off last time at the end of chapter 10, or chapter 1, excuse me, you'll remember Jesus had been in Capernaum, and then He went into the surrounding towns, these smaller areas, so that He could do ministry outside of this major metropolis of Capernaum.

You'll remember Capernaum was a city of maybe around 10,000 people, and so Jesus goes into these towns that are on the outskirts. That helps us explain why it is that He healed a leper in our most recent episode, because they would not have been in the major cities.

They would have stayed away from those, and they would have been in smaller areas. And so we saw Jesus heal this leper, right? He did this miraculous thing. He touched this person that no one else would touch, except at the very end of that episode, we have one big problem that comes up.

[5 : 04] Now, I didn't talk about this much last time, but you'll remember that Jesus tells this man, chapter 1, verse 44, make sure you don't say anything to anyone. And what happens?

Well, verse 45, he went out and began to talk freely about it. So this leper does the exact opposite of what Jesus has asked him to, and we understand why, because we're told again in verse 45, Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

In other words, things are heating up for Jesus in his ministry, and it's gotten to a point where his popularity and his power have made him desire secrecy. He needs secrecy as all these people are gathering to him and running after him.

That perhaps helps us understand why things start out the way they do. At the beginning of chapter 2, we're told after some days, it's that Jesus returns to Capernaum. Perhaps he has to lay low for a while as people are running after him.

Regardless, it's a bold move here on Jesus' part, that as he has all these people chasing him, and he has to be in isolated areas, he still chooses to return back to his base of operations in Capernaum.

[6 : 17] And you'll remember that that is the function that Capernaum has as Jesus is ministering in the area of Galilee. He goes out, he has this rhythm, he goes out and does ministry, and he comes back to Capernaum. And Capernaum, you'll also remember, is the place where Simon and Andrew live.

And so it's not just that we've been at this city before, we've been to this home before. Verse 1, we're told it was reported that he was at home. And so things are getting, in this section, just more and more intense.

Things are ramping up and heating up from chapter 1. You'll remember in chapter 1, he had this whole episode in Capernaum. At this same house, he went to the synagogue. He was preaching, and then someone interrupted his preaching, who was possessed by a spirit.

Jesus casts out the spirit. He goes home. Then he heals Simon's mother-in-law of sickness. Then later that night, he has everyone surrounding his house coming for healing. That's the whole episode we had before Jesus goes out and finds an isolated place to pray.

And as intense as things were in that time in chapter 1, they are even more intense now. We were told in chapter 1, verse 33, the whole city was gathered together at the door.

[7 : 24] In other words, people were outside of Simon and Andrew's house. It has gotten worse in chapter 2. We see these same words, verse 2. Many were gathered together.

That's the same phrase from chapter 1. Now they're not just outside. They're also inside the house.

Now they're not just at the door. They've blocked the door. So I want you guys to remember, as we go through the Gospel of Mark, it's tempting when we read the Bible to believe we're just looking at these isolated episodes and just here's another healing from Jesus.

But that's in fact not the way the Gospels work. There's this narrative and there's this story that's building. We're building from chapter 1. Things are increasingly intense for Jesus. His popularity is growing more and more.

There's this great desire to see him and to know his healing. And so that helps us understand what's going on in the rest of the story here. There's this man and his friends. There's this paralytic, verse 3, who's coming to see Jesus and his healing.

[8 : 26] Remember verse 1. Word has gone throughout all of Capernaum that Jesus has returned. And so anyone who missed out last time on the late night healing, this is their chance to make good on that.

Perhaps these friends have been planning this for a while. Maybe they've been talking about it. Man, we can't believe we missed Jesus last time. Our friend who is paralyzed, this would be perfect for him. And so they have every intention that this time they're not going to miss out.

Instead, they head directly for this house where Jesus is gathered. Unfortunately, they have a problem, right? Things are worse than they were last time. People aren't just outside the house.

They're inside the house. They're not just at the door. They're blocking the door. And so they come across this problem in verse 4. They can't get near Jesus because of the crowd. And yet, they're not going to let anything get in their way.

Now, these houses in Capernaum, we know a lot about them from archaeology. Capernaum is still a city in Israel. You can go visit it today. And this most likely would have been a one-story building with a flat roof.

[9 : 28] And there was probably a set of stairs that went up to the roof. And so you can imagine these men are carrying their friend. And they see they can't get to the door. And so they immediately start heading up these stairs.

Perhaps they put down his stretcher on the roof, which would have been made of this wooden thatch. It might have even had grass growing up on top of it. And without hesitation, they just start digging. And so it's not just that Jesus' popularity is growing in intensity.

It's also that the dramatic element of this story is growing as well. It's not just that people are bringing their sick friends to Jesus. It's that they're destroying the roof while Jesus is preaching. When we talked about Jesus preaching in the synagogue, I asked you guys to imagine what it would be like for me to be preaching and someone to come in here and start yelling during the middle of the sermon.

Because that's what happened to Jesus. If you want to get a sense of this one, imagine that I'm preaching here. And you can start hearing people just thumping on top of the roof of the church. And it sounds like they're tearing away shingles, right?

That's what's going on in this scene. It's not just that these men are bold and they're not going to let anything stand in their way. It's also that Jesus is trying to teach while the roof on top of him is being torn apart.

[10 : 37] And so you have to imagine what this might have been like. I'm not sure who this house belonged to. Maybe it was Simon and Andrew's house. Maybe it belonged to Simon's mother-in-law. Remember, Simon and Andrew are brothers.

Either way, we know almost certainly this house belonged to someone in the family. Jesus is treating it as his base of operations, the place where he comes to crash, and as a result, their roof is getting destroyed.

While Jesus is trying to teach, and by the way, we know the scribes are just sitting there watching. Point of all of this is to raise the tension for us. As good readers of this story, we're waiting for the climax, right?

There's this rising tension as we see the problems around Jesus getting worse and worse. We see the intensity of the people who want healing getting higher and higher, and it's building us to what we know is supposed to happen, right?

We know from what we've seen of Jesus in the past that we're all just waiting and holding our breath for Jesus to make this dramatic healing of this poor man. Okay? This is like the movie that people watch and they say, you know, it was a good movie, but it was just so predictable.

[11 : 42] I knew what was going to happen in advance. I called it all. You know, it's just cliché. It followed the same thing that all of these movies follow. I knew Jesus was going to heal the guy, right?

We all knew it for minutes before. We all knew that the hero was going to get in a battle. Everyone knows he's not going to die, right? Because it's 15 minutes into the movie. If he dies, the movie has to end.

That's the same thing we're supposed to be feeling in this story. Of course, Jesus is going to heal this guy. He's powerful, and we're going to see how great these people's faith is. And Jesus decides to call us out on it.

For the first time, Jesus disrupts the narrative. He blows it up because he actually does something they don't expect. He doesn't play into the script that we think is about to happen.

Verse 5, And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven. Not at all what's supposed to happen, right?

[12 : 47] Not at all what we're expecting. It's like you're, you know, on Christmas, you're waiting for some great and amazing gift. You think someone's going to get you, I don't know, a new bicycle, or they're going to get you some electronic thing that you want.

And you're so excited, and you're opening this up, and you pull it out, and in your hands are a new pair of underwear and a new pair of socks. Jesus, we wanted healing, right?

I'm a paralytic. I want to be able to walk. And Jesus says, Congratulations, your sins are forgiven. You have to think for a second what these people are feeling and thinking.

We dug through a roof for Jesus to say this. Here's this man who's supposed to be healing. He's supposed to be filled with power, and this is what he does.

He takes our expectations, and he blows them up. This narrative does exactly the opposite of what we're expecting. Mark blows up the narrative. He disrupts it for us. Climaxes, by the way, when we read narratives, especially in the Gospels, the climax of the story helps us understand the point.

[13 : 51] The climax here that we're waiting for is the healing. Instead, we get forgiveness. And so the point that Mark is making for us is this. There is something better and greater and more important than physical healing.

There is something better and greater and more important than physical healing. Jesus is actually giving this man more than what he wants, more than he thinks he needs.

That's not less than that, right? Jesus is bringing true and real physical healing. That's part of the reason we long for when Jesus comes back to make everything in this world right. We're going to see later in this episode, Jesus is going to heal this man.

And he wants these people to know there's something that matters more. There's something that matters more than healing. Spiritual need trumps physical need.

One is temporary. The other is forever. Spiritual need trumps physical need. One is temporary. The other is forever.

[15 : 03] It's the difference, perhaps you might think about the difference between cosmetic surgery and cancer. One addresses something that won't kill you. The other addresses something that will.

And so this isn't to downplay the importance of our physical needs. Jesus cares about those things. There's a reason he's healing these people. And he wants to make sure that they know, it's like Gandalf says in the Lord of the Rings, I am not a mere conjurer of tricks.

I am not here just to perform miracles. I have something greater and better in mind. And so our question this morning is this, what is it that you want Jesus to fix in your life?

What is it that you want Jesus to fix in your life? Maybe it's a chronic illness. Maybe you're single and you dream about being married.

Maybe you're married and you dream about being single. Maybe it's your mental health, right? Maybe you long and wish that your chronic depression would go away.

[16 : 15] Maybe you wish you would never have to worry about PTSD again. Maybe you think if I could only never have to take medicine again for bipolar disorder, then things would be all right.

If Jesus could just heal that. Maybe you wish that you could rewind and relive your childhood, but that it would be better this time.

Maybe you wish that that car wreck had never happened. Maybe you struggle with temptation and you wish that it would just go away. Maybe you have a child who's estranged and you wish Jesus would fix it.

Now those are all tender and precious and important things, right? And Jesus tells us whatever it is, it's not enough.

Whatever it is that you want Jesus to fix in your life, it is not enough. Those are all symptoms of sin. Jesus is here to address the root.

[17 : 20] Those are all great needs. They're important needs. Jesus comes to address our greatest need, our most important need. So I'm not trying to dismiss those things by listing them, right?

Those things are tender and precious. Those things matter. It's just that there's something that matters even more. Those things matter. It's just that there's something that matters even more.

When I was in seminary preparing to be a pastor, I remember being taught that one of the most important things you're supposed to do when you start a sermon is you're supposed to help people understand why what you're about to tell them matters to them.

So in a sense, you're supposed to figure out someone's felt need, right? And then you connect that felt need to whatever's in the passage. In this passage, Jesus is saying, I actually don't care primarily about your felt needs.

That's not my primary interest. You have a greater need whether you feel it or not. I am not primarily interested in your felt needs. The felt need in this situation is that this paralytic walks.

[18 : 29] Jesus is not interested in that. He is saying, you have a greater need. Remember that this happens while Jesus is preaching a sermon. It tells us he's teaching the word.

We can assume he's most likely teaching what we've given a summary of before of his teaching. Mark chapter 1, verses 14 and 15. He's preaching that the kingdom has come near. It's time to repent and believe. And so who knows what Jesus is saying at that moment when the man comes to the ceiling, but perhaps he's talking about forgiveness of sins, right?

Here's a perfect sermon illustration. Maybe he's just told them that their most important need is forgiveness. Either way, Jesus is saying, here's what you need more than anything.

As a church, people come here with all kinds of needs, right? That's good and right. We want people to come and feel like this is a safe place to be imperfect and broken and sinful and needy.

There's all kinds of material and physical needs that we care about. We have a whole fund for it, our deacon's mercy fund that our deacons manage and oversee. And that's not the ultimate reason that we're here, right?

[19 : 39] We are here as a church primarily for your greatest need. We are not just another social services agency. We are an embassy and an embassy.

We are an embassy and an outpost of God's kingdom on earth, announcing and proclaiming his reconciliation to men and women and children, that he has come to forgive sins.

That is why we are here in Southwest Colorado Springs. And so we're seeing here a bit of our answer to who is Jesus.

And of course, our other question is, how do we respond to him? Last week, we responded by coming with our need, right? This week, we never forget our greatest need.

This week, we never forget our greatest need. As we come to Jesus, as we bring him our needs, we know that one of those needs is that we need forgiveness.

[20 : 36] And so that's why Jesus offers that to this man first before everything else. Now, we're just a few verses into the story at this point.

And we have these scribes who are sitting here. By the way, I don't think we've seen the scribes before, sitting around listening to Jesus' teaching. The last time, I believe, they were referred to, it was when people were commenting that Jesus has an authority.

He teaches with authority, unlike the scribes and the Pharisees. Maybe they'd heard that dig, and they decided it was time for them to show up and see what kind of authority Jesus has. But we see immediately, they're thinking to themselves, verses 6 and 7, well, Jesus is blaspheming here, right?

Who can forgive sins but God alone? And of course, they're actually saying something correct, right? It is true that only God can forgive sins.

And Jesus, because he has authority greater than the scribes and the Pharisees, is able to read their minds. It's what we see in verse 8.

[21 : 41] Jesus perceiving in his spirit that they questioned within themselves. And so Jesus poses them this difficult question, verse 9. Which is easier? Which is easier?

Your sins are forgiven? Or to say, rise up, take your bed, and walk? Now, there's two different ways of answering that question, right?

I'll give you one in a minute. But then immediately, this man stands up and walks. So these Pharisees don't understand what's going on with Jesus. Jesus uses his miracle here, right?

Remember, Jesus still cares about physical healing. It is a need. It's an important need. It's just not the greatest need. And he uses it to make a point here to prove something. Which is easier, verse 9, to say, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up and walk?

Well, if we focus on the word say, it's easier to say, your sins are forgiven, right? It would be easier for me to say from this pulpit, your sins are forgiven, than to say to someone who's a paralytic right now in this congregation, get up and walk.

[22 : 45] Because one is easier to see than the other, right? If I say, your sins are forgiven, you might think, well, yeah, my sins are forgiven. If I say, get up and walk, you can see that the person I just said that to can't walk.

And so there's something clarifying about that, right? There's something visible about it. In other words, Jesus is using the thing that's easier to prove to verify the thing that's harder to do.

Jesus is using the thing that's easier to prove to verify the thing that's harder to do. Jesus' ability to heal authenticates and verifies His ability to forgive.

Jesus' ability to heal authenticates and verifies His ability to forgive. What you can see, the healing, confirms what you can't see, the forgiveness.

And that's the point Jesus is making explicitly here in verse 9. But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. I'm going to prove my authority to forgive by my authority to heal.

[23 : 51] One is easier to say you're forgiven. The other is easier to do. And that's the healing. And so Jesus' healing here, it's secondary, right?

It's secondary to his greatest need. It accomplishes one of the purposes of healing, which is to prove and authenticate Jesus' power. Yes, it is harder to forgive.

Yes, it's going to require more from Jesus than his healing. And they're going to be able to see a taste of it now. And as we look at this question of who Jesus is, the Pharisees here, the scribes, help us answer this.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? And Jesus is setting up a set of dominoes here for us to prove and to demonstrate kind of indirectly that he is divine, that he is God, right?

So think about it this way. Jesus can heal. Then he can forgive sins. The healing proves his ability to forgive. Jesus can forgive. Then he's divine.

[24 : 51] So Jesus is indirectly saying here, yes, I am God. Who can forgive sins but God alone? That's true. Only God can forgive sins.

Guess who can forgive sins? I can forgive sins. How do you know I can forgive sins? Because I made a paralytic walk. Guess who's God? I am. Jesus is indirectly proving and authenticating his divinity.

And he's also revealing to the scribes here that he's a mind reader. He can do more than just heal. He's the one who forgives. So Jesus is healing and reconciling the world.

He is making everything right. And, of course, one needs to be solved before the other, right? It is not enough for Jesus just to solve the symptoms of sin. And sin is not the result of sickness.

Sickness is the result of sin. Sin is not the result of sickness. Sickness is the result of sin. Of course, Jesus wants to hit everything at the root.

[25 : 54] Of course, he wants to address the cause before the symptoms. He solves sin. Sickness is ultimately going to be solved as well. That's our hope as Christians.

That as Jesus puts death to death, we look forward to when he returns and sin and sickness are ended forever. That these things are a complete package. They do go together.

It's just that one goes before the other. Sin, the greater problem. Sin is a greater problem than sickness. Forgiveness is a greater task than healing.

Sin is a greater problem than sickness. Forgiveness is a greater task than healing. And so who is Jesus? Jesus is God. He's the one who can forgive sins and not blaspheme.

Who is Jesus? He's the one who's come to reconcile us. He's the one who's come to give us forgiveness. And we know the way he's going to achieve that forgiveness is by dying.

[26 : 55] And so some people say this is one of the clearest points earlier in the Gospel of Mark where we can see the shadow of the cross falling over Jesus. He pronounces this forgiveness based on what he's going to do in the future, right?

How is he able to forgive this man? Because he knows that he will pay the price for this man's sins when he dies on the cross and rises again from the dead after three days. And so we're looking forward to what enables and empowers Jesus to be able to do this.

We're looking forward, even this early, the beginning of chapter 2 in the Gospel of Mark, to what Jesus will do at the very end. He is going to go and he's going to pay for what he does now.

He is going to pay the price for this man's sin. So how do we respond to him? If Jesus is God, if he's the one who's come to reconcile us, if he is the one who's coming to die for us, then we have to recognize and admit of our many needs what our greatest need is.

And our greatest need is not that we be able to stand up and walk. Our greatest need is that our sins are forgiven. That's the greatest thing and the most important thing that Jesus offers.

[28 : 06] Nothing else that we look for for him is going to matter if we don't get that right. It doesn't matter how many wonderful things we see happen at church.

It doesn't matter how much aid one person offers another. If we don't understand and know and embrace and believe Jesus' forgiveness. That is the basis, the root, the foundation for everything else.

The other way we respond to Jesus is this. We want to be like these friends. We want to continue to come to Jesus. They do what we talked about at the end of chapter one.

They come with their need no matter what. They don't care about how embarrassing it might be. They're not concerned ultimately with the destruction that they're giving to this roof. They're not worried about being embarrassed, right?

Nothing is more important to them than getting to Jesus. Their priorities might be wrong. They might prioritize the material over the physical, over the spiritual. And they get one thing right.

[29 : 11] They pursue Jesus no matter what. Remember I told you about my seminary professor who said the disciples got many things wrong and they got one thing right.

And that one thing was that they kept following Jesus. Brothers and sisters, we respond to Jesus by continuing to follow him. We don't let anything stand in our way.

We don't care if the door is blocked. Whatever we have to do, as I've told you before, my mother told me growing up, people will climb over walls to get to the truth. They will also destroy roofs.

We admit our greatest need and we continue following Jesus and running after him no matter what. This man and his friends might be misguided in some ways.

They might be misdirected. They might not understand that one thing is more important than the other. And they run after Jesus and pursue him no matter what.

[30 : 12] Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. We admit our greatest need and we respond to what Jesus says in Mark 1, verse 17. Come and follow me.

Come and follow me. Finally, I want you guys to not miss verse 11. Jesus says, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.

Now I mentioned this when it came to the healing of Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus, remember, raised her. Here he says, rise. It's the same word again. It's the same word that's used to speak of Jesus' resurrection.

In other words, Mark is winking at us again. He's winking at us again by using this word that speaks about Jesus being raised from the dead. Jesus is telling them that reconciliation with him, that forgiveness is more important than anything else.

And he's giving them a small picture and a hint and a taste and a sampler and an appetizer of what he's going to do fully and finally later in the book. We're going to see a small picture of this man being raised.

[31 : 16] We'll see the greater and greatest picture of Jesus being raised from the dead. This is just a hint and a piece of where this story is going. Remember, in this one in chapter 2, the intensity is increasing from chapter 1.

It's going to keep going forward in what Mark is foreshadowing for us, both in chapter 1 and chapter 2, that Jesus is the one who raises and he's the one who's raised. That is the way he is going to be able to reconcile and bring forgiveness to everyone who has faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And so what is our greatest need? Who is Jesus? Jesus is God. He has come to reconcile us to himself. He has come to forgive us.

And he's come to raise us from the dead. So how do we respond to him? We know our greatest need. We keep following after him no matter what.

And that's why we're going to sing in a moment these words until page 6 of your worship guide. I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned, unclean.

[32 : 27] Unclean like the leper at the end of chapter 1. Unclean condemned like this man here in this story who needs God's forgiveness. Chorus. Marvelous.

That's how wonderful is my Savior's love for me. That's our confession as well. We recognize our greatest need that we're sinners condemned unclean. And we pursue and run after Jesus no matter what because we know of our Savior's love for us.

Amen. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and we thank you that you do let us know what our greatest need is. And you meet us at that very same point of need.

You don't leave us without hope. But instead, you've provided your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, to say to us, your sins are forgiven. We ask that you would make that more and more true in our consciousness and our lives and our hearts as we love you and trust you and look to you.

And we ask all these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.