

**Why is Jesus worth following? - #2**

Mark 1:40-2:12

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My Mom passed away 7 years ago. She was 85 and had a tremendous influence on my life. She was a Mom who really cared about her kids and grandkids. When we moved here in 2006, she was recently widowed. My Dad passed away 6 months before. So we looked forward to at least spending time with her and experiencing life in relatively close proximity. She still lived in Calgary but that was a lot closer to St. Albert than when we lived in Ottawa.

I remember in that first year, she drove up from Calgary to see us just around her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. At that time, Anthony Henday was still under a lot of construction. I think that the south west and western part was open. But to get up to St. Albert you still had to cut off at Yellowhead Trail and then take 184 St or 170 St to get here. So she came up and took that route. While here, she looked at a map and asked if she could get to Highway 2 south by going straight down St. Albert Trail and Groat Road to find her way to Highway 2. I said yes but it's not a direct route that you stay on. You have to change some streets and cut over to Calgary Trail South. But she wanted to try it at 80 years of age. She called me later that day from Calgary excited that she had discovered this new way to get to St Albert through Edmonton. She loved exploring and discovering new paths. But that was the last time I remember my Mom taking a risk like that.

Slowly but surely, she began to pull back from every day activities because of her health or aging issues. First, it was she didn't want to deal with anything financial. Then she didn't want to drive. Then she had to have a hip replacement. One day, I had to take her to a doctor's appointment in Calgary. Her regular doctor had been killed in an airplane accident. As we stood there waiting to talk to the front receptionist, she started crying. I remember on the outside saying, "Mom, what's wrong?" She explained that just standing in the room reminded her of the kindness of her former doctor. So she mourned that.

But inside I was very irritated with my Mom for crying in public like that. So I had to think about that. Why did that irritate me so much? Upon reflection, I realized that we were going through a transition that I did not want to go through. My Mom had been my caregiver all my life. But now she needed care. Slowly but surely, the Mom I knew as my caregiver could no longer care for me. I realized that I had taken for granted her decades of caring concern for me. I enjoyed it and almost expected it. So when she couldn't give it any longer, I got irritated. I took for granted something that required years of energy, time and sacrifice. I don't think I showed a lot of gratitude or appreciation for all she gave

until she couldn't give it any more. Yet if we were going to have a good relationship even through her last difficult years, I needed a major attitude adjustment. Instead of expecting Mom to care for me, I needed to support and care for her as much as I could. I needed to relate to her as my Mom and just enjoy her for who she was.

We can take for granted the sacrifices, gifts or support others like our Moms or caring people have offered on our behalf. We can live without gratitude and treat their offerings almost as our right and privilege. But sometimes events like that moment I had in the doctor's office can give us cold dose of reality that exposes such an attitude. Today's Bible text has the potential to be something like that for our lives when it come to our relationship with God. I think in some ways, we take God for granted all the time. But hopefully, as we journey through life we become more and more aware of all He has done for us. As we grow in gratitude for His blessings, we hopefully will grow in desiring Him even more than His blessings.

So today, we are going to talk about a great gift from God that we can easily take for granted – forgiveness. I suspect few of us got up this morning and thanked God for His gift of forgiveness in our lives. Some here may not have because you doubt you have been forgiven. Some may not have because you doubt you need forgiving. Some may not have because you just grow into expecting it from God. Some might be apathetic towards God's gift of forgiveness. But I pray all this will change a bit before we're done today as we look at Jesus and forgiveness. This is the second in a series of messages from the Gospel of Mark asking the question "Why is Jesus worth following?" We're going to consider the definition of forgiveness and what it cost. Then we will see ways can respond as we come to the Lord's Table. Our text is Mark 1, verse 40. It is on page 705 in the Bibles that are in front of you.

**Mark 1:40-2:12 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." <sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them."<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

**2** And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” <sup>6</sup> Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup> “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” <sup>8</sup> 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? <sup>9</sup> Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? <sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” —he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup> “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” <sup>12</sup> 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!” Now we’re going to spend most of our time on this scene in the house today. But let’s take a few moments to look at the encounter with the leper.

A leper approaches Jesus and kneels before him. To us, this may seem like an everyday event in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judean culture. But this was a total breach of cultural rules. The Old Testament law declared a leper ritually unclean. Only a priest could declare a person clean or unclean. Those judged unclean were required to live outside the community, wear torn clothing and leave their hair untended. They were supposed to keep the lower part of their face covered and cry out “Unclean! Unclean!” when approaching others to warn them.

But this leper does none of that. He comes up to Jesus and says “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” He’s not talking about his religious impurity. He asks for healing from the disease. So what does Jesus do? *He* also breaks cultural rules in verse 41. “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand AND touched him.” Are you crazy Jesus? Do you realize what you’ve done? Not only have you made yourself ritually unclean. You may have exposed yourself to a contagious disease.

But Jesus has other plans. Immediately, the leprosy leaves the man and he was made clean. This incident portrays the Gospel. We expect the uncleanness to flow from the leper to Jesus. But Jesus reverses this. His cleanness flows to the leper. It’s like Jesus took the man’s leprosy and exchanged it for wholeness. Or Jesus took the curse upon Himself so the man could be freed from the curse.

Then Jesus instructs the man sternly not to tell others. Instead he is supposed to go show himself to the priest to begin reintegration into society. But the man won’t listen. He disregards Jesus’ command and tells everyone. This hinders Jesus ability to go openly into towns. Now he has to stay out in more remote places but people still find him there.

But somehow, he returns to Capernaum without the crowds knowing. Maybe he travelled at night or very early morning. He gets back to his home or the house he stayed at. Maybe it was Simon and Andrew’s house. Soon people

hear about Jesus' arrival. Many come. They pack out the house and crowd around the door to listen to him. Mark tells us he preached the word to them.

Four men approach the house carrying their paralyzed friend on some sort of bed or stretcher. They realize there's no way they can get near to Jesus. So instead they go up on the roof of the house. Now we read that and wonder how that could happen. When people come over to our houses, they don't just go up on the roof if we're not at home. We don't have staircases to our roofs or sitting areas.

But in first century Israel, the houses generally had flat roofs made of wooden crossbeams. They were covered with thatch – basically dead or dried out palms that were held together with mud or compact dirt. They could be used for storage, drying fruit and even for sleeping on hot summer nights when the inside of the house was very hot. These roofs likely had to be replenished every fall before the winter rains came. Houses had steps to go onto the roof.

So these four men carry their friend onto the roof. But it's not so they can all get a tan while waiting to see Jesus. They reason that since they can't get their friend in to see Jesus through the front door, they will have to make an opening in the roof and lower him down. So they begin pulling apart the thatch. This must have created quite a commotion below in a packed room. Likely dust and thatch fell down onto the people below. Then they lower their paralyzed friend through the roof before Jesus. And then Mark 2:5 tells us "And when Jesus saw their faith, he healed the paralytic." Right?

No. Jesus says something that seems totally out of place. "Son, your sins are forgiven." "What? Jesus, this does not have anything to do with the situation. They did not bring their friend to have his sins forgiven. They brought him to be healed. Besides that, he didn't confess his sins. Nor has he offered the appropriate sacrifices at the temple. Only a priest could pronounce forgiveness for sins on the basis of repentance, restitution and sacrifice. The priest would not say 'Your sins are forgiven,' but 'God forgives your sins.' Why did you bring forgiveness into the picture Jesus?

But Jesus lived a very deliberate and God-led life. This statement makes no sense unless Jesus saw the man's most important need beyond healing – forgiveness. It makes no sense to offer forgiveness to a person who has not made the sacrifices unless Jesus knew of a coming sacrifice that would atone for the sins of the repentant – namely Himself.

So Jesus pronounces forgiveness over this paralyzed man. **What is Forgiveness?** The word can simply be defined as **pardoning an offense or not holding a person responsible for a debt.** That might be the definition of God's

forgiveness that many of us live with. God pardons our offenses. God no longer holds us in debt. So we can just go on in our lives because we've been forgiven. That seems a lot like a "take it for granted" attitude.

But how about this definition of God's forgiveness by my friend Chris Brauns. He wrote an entire book on it called "Unpacking Forgiveness." I would encourage you to consider studying this as a small group in the fall or getting it for yourself. He does a tremendous job of working through many questions we have especially about forgiving others. He writes that God's forgiveness is **"A commitment by the one true God to pardon graciously those who repent and believe so that they are reconciled to him, although his commitment does not eliminate all consequences."**

That is a robust definition of God's forgiveness towards us. It's not simply absolution or release from guilt though that is part of it. It is not just a get out of jail free card. It is not just some event we can look back to in the past and say "I finally got off the hook. Thanks God. Now I can live my life however I want." This definition begins to capture the depth and purpose of God's forgiveness.

Chris notes several challenging observations about God's forgiveness. (If you want, you can use the insert with these down.) **1) God's forgiveness is gracious but it's not free.** Oh it's a free gift to us. But it cost God the very high price of the blood of His own Son. 1 John 4:10 – In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That means Jesus turned away God's righteous wrath towards our sins by offering Himself in our place. So forgiveness is free to us but it cost Christ everything.

The next observation is perhaps the most controversial. **2) Gods' forgiveness is conditional. Only those who repent and believe are saved.** God offers the present or gift of forgiveness to all people. But only those who open the gift by repentance and belief receive it. So everyone is not forgiven. Only those who turn away from their sins and turn to Christ with the trust of their lives can be forgiven.

**3) God's forgiveness is a commitment to those He forgives.** The most common word for forgiveness in the New Testament means to release from legal or moral obligation. When God forgives he commits or promises to no longer hold the sin against the person being forgiven. In Psalm 103 the Lord says "for as far as the east is from the west, so far have I removed your sins from you."

**4) Forgiveness lays the groundwork for and begins the process of reconciliation.** So again, God's forgiveness does not simply mean He eliminates our guilt and then we go our separate ways. Its purpose is to pave the way for a healthy and close relationship with Him.

**5) Forgiveness does not mean the elimination of consequences.** This side of heaven, we continue to live and work through the consequence of our sin. Jesus forgave the one thief on the cross beside him. But that thief still suffered the painful death of crucifixion for his crimes.

Now I know that's a lot about forgiveness in just a few short paragraphs. But maybe this helps snap us out of our complacency towards God and His gift of forgiveness.

And I think that Jesus' statement in this moment snapped the paralyzed man and everyone there out of any apathy they experienced about their need for forgiveness. They thought the man's greatest need was physical healing. But Jesus addresses the deeper need of forgiveness of sins.

But not everyone there was impressed. Mark tells us that the scribes present began questioning in their hearts "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They understood very clearly what Jesus said. They did not think he said "I pray your sins are forgiven" or "May God forgive your sins." It was "your sins are forgiven" as if Jesus Himself had the authority to declare this.

Jesus immediately senses their thoughts in His spirit. So he confronts them. "Why do you question these things in your heart?" Whoa Jesus? Do you know who you're talking to here? Don't you think it would be more appropriate to take them aside one on one after the healing is complete and discuss what they might be thinking? NO! He is going to confront them right there in front of everyone. Because He's claiming He did just forgive the man.

But just when we think Jesus is about to gain the upper hand, He paints himself into a corner. "Which is easier; to say to the paralytic "Your sins are forgiven" or to say "Take up your mat and walk?" Well actually, it's easier to say yours sins are forgiven. Because you can't really prove that in that moment. There's no eye test you can do that divides the forgiven and the unforgiven. But if you say "take up your mat and walk" to a paralyzed guy, everyone can test in the next 30 seconds whether or not your word has any power. So Jesus kind of paints himself into a corner. Now the guy has to get up and walk out of there to prove Jesus' word. You had them Jesus and then you let them off the hook.

Except He does what only God can do. Mark 2:10 – Jesus says to the scribes “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 – them including the Scribes. So they were all amazed and glorified God saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

**Why is Jesus worth following? Because He has the authority to forgive sin.** We’ve seen that Jesus has absolute authority over the kingdom of darkness. Jesus has a compassionate heart towards those who suffer. Jesus has absolute authority over sickness and disease. Now Jesus has authority in Himself to forgive sin.

### So how can we respond?

**We must receive forgiveness from God.** His forgiveness is conditional in that it is only given to those who repent and believe. So we need to receive God’s forgiveness **Initially –The status of “not guilty forever” before God.** This happens when we come to Christ for the first time. Then Romans 8:1 becomes true of us. “There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

But we must also receive the forgiveness of God **Continually – “Relational” Forgiveness.** We see this in the Lord’s Prayer Matthew 6:12 – Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. We see it in 1 John 1:9 –“If we confess our sins, he his faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This daily prayer for forgiveness of sins is not a prayer that God would renew His pronouncement of “not guilty forever.” Rather, the prayer for forgiveness each day is a prayer that God’s fatherly relationship with us be restored.

Once we’ve received God’s forgiveness, **we must live out the primary purpose of God’s forgiveness – Relationship with God.** Living in the joy of forgiveness requires our pondering the horror and magnitude of our own sin compared to the holiness and perfection of God. Then we need to recognize that God’s forgiveness bridges this massive gap – our sinfulness and His holiness. It’s like we were in jail and God came and paid our bail price to get us out of jail. But God not only paid for us to get out, He sent Jesus to take our place as the defendant in court. When we were pronounced guilty, Jesus took the sentence in our place. But God didn’t do that so that we could go our separate ways. Instead of just looking back to some transaction God performed on our behalf, we need to look around and look ahead to live in relationship with the one who got us out.

John Piper writes “Saving faith cherishes being forgiven by God and then cherishes the God who forgives. Greg Morse, a staff writer for the Desiring God website writes “God’s forgiveness — that which no money can buy, no good deeds can earn, and no suffering can steal — breathes heaven’s air into your lungs. Satan is robbed of his accusations against you. You have been adopted into Christ’s family. You are perfect in God’s eyes in union with his Son. So let this news bear you up on wings like eagles — though your health, happiness, and legs be anchored to the floor. Christ has given us more than new legs; he has given us a new heart, a new hope, and a new future — by giving himself, bloodied on a cross, for us. He shall not spare us anything for our ultimate good. **Because Jesus has authority to forgive sins, we must receive forgiveness and pursue deeper relationship with the one who forgave us.**

- **Receive God’s forgiveness for the first time.**
- **Believe He has forgiven and does forgive.**
- **Confess taking it for granted.**
- **Confess wanting God’s gifts more than God.**
- **Then take the next step in your relationship with God.**

**Thank you!**