

## ***The Authority of Jesus (Part 3) – Mark 2:1-17***

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with Pastor Derek at [Derek.berry1990@gmail.com](mailto:Derek.berry1990@gmail.com).*

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 2:1-17....

A misdiagnosis of an issue can be both dangerous and deadly. This is why competence is of utmost importance in various professions. You take your car to the shop because there seems to be an issue, yet the mechanic tells you that an oil change will fix the problem. But a month later, your car stops working, and you discover that the root of the matter is your transmission, not an oil change. This misdiagnosis has just cost you a car. What if there was an issue in your home? There's an unidentified odor, and the home inspector tells you it's from leaving the water on too long. However, you discover that your house is on a poor foundation; therefore, mold and pests have settled in. This has just become an expensive problem. Misdiagnosis can take a deadly turn when dealing with people's health. The big three misdiagnoses that lead to death or a severe permanent disability are associated with misdiagnosed cancers, vascular events, and infections.

Diagnosing a problem properly is crucial. There's a greater misdiagnosis that isn't discussed that often, and that has to do with the diagnosis of humanity. What is our primary problem? And what is the remedy? Some suggest external issues such as climate change, overpopulation, or systemic injustice. Others claim that our ultimate issues are more intrinsic or psychological in nature. However, the Bible teaches that the fundamental problem with humanity is the fact that we have sin. Many secondary symptoms stem from this issue, such as our lack of care for one another, wars, injustice, etc. But you must understand that it all boils down to the fact that we've sinned against God and desperately need a savior. Thankfully there is a remedy, and his name is Jesus. He came to the earth and revealed that he had the authority to forgive sin. And if this is mankind's fundamental disease and remedy, we should spend our days proclaiming this truth to others. These are the two points in our text this morning.

### **Pardon for sins (vv 1-12)**

### **Physician for sinners (13-17)**

Instead of rereading all of 1-12, we'll walk through these verses and teach on the way. Let's start with verses 1-2. So, Jesus returns to Capernaum. In chapter 1, he builds a following because of his authoritative teaching, exorcisms, and supernatural healing. Peter expects them to capitalize on the hype built, but Jesus goes into other towns to preach the gospel of the kingdom. Here we have him back but notice that the focus isn't on healing but the preaching of the Word.

Remember, last week, the point was made that Jesus didn't want to be known as an itinerant healer. He did and still does heal. However, that's secondary to the preaching of the Word. And even his miracles are meant to point to a greater spiritual truth. Apparently, The crowds hadn't forgotten about him because it's likely packed out again in Peter's mother-in-law's home.

Let's keep reading verses 3-5. Notice the faith and diligence of these four friends. They went so far as to remove a roof to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus! That's because they knew Jesus was able to do the impossible. And seemingly, they knew he was willing as well. They understood that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. So, listen to their logic. We have a friend whom we love. We realize that he's paralyzed and is unable to heal himself. However, we know of one who has the power to heal our friend and cause his joints to work again. Therefore, absolutely nothing will stop us from bringing this man to Jesus. Oh, the house he's in is packed, and we can't traditionally make our way? We'll remove the roof so that we can bring him to Jesus. Keep these good friends' logic in mind as we press forward because we'll return to it after considering Jesus' authority in this passage. It'll be the practical application of our theological plumbing. So, remember these good friends.

Verse 5 brings us to one of the essential doctrines in all of Christianity. Luther, the reformer, would say that "the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the article upon which the church stands or falls." And I would agree with him. Remove justification by faith alone, and you have no gospel message. So, we'll take some time to examine this doctrine, and I pray you truly grasp its importance.

So, what is justification by faith alone? It is the beating heart of the Protestant Reformation. During medieval times, the Roman Catholic Church espoused the idea that salvation, being made right with God, was an ongoing process that included our works. This is why an idea like purgatory makes sense in this erroneous framework. If you haven't done enough good, there's a place in the afterlife where you can make up for it and hopefully earn your way into heaven. There's a catholic monk named Martin Luther who was wrecked by the moral perfection of God. He knew he fell short of God's glory; therefore, he could barely sleep from fears that his soul would be damned. That is until he studied Romans and Galatians. He then uncovered, not invented, the doctrine of justification by faith alone that sparked the reformation and turned Christendom upside down. This doctrine was believed by the patristics and apostolic fathers, although it wasn't as developed. And more importantly, it was taught by Jesus and the apostles.

In the original language, justification is a legal term. It's a one-time declaration from God of not guilty. At the point of faith, God credits the righteousness of his Son on the believer's account. Let's back up a bit to place this all in context. First, I ask you to remember the sermon where we considered Mark 1:14-15. In that message, we discovered that there is such a thing as counterfeit faith. That's not what I'm referring to when I use faith this morning. We looked at John 2, Matthew 7, Acts 8, and James 2 as evidence that faith is not merely an intellectual assent. Saving faith is repentant faith. Keep that in mind.

Now, why is justification by faith alone necessary? To answer that question, we must consider the fallen state of humanity. The sinful human condition is what keeps us from being justified by works. God has a standard, and that's perfection. And ever since Adam sinned, we're all born with rebellious hearts incapable of keeping God's law perfectly.

*<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." -Galatians 3:10*

Paul's point here is that the requirement of keeping the law to be justified places the readers in an impossible situation because no one can carry out all that the law requires. Paul makes this point in the book of Romans. He spends the latter half of the first chapter calling out the sinfulness of gentiles who were never given the law, but it was placed on their hearts. At least the moral awareness of right and wrong, without the ceremonial laws given to Israel. And then, in chapter 2, he explains that the Jewish people are also dead in sin, as they, too, are lawbreakers. So this is how he sums it up:

*<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. -Romans 3:19-10*

And Paul would also say the wages of sin is death. In other words, we all have earned eternal separation from God due to our sin. Luther understood this, and it's why he trembled with such great fear. How can humanity be made right with God when we can't keep his holy standards!? In steps the Lord Jesus. And this is the gospel! God does in Christ what we could not do. He sends his co-eternal Son to live the perfect life, fulfilling all the laws, therefore gaining righteousness, which will be important to remember because it's going to come back up soon. And then he takes the death and separation that we deserved on the cross and victoriously resurrects. And now, how do we personally receive the benefits of his righteousness and what he earned for us on the cross? Through faith alone.

It is God's grace through faith that justifies us. This is all throughout the New Testament! Too many verses to reference this morning. But consider Romans 4,

*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." - Romans 4:1-3*

Now let me leave you with three keys to understanding a biblical justification by faith alone that has been misunderstood throughout church history. Firstly, justification is forensic. In other words, it's a one-time declaration that someone has been made right with God. It's a stamp of not guilty and occurs at the point of faith. Therefore, getting right with God is not a process; instead, it takes place instantly at the point of faith. Secondly, justification must be distinguished from sanctification. Sanctification is the ongoing process of God conforming us to the image of his son. This is a process, but it has no bearing on our already not-guilty sentencing. Sanctification flows from justification. Thirdly, justification is God imputing, or accrediting, the righteousness of Christ on our account. You need more than forgiveness to be made right with God and brought into his presence. You need perfection. And yet only Jesus has met this standard. But God the Father takes his righteousness and gives it to you believer at the point of faith. In other words, all of your sins are forgiven, and God sees you as his son!

*<sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -2 Corinthians 5:21*

That is justification by faith alone. That is what this man is receiving. Now, to be clear, the content of the faith was in germ form in this text, as compared to Mark's audience. His faith was that Jesus was whom he said he was, not necessarily understanding all the elements of the cross and resurrection. Mark's audience and us today have faith in its mature form in that we place faith in what Jesus accomplished on the cross and his resurrection. Let's read verse 6. Now, who are the scribes? They were mentioned in verse 22 of chapter 1, as Mark informed us that Jesus taught not as the scribes. And we see them here again in chapter 2. The scribes were teachers of the people who had religious authority, especially concerning law interpretation. By this time, many priests became too Hellenistic, while the scribes became a well-defined group from a class of lay experts in the Scriptures. Many scholars believe they took the place of the priests as the lead teachers, spiritual leaders, and interpreters of the law due to their piety and dedication to the Torah. And most of the scribes aligned themselves with the Pharisees, as we'll see later in the text. So, these were the biblical scholars who held authority.

What are they questioning in their hearts? Let's read verse 7. It's ironic because the scribes are both right and wrong. Here's their logic:

- We know that only God can forgive sins.
- Jesus claims to forgive sins.
- Therefore, Jesus is making himself out to be God.
- This is blasphemy.

Well, they're right about the first three points. Only God has the authority to forgive sins. Just like only God has power over human hearts, unclean spirits, and sickness and disease. And Mark has already shown us that Jesus has this authority, which means he's God! So, guess what Mark is trying to show us again this week? That he's God! Who else knows all the sins of someone else to declare them as forgiven? It's also stunning because the forgiveness of Jesus implies that he saw these sins as being against him in a personal sense.

Imagine I'm walking down the street, and I witness one kid bullying another kid. And let's say the bully punches the other kid, and blood comes from his mouth. And then I say to the bully, "kid, I forgive you for punching him in the mouth." And then let's say I take the small kid with me to get him back to his parents. On the way, the smaller kid would probably say, "you can't forgive that bully; he didn't wrong you; he wronged me." You can only forgive a sin if it's against you. So, Jesus is actually saying, "Your sins have really been against me." The only person who can possibly say that to a human being would be their Creator. The lawgiver himself. Have you come to grips with the fact that your sins have personally offended a holy, righteous God? That your lust, lying, cheating, and whatever other sin no one else can see has reached his heavenly throne. And this is why he vacated his heavenly throne, that he could come down and provide humanity with a way of forgiveness, and that's the cross. If you've never truly grasped these truths, I pray you to do this morning and respond accordingly. And if you have, I pray this would compel you to worship the Lord Jesus with greater fervency.

So, Jesus is claiming to be God. And he's about to prove it to his doubters. Let's read verses 8-12. Take notice of verse 10. This is the first time in Mark that Jesus uses this title, "son of man." The Old Testament contains this title when referring to an authoritative eschatological figure.

<sup>13</sup> *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a **son of man**, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. -Daniel 7:13-14*

So, this Old Testament text connects the Son of Man and authority. Therefore, it's a relevant title of the Lord Jesus as he flexes his authoritative muscles in forgiving this man of his sin. Now, what's the point Jesus makes here? He doesn't ask which is easier to do but rather which is easier to say. Forgiveness is easier to claim because it's an invisible and internal reality. But physical healing is visible and external; therefore, it would be immediately evident to everyone if Jesus' word of healing failed. However, it doesn't because he's the creator. As is the pattern in this gospel, the man can't help but immediately obey the command of Jesus. He doesn't persuade the man to dig deep and do what he can do himself. No! This man's legs were dead. But that's the point. Jesus can heal the paralyzed man because, as God, he has the power of the creator to make dead legs live. And he does the same with us spiritually. We don't meet him halfway; no, the Bible says we're dead in sin. Therefore, it is God who calls us out of our spiritual graveyards. And thankfully, we have no choice but to respond to his irresistible grace.

Now how does this miracle relate to Jesus? The miracles are never the point within themselves; they are pointers. We'll look at three points of application.

First, do not harden your heart like the scribes and the crowd. Their amazement fell short of repentant faith. If you haven't, recognize your need for your sins to be forgiven, and follow the Lord Jesus. Give him your life. Treasure him above all. Repent, for this world is passing away, and fully believe, trust, and rely on Christ and his cross to save you from your sins. And then join a local church of believers who will help you in this marathon.

Second, understand that God uses tragedies for our good and his glory, even when we don't realize it. It's easy to shake our fists at God during a disaster and say, "I see no reason for this, God!" And perhaps the paralyzed man did the same. But J.C. Ryle makes an excellent point, "Who can doubt that to the end of his days, this man would thank God for this paralysis? Without it, he would probably have lived and died in ignorance and never seen Christ at all. Without it, he might have kept his sheep on the green hills of Galilee all his life long, and never been brought to Christ, and never heard the blessed words, 'your sins are forgiven.' That paralysis was indeed a blessing. Who can tell but it was the beginning of eternal life to his soul?" Hopefully, this helps you to reorient your mind and posture regarding adversity in your own life. Isn't it good to know that there isn't gratuitous suffering, but God has a plan even when we don't see it?

And this last point is for those who have already surrendered to Jesus and for those who haven't. Understand that the Lord Jesus always wants to go deeper and remove any functional saviors. We don't just need someone who will fulfill our wishes. For many of us, that's why we first started attending church and giving Christianity a chance. We have problems, and we're asking God to give us a little boost over the hump to get back to pursuing our deepest wishes. But if that something else is something besides Jesus as savior, we have a functional savior that can never

deliver. We need someone who can use his claws lovingly and carefully to pierce our self-centeredness and remove the sin that enslaves and distorts our longings. This is why it's so vital that we preach Christ in our local churches because man-centered sermons feed people's desire to clutch onto their functional saviors. This is why it's a terrible idea to fit Christ into people's existing idolatry.

"I want fulfillment!" one may cry. We don't respond by zeroing in on how Christ fulfills, so receive him. No. We cry out; your actual problem is that a sense of fulfillment is your functional savior, now understand your real problem of sin and receive Christ! Both believers and nonbelievers alike. Now Christ does fulfill as he did, heal the paralytic. We must understand the profound and fundamental problem with humanity as we are sinners in desperate need of forgiveness. And only Jesus Christ makes that possible. And the beautiful truth is that when we receive forgiveness, we accept him! He doesn't just grant your true deepest wish; he fulfills it.

Now to our second point this morning, physician for sinners. Let's read verses 13-14. Much like the first four disciples, Jesus calls Levi unto himself. Notice the difference. He instructs and teaches the crowds, but he effectually calls his disciples unto himself. Levi is also known as Matthew, who has also written a gospel. Let's read verse 15. Notice the first thing Matthew does after becoming a disciple of Jesus; he evangelizes! We get this detail from Luke's gospel.

*<sup>29</sup>And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. -Luke 5:29*

The natural response to having one's sins forgiven is to tell others about this sin forgiver. Here's another application of our first point. Do you recall the four friends from verse 3? What was their logic? We have a friend in need, and we know the one who can meet that need. Beloved, you should possess this same outlook concerning your lost friends. "I have a friend who has a great need. It's not his legs that are dead, but rather his spirit. They're in need of having their sins forgiven. Luckily, I know the one who can meet that need. I should introduce them to Jesus!" Is that your disposition? Are you like these four friends? If not, we must ask if we're good friends at all. Matthew's disposition was similar.

"Jesus has called and forgiven me; therefore, let me call all my friends to my house so they can meet this Jesus!" Now obviously, we can't physically take anyone to Jesus anymore, as he's in heaven, seated on the right side of his Father. However, we do this when we share the gospel with our friends. When was the last time you shared the gospel with a nonbelieving friend? Another way is bringing non-believing friends to be around the people of God because we should be offering a trailer of the upcoming kingdom that provokes an inquisitive spirit within them that is ripe for gospel preaching. This is why church-wide post-service lunches are so helpful. Our nonbelieving friends can see how we love and treat one another so they may know we're his disciples. Perhaps you can discuss this topic with a fellow member over lunch after church or during this week? Who is one friend that I have in my life with whom I can share the gospel or invite to be around a group of believers? Beloved, I challenge you to come up with a name so that this doesn't remain in the abstract. Share that name with a fellow member so that you can be held accountable.

You may say, "I don't have any non-believing friends." Well, let's read verses 16-17. Now here we read about Pharisees as well. Much like the scribes, this was a group of pious Jews who held religious authority and were known for their strict adherence to the law and for adding stipulations and traditions that would keep people from breaking the law. And as you see, they're disgusted by Jesus' association with these tax collectors. They were seen as traitors. They were working for Rome, the oppressors of their own people. Jewish literature lumps tax collectors with thieves and murderers. They were disqualified as witnesses in court, expelled from the synagogues, and seen as a disgrace to their families. Jewish rabbis agreed it was morally okay for a Jew to lie to a tax collector. The scribes would say that tax collectors were morally unclean, just as those with leprosy were ritually unclean. Therefore, they conclude that eating with morally unclean people will make Jesus unclean.

But Jesus employs a well-known parable in verse 17. He's not insinuating that some are not sin-sick. He's somewhat using their logic against them. Basically, I'm not here for you if you don't believe yourself to be in need. The beatitudes' first line states, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." They always say the first step to recovery is recognizing that you have a problem. The first step is declaring, "I am unclean and need a savior!" These Pharisees have failed to acknowledge this.

*<sup>9</sup> He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." -Luke 18:9-14*

So, the application is two-fold. One, understand whom Jesus has come for. The message of the gospel is good news for bad people. Secondly, jettison any scribal attitude you may have for the outcasts you deem unworthy of hearing the gospel message. If you don't have any unbelieving friends, place yourself in situations where you can gain them. And then deliver them to the people of God, or give them the gospel message yourself. The only message that can heal them of their sin sickness. What a mighty God we serve in the Lord Jesus.

Let's pray.