Christ Knows Your Deepest Need

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[0:00] We're going to read this evening from Mark's Gospel. We're reading in Mark chapter 2,! and the first 12 verses of that chapter. Let's hear and read together from God's Word.

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. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him.
And when they'd made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, My 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?
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 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.
[2:07] This is the Word of God, and to His name be the praise and the glory. So as David said at the introduction, we are in the summer months working through a series in the evenings called Questions Jesus Asked from the Gospels. And tonight we're in Mark's Gospel, and a passage that, as David also said, raises lots of different questions. Questions that Jesus asks, and questions that we ask of ourselves. Not just questions for the people who were in this episode that we've got recorded for us, not just for the first readers, but for us today as we live our lives in Edinburgh. Well, David read the passage for us, and I wondered if one of the questions that you asked yourself was, Do I have four friends who would carry me to healing if that's what it took?

Because we live in a world that's inherently busy. We're always doing things. We're disconnected from one another. We want to be autonomous in our lives. Each one of us wants to take control for the things that we do. We want to have nobody to rule over us, tell us how we are to live our lives. We're independent. We want to live apart from authorities outside of ourselves. But at the same time, we know our frailty, and we know our weakness. We know that we are not people who can depend on ourselves. And this passage exposes it for us. Because the man that we see here is not in any capacity for self-determination and self-governance. This is a man who's got tremendous need, and he's got absolutely no way of doing anything about it by himself. He's utterly reliant on others to help him. Or maybe we were asking ourselves, okay, I've got four friends, but what do I need to learn from those four friends? What are the things that they do that I need to put into practice in my life? How can their example be a lesson for me? Hey, can I be a better friend? So there are definitely things that we can learn from these friends. Determination, perseverance, faith. But there's a bigger question at stake, an ultimate question. And the question doesn't actually come from Jesus. It comes from those opposed to him.
Who can give sins but God alone? And that is to ask, who is the one who can free me from my sickness, my suffering, my guilt, my shame, my hurt, my isolation, and loneliness, except God alone?
What we read, what David read, was an account of a miracle, but it actually transforms into a story about identity. So if you're here tonight and you're looking for healing, you know that you need healing, deep heart level healing that doesn't just heal your physical symptoms. It gets right to the source of where all your worries and your pains and your fears begin. You need to know the one

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who has the power and the authority to bring that kind of healing. So we're going to look through the passage today together in three headings. And the first one is faith that breaks through. So just to set the scene for us a little bit, Jesus has been on a preaching tour. He's been around the Galilee, and he's come back home to Capernaum, which is where he set up as home base when he left Nazareth.
In Mark chapter one, he told us that Jesus has cast out an unclean spirit in the synagogue. He's healed loads of people, including one of his best pals, Peter's mother-in-law. And the word is out, and people are following Jesus. They're coming to him for his teaching and for his healing. Crowds are flocking around him. They're maybe in Jesus's own house, but I think it's more likely that they're gathered in Peter's house. And Mark explains that the house is so full that the doorway is jammed with people. It's standing room only. People are spilling out onto the street, desperate to just catch a fragment of Jesus's message. And into this jostling arrive four friends bringing a paralyzed man on a stretcher to Jesus. But because of the crowds that are all around him, they can't get to him.
[6:39] Mark talks about crowds 40 times in the first 10 chapters of Mark. So crowds are the audience that hear Jesus speak. But Jesus has, while Jesus does have compassion for the crowds, we don't really read about the crowds coming to believe in Jesus. In terms of their faith and their understanding, crowds in Mark tend to be pretty passive. The one thing that crowds do regularly do in Mark is obstruct people from getting to Jesus. And that's what's happening here.

I think it's quite interesting in the original languages, the words for crowd and the word for house are alliterative. That is, they start with the same sound. Oikos is house and ochlos is crowd.
So you can see how they kind of sound similar. And I think that this is a literary tool that Mark's using to set up insiders and outsiders. You've got the crowd who are outside, who are gathered, who are passive. And then you've got the insiders, the people who are in the house, who are close to Jesus, who understand who he is and what he's come to do. Not just physically inside the house, but are part of the group who really know him or know something of him. So these four friends, they can't get near to Jesus because the crowd is blocking the entrance. But these four, five people have got eyes of faith and they see a way to Jesus that those without faith just can't see.
Palestinian homes at the time typically would have had a flat roof and there would have been kind of brick buildings with cross beams. And then there'd be like kind of crisscrossed sticks.
Then there'd be thatch on top of that. And then they'd put like a kind of hard mud stuff on top of it. And they'd compact it really hard down. So you'd get this flat roof that kind of doubled up like a terrace. So in the summertime, when it was really hot and stuffy inside, you'd come up in the evening to the terrace and catch some fresh air. And they also had typically a stone staircase or maybe a ladder on the outside for access to the roof. And that's what these friends do. They start climbing onto the roof and breaking through. And the roof's really hard packed with dried mud and sticks and everything else holding it together. It's strong enough for people to walk on. So it's not like they could just stand up there and lift the hatch. That's why Mark describes it as digging through it. They're digging through the roof to get to Jesus. But they do. And they dig a hole big enough to lower down a man on a stretcher. And they lower the paralyzed man down. And he lands in front of Jesus.
[9:37] This is determination. An incredible display of strength from all the parties on the roof. The four friends, they're willing to rip somebody's house apart. I kind of imagine Peter looking at Jesus and looking at the roof and then looking at Jesus again, as if to say, this is my ceiling that's coming in. But also the man who's being Lord shows incredible faith to be carried and to be Lord.

He's put trust in his friends. But more than that, he's got faith, real faith. They all do that Jesus can heal him. Well, if all the people inside are put off by the dust and the debris, Jesus isn't put out at all. Despite all the clattering, verse five says, when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son or child, your sins are forgiven. Well, first of all, if you were in that room on that day, when everyone's crowded around to hear Jesus preaching, this might be the funniest thing, the strangest thing that Jesus might say, or that you might expect Jesus to say. Why? Because everyone knows, everyone's got eyes. They can see that this man came about his legs and yet Jesus has started on his soul. Jesus doesn't see what's on the outside. Jesus sees what's on the inside.
Verse five tells us that Jesus saw their faith. Now it's tempting, I think, to presume that the man in the stretcher is so completely disempowered that he's kind of got no choice in what happens.
But I don't think that's the case at all. We see the faith of the four stretcher bearers, they carry this friend to be healed. But you think about it, the paralyzed man must have had faith too.

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He is, he's been willing to lie on his bed, on his mat, been paraded through the streets, carried onto a roof, precariously lowered through the ceiling in front of a massive, crowd of people with the real risk of falling or slipping and the physical pain, but also the embarrassment that that might bring. Someone doesn't submit to that sort of risk unless they're really sure that they're going to find what they're looking for. And that makes sense because all over scripture, we know that no one can be forgiven for their sins on the account of somebody else's faith. We must each come to a saving faith in Jesus by ourselves in order to be saved.
[12:20] It's not that these, Jesus looked at the four men and said, these four men who've carried this are so faithful, I'm going to forgive the sins of the man in the stretcher. That's not how the Bible works. John 3, 16 says, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Those who believe are saved to everlasting life.

Romans chapter 14 says, so then each of us shall give account of himself to God. No one else can give account on your behalf. So we know that it's not only the four carriers who have faith, but the paralytic man has faith in Jesus to save him as well. And that's evidenced also, I think, in the way that Jesus addresses him. Jesus calls him child, which is a term that a person of authority over somebody would use in an affectionate way, in a caring way for somebody who's under them. Jesus declares this man's sins forgiven on the basis of his faith in Christ, his own faith. I think we've got here a warning and a comfort for the church. The warning is, of course, none of us can rely on the faith of anybody else to be saved. Not your godly grandmother who prays for you every night. Not your loving parents who bring you to church every week. Not your pastor, no matter how many times you come to hear him preach. You must come to your own saving faith in Jesus. You must be brought to see the reality of your own particular sin, to repent of your own particular sin, and put your trust in Jesus as the one who is able and who will forgive you of your sin. Nobody else can do that for you. And then at the same time, there's real comfort here also, especially, I think, for people who haven't been brought up in church, who don't come from prayerful parents, examples of what it means to live by the gospel. People who don't have, didn't grow up with church communities around them to guide them. Jesus doesn't need you to have a particular kind of background. He doesn't need you to come from a certain kind of community.
He wants you. And all you need to do is believe that that's true. So we've seen that it's by faith that any of us are to come to Jesus. And as we go on, we see that when we do, Jesus will give us exactly what we need, which is point two, healing for the heart.
At this point, the man is still lying on a mat at Jesus' feet. He wanted Jesus to heal his legs. Jesus starts instead by forgiving his sins. And Jesus isn't getting things mixed up. Jesus has not misread what the man's intentions were. This from Jesus is a sign of a true physician. Jesus sees past the patient's presenting symptoms in order to treat the underlying cause. Jesus can see the man's physical needs. Everybody can. But he also knows that the man's real condition, the man's spiritual condition is much more serious than the condition of his legs. Jesus knows that all are brokenness. Every disease, disorder, degeneration of our body and our minds is downstream of something else. Ever since Genesis chapter three, when Adam and Eve took the fruit they were forbidden to take, they sinned and mankind broke a relationship with God, a closeness with God. And the world is not the way that it was originally designed to be. It's been corrupted. It's under curse. Sin is fractured right through the entire created order. There's not a chasm that exists. Sin is the reason that bodies fall apart. Why hearts break. Why crops fail. Why roofs fall in and need repaired. This man's paralysis is one expression of a world ruined by sin. And like every sickness, every disease, every funeral that you've been to. These are all symptoms of a world rocking from Genesis three and sin in the world. And it points us back, doesn't it? To our deepest problem. No matter what our physical ailments are that we came here with tonight. Our real problem is a heart problem. It's a sin problem. It's our rebellion against
[17:12] God. You're suffering your loneliness, your shattered relationships, the jealousy that lives inside you and eats away. These are all the result of sin in the world. But Jesus doesn't just heal the symptoms of sin. He heals sin itself. There's a Dutch theologian called Herman Bavinck, you might have heard mentioned from this pulpit before. And he says, in Christ there appears divine, a divine power that's stronger than all the corrupting and destructive power. This latter power he attacks, not only peripherally by healing diseases and performing all kinds of miracles, but centrally by penetrating the core, breaking and overcoming them. Jesus heals diseases. He performs miracles,

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but he also penetrates to your very core, healing you from the sin that sickness and disease and suffering and loneliness are symptoms of.

Jesus can treat your most visible need. He's just the right to do that for this man. He's capable of that. He has all the power. But he's much more concerned with your sin-sick heart because it's your heart, your sin in your heart that will keep you from receiving his richest, purest, truest blessing.
Now it's fair to say not everybody who is in the house is happy with Jesus's words. The scribes in particular, they think to themselves, this man is blaspheming. And they ask the question, which transforms this passage from being about a man coming to Jesus for healing to being one about identity.
Jesus is true identity. So thirdly, finally, authority to forgive. So Jesus knows the murmurings in the heart of the scribes, these religious experts, these guys trained in Bible law. And the thing is, they're not wrong. They ask who can forgive sin but God alone. And they're right. These guys were paying attention when they did their doctrine of God class in seminary. It's God alone who can forgive sin. God's the one who has power and the authority to forgive sin. God's the maker of heaven and earth.
He holds all power over sin and death. But also, God's the one who can forgive sin because God is the one who's being sinned against. This morning, you guys are going to think that we coordinated this in some way.
[19:59] I can assure you that there's not a lot of coordination goes on between me and David. David preached from Psalm 51. And in it, King David is repenting of his sins. Obvious sins that we read about in the Old Testament. We know what he's done against other people. But David's words are, against you and you only have I sinned, Lord.

The Psalm is repenting of sins that he's committed. And he's repenting to God because he knows that ultimately God is the one that he sinned against. This is unfair on my children, but they're not here.
But if you're a parent, you know this because one kid will thump the other kids and they'll come running in and they'll say, I'm sorry, dad. And you say, you don't say sorry to me. You don't thump me.
Say sorry to your sister. She's the one that you've wronged. You have to apologize to the one. You have to be forgiven for your sins, for the things you've done wrong by the one that you've done wrong against. The one who's felt the loss. The one who's bore the cost. As the maker of the whole world, the creator of all human beings, every sin that we commit is a sin against God. So the scribes know this, and they've got two options open to them.
Either this is blasphemy, Jesus is saying that he's equal to God, and he's guilty of breaking a law which is punishable by death. Or Jesus is God. But the thing is, one of those options simply doesn't fit with their worldview. They're so ingrained in their position in society, their collective interpretation of scripture. They just can't see a miracle as a miracle, but they see it as a challenge to their authority. In the Brothers Karamazov, there's not enough Dostoevsky in this pulpit.
[22:03] Dostoevsky imagines Christ returning to earth at the time of the Spanish Inquisition in the 16th century. The people recognize him. Jesus performs a miracle on the street. People know who he is.

And the grand inquisitor, the one, the cardinal, who is running the Inquisition, immediately has him arrested and put in prison. Why? Because the presence of the real Christ threatens the religious system that they've built. That's exactly what the scribes are doing here.
They don't rejoice that sins are forgiven. They're afraid of losing control. This isn't scribe bashing just because they're an easy target. It's a reminder to anyone who wants to live by theological competence, which should be all of us. We all want to know what the Bible teaches, why it's important. But we must not let ourselves build ourselves into theological blind spots or hold so tight to learning and intellectual pursuit with our minds that we fail to cling on to Jesus in our hearts. The scribes of all the doctrine. It was our hearts that were wrong. And that combination is open to any of us. Jesus doesn't dodge this accusation of blasphemy. He asks him a question about which is easier. And the easiest thing for Jesus to have said would have said, look, don't get me wrong, guys, I'm not claiming to be God here.
I'm speaking metaphorically, of course. But he doesn't do that, does he? He says, which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk?

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So on the face of it, forgiving sins is harder. There's only one person that can do that. It deals with the state of our eternal soul for all of eternity. Much more serious than physical illness.
[24:19] But saying your sins are forgiven is in a sense easier because there's nobody in the room who can ratify that. Nobody in the room that can prove it. There's no visible test that they can run.

You could say it, be a fraud, and no one would really know. But saying get up and walk, like Jesus does to this man lying in front of him who's been paralyzed and carried through a roof by his friends because he was so helpless, that's something that you can verify in about three seconds.
Does the man get up or does he not? Jesus, of course, heals the man, and immediately he arises. Jesus performs the harder to fake thing publicly, verifiably, to prove that he really did do the thing that they couldn't verify. The visible miracle is like the receipt for the invisible one.
But notice something else that Jesus says. In verse 10, Jesus doesn't just simply say, I've got the authority to do this. He says, the son of man. He calls himself the son of man.
And to us, when we read that, it might sound quite humble, like Jesus is saying, I'm just a man. But that's not at all what first century Jews heard. It's definitely not what every scribe in the room heard either. They knew exactly where it came from. In the Old Testament book of Daniel, there's a prophecy. Daniel saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and to him was given dominion, glory, and everlasting kingdom so that all peoples and nations should worship him. You see, the son of man isn't merely human. The son of man is the coming heavenly king. He comes with God's own authority. He receives worship that belongs to God alone. His kingdom never ends. So when Jesus says, the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, what he's saying is utterly astounding. He is saying, I am Daniel's son of man, the eternal king, the ruler to whom God has entrusted all authority, the one before whom all the world will one day stand.
[26:55] Suddenly the question changes. It's not about, can Jesus forgive sins? The scribes are now have to ask themselves, if Daniel's son of man is standing here, who else can forgive sins?

And here's a surprise. Daniel's glorious king is the same son of man who appears later in Mark's gospel. In chapter 10, it says the son of man, Jesus says about himself, the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. This king who possesses all authority, uses authority not to condemn sinners, but to save them. The judge takes the judgment. The king carries the cross. The one who forgives sin pays for sin. Look, we read this story and we ask ourselves all sorts of questions. Maybe we ask ourselves, am I a good friend to carry my brother or sister who needs healing in whatever circumstances they are? No matter what it takes, no matter the cost to me, no matter how much effort it is, am I a faithful friend? But here's the truth. You're not the faithful friend carrying the stretcher. In this story, spiritually, you're the one lying on the mat, helpless, desperate, desperately in need of healing, completely unable to help yourself, utterly reliant on the kindness of someone else. Sin has left you paralyzed, not just with broken legs.
It's ravished your whole being, your body, your mind, and your soul. And yet, in Jesus, Jesus is the one who's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He's the one with all the power and all authority to heal, not just our presenting symptoms, but the very source of all our brokenness, all our hurt, all our pain, all our suffering, all our lostness. When Jesus went to his death, he took on himself the wrath, God's righteous wrath that was justly deserving of us for our sin.
On the way to the cross, Jesus had been so badly physically hurt that he couldn't even carry the cross that he was given to carry up the hill. But he did carry your sin and my sin.
And when Jesus was carried up, it wasn't by his friends, it was by his enemies who nailed him to a cross in the most cruel and excruciating death. The one with all a power and authority over sin.
[29:53] The power to forgive sin became sin for you. So that by faith in him, you can be healed from your most urgent disease. So that you can be forgiven for your sins. So that you can live today free from the guilt and the shame that sin brings. So that the fault line that was created that separates you from your heavenly father, it can be restored. So that you can be reconciled with the true God of heaven. Let's pray.

Our loving God, you have the power and authority over all things. You're the creator of the whole world. And despite our sinful rebellion against you, you provide for us salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, the God man. Father, we thank you for Jesus. He walked the same earth we walked, breathed the same air that we breathe, ate and slept, worked like we do, yet has the power and authority over sin and death.

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Lord, help us tonight to see our need for Jesus more clearly. Show us our helplessness apart from him. But show us to the forgiveness that's offered through him. Help us to cling to him by faith, no matter the individual circumstances of our lives. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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