

**“Two Attitudes Towards Jesus” - Mark 2:1-12**  
**Sermon by Dr. Roger McCay**  
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Have you ever had a conversation with someone who can give you all sorts of reasons against Christianity? Maybe they have issues with the Bible and try to point out errors or inconsistencies in it. Maybe they point at the behavior of Christians and say that they are hypocrites. Maybe they claim Christianity is a bunch of rules that they don't agree with. Fill in the blank. I know I've heard all these reasons and many more over the years about why people just refuse to believe in Jesus.

But, their unbelief, regardless of their many creative excuses, all comes down to one thing. It comes down to who they believe Jesus is. They either acknowledge that Jesus was the Son of God, God himself in the flesh, or they don't. That's the hinging factor.

In our passage today, we see the actions of two groups of men. One group saw wonders in the Word and actions of Jesus and humbly came before him not letting anything get in their way. The other group sat in Jesus' presence and, in their pride, judged him.

I think most Christians would want to think that they are very much like the first group. But, the fact is many Christians, rather than living an active aggressive faith, live passively in regards to Jesus. And, unfortunately, there are still many out there who have doubts, or just refuse to acknowledge who Jesus is despite the evidence right in front of their face just like the second group.

But let's take a closer look at the scene in this passage: first the paralytic and his friends, second the Scribes, and how Jesus responded to both.

READ 2:1-2

These first two verses set the scene for what is to follow.

You may remember how Jesus' popularity had grown to such a point that he couldn't even go back into the cities around Galilee anymore because he was mobbed continuously. Despite that, however it seems that he was able to slip back into Capernaum at some point and avoid notice for a little while. But, invariably, the people in Capernaum discovered his presence, and the word spread and many came seeking after him.

A few days later, Jesus was preaching in a home, possibly Simon's place, but we don't know for sure. The house was likely typical of the houses of that time and region—built of earth with a stairway on the side of the house leading up to the flat roof.

So, imagine this scene. Here Jesus was, sitting in this small house. It was jam-packed with people listening closely to his preaching: people piled in the house, listening at the doors and windows, and eagerly looking forward to what Jesus might say or do next. And then, the unexpected occurred. Look at vs. 3-4.

READ vv. 3-4

All of a sudden in the house there was a crashing and digging noise coming from the roof as dirt started falling on the people below. Kent Hughes describes how the roofs of that time and place were constructed:

“The typical...roof was constructed of timbers laid parallel to each other about two or three feet apart. Then crosswise over the timbers, sticks were laid close to each other, thus forming the basic roof. Upon this was laid reeds, branches of trees, and thistles,

the whole thing was overlaid with about a foot of earth, which was then packed down to resist water. All told the roof was about two feet thick.”

While the startled crowd looked up, a hole appeared in the roof, and then men were seen digging and laboring widening the hole.

I imagine there was quite a bit of shouting going on as people cried out wondering what these crazy people were doing to Simon’s house. And, I wonder, what Simon was thinking as the roof to his house was being torn apart.

But then, after the digging stopped and there was a large hole in the roof, the men, who dug the hole, started lowering down a pallet – like a stretcher – into the room with a man on it. So, picture everyone moving out of the way as this man was lowered down through the roof to settle at the very feet of Jesus.

The Scripture’s don’t spell out all of Jesus’ reaction. I suspect, though, that he was joyful, laughing in delight at the actions of these four good friends of this helpless paralyzed man.

What an amazing display of brotherly love for their friend these four showed. I’m sure we’ll all agree that friends like that are the types of friends we all want. And, what a tremendous faith they showed in Jesus! Not a word of theirs is recorded, but their actions shouted out louder than words ever could. These men sought out Jesus expecting him to react, to help. They refused to let the crowd, walls, or even a roof stand in their way as they sought after Jesus. They humbled themselves before Jesus, bringing nothing but need, hope, trust, and their paralyzed friend. Their actions, fueled by their faith, were persistent, aggressive, and exactly what was needed.

Now, they didn’t have the full picture of who Jesus is and the redemption he brought that we have today. What they knew was that Jesus had come preaching about the Kingdom of God being at hand, and calling people to repentance. And they knew he was performing miracles that backed up his message. Maybe some of them had heard him preach and believed his message, repenting, as Jesus called them to do.

Their faith essentially consisted of their recognition that God was at work through Jesus and then trusting in him. So, they sought after him for what he could do for their friend who was paralyzed. They weren’t going to let anything stand in their way.

Verse five: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Wow ... not really the expected response. Probably nobody would have predicted Jesus to tell the man his sins were forgiven. Wasn’t the friends’ effort done towards the purpose of getting Jesus to heal the man’s paralysis?

But, we must remember that Jesus had everything in hand. He saw the bigger picture, and for that matter knew what the people present were thinking. Hence, his response was perfect to the situation. It is not as if he was ignoring the paralysis of the man. Jesus, in fact, was looking at the whole man and his deeper need. Albert Schweitzer has a good insight on the man’s situation:

“...his case makes the universal separation of man from God more conspicuous and illustrates the truth which is proclaimed over and over in the Old Testament, that all suffering is rooted in man’s separation from God. For this reason, Jesus must call attention here to man’s deepest need; otherwise the testimony of this healing would remain nothing more than the story of a remarkable miracle.”

Psalm 103:2-3 says, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,”

As a result of man's fallen condition, sickness, disease, and death are all consequences of that condition. Hence, when Jesus proclaimed that he forgave this paralyzed man, he was emphasizing that a man can only be genuinely whole when the damage caused by sin has been "healed through God's forgiveness of sins." So, we see that Jesus spoke to the deeper issue at hand and healed the rift between God and this man through forgiveness—a deeper healing with eternal significance.

With this account of faith in mind, along with Jesus' response, consider how you respond to Jesus. Would you describe your faith as a faith that aggressively seeks after Jesus and his Kingdom not letting anything stand in your way? What would that aggressiveness look like for you?

If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, the obstacle to healing the rift between you and God lies in your unbelief. Maybe you've allowed all sorts of excuses to pile up getting in the way of the healing that you know you need. But don't lose the Kingdom of God because you aren't willing to push through obstacles that hold you back. Go before Christ today, no matter what it takes, and humbly seek the forgiveness and the healing of that rift. What he requires from you is that you trust in him in acknowledgment of who he is—the Son of God and the Savior of all who believe from their sins.

If you are a believer, a disciple of Christ, you have already experienced the forgiveness that comes from Jesus Christ receiving it by faith. Now, you are obligated to live a life of faith actively striving to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, loving your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30-31). God requires that we seek out how to live each and every day to his Glory, following after Christ on the path of righteousness, in obedience to his commands.

I. Because Jesus has the power to forgive sins, we must seek after him.

Now, let's take a look at the other group represented in this passage. Look at vv. 6-7.

READ vss. 6-7

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* calls pride the "great sin." He states, I think accurately, "Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind." He then writes something that helps our understanding of what was going on with the scribes in that house in Capernaum:

"Pride is competitive by its very nature: that is why it goes on and on. If I am a proud man, then, as long as there is one man in the whole world more powerful, or richer, or cleverer than I, he is my rival and my enemy."

Remember back in chapter 1 where Jesus taught in the synagogue with such authority that the people were astounded. Verse 22 says, "He taught as one who had authority and not as the scribes." Well, the scribes were either present then, or got the word about Jesus' authoritative preaching, which was greater than theirs. And, they knew about Jesus healing multitudes of people and casting out demons. So, it seems that when the word got back around that Jesus was in town, they decided to go see.

Yet, they observed, not with the wondering sense of what the implications were if he really was what he seemed, but with a skeptical sense looking for weak points and holes where they could bring him down. They were the elite theologians and teachers after all; who did this upstart think he was?

Well, we see that Jesus made a point of showing them exactly who he was. One of the

reasons Jesus may have told the paralytic the unlikely declaration that his sins were forgiven was that by doing so he was setting the scribes up. And, they took the bait. You can almost hear the glee in their attitudes thinking that they had Jesus now; he wasn't so great after all. Look here, he is even blaspheming, which meant that they thought he was insulting the majesty of God by claiming something that only God alone could do in the absolute sense.

In Leviticus 24 the penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning, and, later in Mark, blasphemy was one of the charges against Jesus the Jewish leaders brought against him leading to his crucifixion. So, what Jesus read in their minds then would later grow into outright accusations with the intent to kill him – with success.

Notice how this is the complete opposite of the humbled attitude and faith of the paralytic and his friends. It seems unlikely that the scribes misunderstood the implications of Jesus' words and actions. They were not stupid men. In the presence of his authoritative teaching, and then the demonstrated faith of the four men and the paralytic, along with his statement of forgiveness to the paralytic based on their faith, a clear picture was painted that they understood.

When Jesus stated that the paralytic's sins were forgiven, they rightly understood the claim of authority that Jesus was making. But their pride was an obstacle that blinded them, and so they were unable to believe. As a result, they refused to see Jesus as anything other than just a man.

So, how did Jesus react to this foolishness of the scribes? Look at vv. 8-11.

READ vv. 8-11

There's a lot going on here. Notice the threefold way Jesus pointedly demonstrated his power and authority. He told them straight up that he knew what was in their hearts—something only God can do. He healed the paralytic with a word—something only God can do. The combination of these two things then verified that Jesus had the authority not only to tell the man his sins were forgiven, but to actually and effectively forgive the man and heal the rift between him and God—something only God can do.

The scribes had something right. They asked, "Who can forgive sins except God alone?" They were just unwilling to accept the implications. Therefore, Jesus makes it clear for them in v. 10. There, Jesus refers to himself as "the Son of Man"—a favorite self-designation of Jesus. The term harkens back to the "Son of Man" spoken of in Daniel 7, which is a clear prophecy concerning Christ Jesus. Jesus told them straight up that healing the paralytic was proof that he had the authority to forgive sins on the earth. Here we find an explicit statement of the incarnation. Jesus, on earth, had the authority to do what only God could do, in heaven. Hence, Jesus, the Son of God, was God as a man.

And so, in v. 12...

READ v. 12

The paralytic was really blessed that day. Not only was he healed and made to be able to walk, not only was told he was forgiven, but his healing was sure evidence confirming his sins actually were forgiven.

But, don't make the mistake of thinking that the healing was the easier of the two actions. The big picture shows us that to forgive was the harder one. Hebrews 9:22, "...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." There is no shedding of blood evident in the immediate picture. No sacrifice of blood given by the paralytic or his buddies. The only logical incidence of the shedding of blood pertaining to Jesus' statement is the blood of Jesus' shed on the cross.

We are told all the people glorified God for the amazing things that went on that day. It would be nice to think the scribes were able to push aside their obstacle to belief—pride. Unfortunately, we see that this was the first of six confrontations that Jesus has with the scribes and Pharisees recorded in chapters 2-3. So, it seems that they were merely provoked.

Don't let pride be an obstacle to your faith. If you recognize in yourself the pride of the scribes, repent it today! Don't let your pride keep you from acknowledging who Jesus is and receiving the salvation he freely offers.

Maybe you are wondering to yourself if you are prideful, even though you are a religious person. Lewis gives us a good test for this:

“Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good – above all, that we are better than someone else – I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil.”

Prideful people cannot properly worship the living and true God. They keep themselves on the throne of their life, and their religious actions are a means to uplifting themselves. Don't fall into that trap. Repent any pride that you might have, which hinders you from completely submitting yourself humbly before Christ. Acknowledge him as Lord and your only hope for salvation from your sins.

II. Because Jesus has the power to forgive sins, we must acknowledge him.

Who do you say Jesus is? The Muslims say Jesus was merely a prophet. Many people say Jesus was a great man, but only a man. Who do you say Jesus is?

Jesus is the Son of God, God himself in the flesh, the Savior of all who believe in him. Seek after him and acknowledge him as Lord. Don't let obstacles get in your way of persistently living out your faith aggressively for his glory. And don't let pride be an obstacle to your relationship with him.

Proposition: Because Jesus has the power to forgive sins, we must believe in him.