Mark 2:1-12 February 25, 2018

The Second Sunday of Lent

*The Forgiveness of Jesus, Part 2*

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Last week we began our Lenten series, *The Forgiveness of Jesus*, by focusing on repentance. It’s what the prophets in the Old Testament preached, it’s what Jesus himself preached, and it’s what his followers preached throughout the New Testament. Repent! Look at the direction you’re headed and if it’s not God’s direction, if it’s not leading to God-filled hope, peace, and joy - repent! Turn around and go God’s way! Go the way of Life! So, the ‘word of the week’ last Sunday was REPENT. I hope you’ve been thinking about that, praying about that, and acting on that in whatever way God speaks to your heart. Turn around and come home to Christ. Repent.

This week the ‘word of the week’ is RECEIVE. Our text comes from the Gospel of Mark 2:1-12. I am reading this morning from the Amplified Bible. *“Jesus returned to Capernaum, and a few days later the news went out that He was at home.****2****So many people gathered together that there was no longer room [for them], not even near the door; and Jesus was discussing with them the word [of God].****3****Then they came, bringing to Him a paralyzed man, who was being carried by four men.****4****When they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they [*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%202&version=NRSV;AMP#fen-AMP-24265a)*]removed the roof above Jesus; and when they had dug out an opening, they let down the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying.****5****When Jesus saw their [active] faith [springing from confidence in Him], He said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”****6****But some of the [*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%202&version=NRSV;AMP#fen-AMP-24267b)*]scribes were sitting there debating in their hearts [the implication of what He had said],****7****“Why does this man talk that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins [remove guilt, nullify sin’s penalty, and assign righteousness] except God alone?”****8****Immediately Jesus, being fully aware [of their hostility] and knowing in His spirit that they were thinking this, said to them, “Why are you debating and arguing about these things in your hearts?****9****Which is easier, to say to the paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your mat and walk’?****10****But so that you may know that the [*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%202&version=NRSV;AMP#fen-AMP-24271c)*]Son of Man has the authority and power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralyzed man,****11****“I say to you, get up, pick up your mat and go home.”****12****And he got up and immediately picked up the mat and went out before them all, so that they all were astonished and they glorified and praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”*

These four able-bodied men and their paralyzed friend apparently never said a word. They didn’t need to! Their actions were more than enough to tell Jesus all they wanted him to know. “We have a friend here, whom we love a lot, who needs what you alone can give him. Would you heal him, please?”

Our text tells us that Jesus saw their faith. He saw their faith as pieces of roof started dropping down in front of him. He saw their faith as they lowered their friend oh so carefully down through the hole. He saw their faith. It was obvious to him and to everyone in the crowded room. These men had faith that what they had heard about Jesus was true. They believed that he could and would heal their friend, and they acted on that belief. They had a saving faith that Jesus saw and to which he responded in a way no one expected.

Saving faith, folks, is different than mere belief. Belief says, “Yes, I believe there is a God, I believe there is a place called heaven. I believe God made this beautiful world and everything in it.” It can even say, “I believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that he died on a cross and rose from the grave.” That belief is all well and good, but guess what? Even the demons believe those things. James 2:19 states, *“Even the demons believe – and shudder!”* because they know they are true. Belief is good, but it stops short of the greatest good, of what we really need, of what God wants for and calls forth from every person in the world. God wants us to have a saving faith – a faith that believes, yes, but that also has obedient action attached to it (like what the four friends demonstrated). A person with saving faith believes in who Jesus is, trusts in what Jesus has done for them, and out of gratitude then, lives the way Jesus calls to live. Saving faith is observable. It is what Jesus saw in the men who were determined to get their friend to him.

So here is this man on a make-shift stretcher in front of Jesus. Everyone is ready for the big moment. Surely Jesus is going to heal this man after all this commotion. And Jesus says this: *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

This seems like a bit of a letdown. This guy wanted healed legs. He wanted to be able to walk and run and jump. His friends were counting on a healing – a physical healing. That’s why they did all they did – digging through the roof and all. “New legs, please, Jesus.” But oh, there was so much more going on here. We are just in the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus had already demonstrated his authority over the temptations of Satan, authority over nature, authority over sickness, authority over the lives of men who dropped everything to follow him…. But now he is revealing a new authority that clearly demonstrates who he is. He has the authority to forgive sins, he claims, an authority that according to the Old Testament, belongs to God alone.

In Isaiah 43:25 we read, *“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.”*

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we read, *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and heal their land.”*

Only God can forgive sins, and so for Jesus to say what he just said to the man caused the religious leaders to have a hissy fit. They knew when Jesus said to the paralyzed man, *“Son, your sins are forgiven,”* he was also saying, “I Am God.”

Then he said to those who were having their hissy fit, “*Which is easier, to say to the paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your mat and walk’?* In other words, which can easily be proven wrong? The healing one, right? The guy either gets up and walks away or he doesn’t. But who can prove Jesus wrong if he says he forgives someone’s sins? It’s an invisible act. So, to say “Your sins are forgiven” is easier (to say) because no one can tell if it actually happened or not. It’s easier to SAY that your sins are forgiven than to actually heal someone. But with God which is easier to DO? Heal or forgive?

For God, who made all things, healing is easy. Why doesn’t he heal everyone we pray for him to heal? I can’t answer that perfectly. That’s where saving faith comes in, but we do know that healing is easy for God. But forgiving, that came hard. Forgiveness cost the Heavenly Father the life of his only begotten Son. Easier to say. Harder to do.

The Rev. Dr. Billy Graham died this week at the age of 99. He was still responding to questions sent to him in whatever way he could. In October of 2015 in the *Kansas City Star*, the following exchange was published between an individual struggling with the burden of their sin and Dr. Graham:

*"How many sins can you list that God won't ever forgive? I worry about this, because I know I've not been a very good person, and some of the things I've done are probably on that list," J.F.D. told the publication.*

*Dr. Graham responded, "Only one sin that can't be forgiven is on God's list - and that is the sin of rejecting Him and refusing His offer of forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ. This alone is the unforgivable sin, because it means we are saying that the Holy Spirit's witness about Jesus is a lie (see Luke 12:10)."*

*There are several reasons why it is so serious to reject Christ, Graham revealed. "The reason, first of all, is because of who He was. He wasn't just another religious teacher; He was God in human flesh - but when we deny this, we limit Him and assume He is unable to save us. But the Bible is clear: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18)," he wrote. The primary reason it's so serious to reject Christ, however, is because He is God's appointed means of salvation, Graham contended.*

*"Our greatest need is to have our sins forgiven; if we don't, we have no reason to expect God to welcome us into Heaven. But by His death and resurrection Christ provided the way for us to be forgiven and cleansed of all our sins."*

*The pastor explained that the most important thing an individual can do is confess their sin humbly before God and ask for His forgiveness.*

*"Don't turn your back on Christ or refuse His offer of forgiveness. Instead, by a simple prayer of faith, ask Him to come into your life today - and He will. Think of it: Before you go to bed tonight, you can know that God has forgiven every sin you ever committed! Commit your life to Christ without delay," he concluded.”*

Jesus came, lived among us, loved us, showed compassion to us, laughed with us, ate with us, came to our homes, taught us, and taught us some more. He taught us that no matter what our name is, what our income is, what our age is, what our education is, what our status is in society, what good works we have done, how many prayers we’ve prayed, how many hours we’ve spent reading the Scripture, he taught us that we are all the same in God’s sight. We are all sinners through and through. I will be as much a sinner on the day I die as on the day I was born. Sin is sin. We’re all stuck with being sinners. If you put a monk in a monastery beside a murderer, they have one thing in common. They are both sinners. And because a holy and righteous God cannot allow sin to go unpunished, God the Father sent Jesus the Son to suffer and die in our place. He laid down his perfect, sinless life as the perfect sacrifice for your sin. Once for all. His life in exchange for yours. “Son, your sins are forgiven.” “Daughter, your sins are forgiven.”

Do you have a saving faith? Do you believe that Jesus was who he said he was, God in human flesh? Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner? Do I? Do you believe that his death was the acceptable sacrifice for your sin – the only acceptable sacrifice for your sin? If you do, then the gift of forgiveness is yours, but it is not enough to simply believe this. Belief is not enough, folks. You have to RECEIVE the gift he died to give you. You have to RECEIVE his forgiveness. “Son, your sins are forgiven.” “Daughter, your sins are forgiven.” Hear me now: To say that you can’t receive it because you’ve gone too wrong, or you can’t receive it because you don’t deserve it, or you can’t receive it for any reason is to admit that you do not have a saving faith. You just have belief. And that, dear ones, is not the way to freedom from the chains that you have allowed to bind you, and it is not the way to eternal life in Heaven. May you not be one who gets to judgement day thinking you’ve got it all covered, and Jesus says to you, “Depart from me. I never knew you.”

Which is easier to say? I believe or I receive? Which is harder to do? Which brings about an observable faith? Which brings others to the feet of Jesus?

Receive. Receive what God has done for you through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. (A time for silent prayers of confession & reception.)

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away, slain for us - and we remember   
The promise made that all who come in faith find forgiveness at the cross.   
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice   
As a sign of our bonds of peace around the table of the King.   
  
The body of our Savior Jesus Christ, torn for you - eat and remember   
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life paid the price to make us one.   
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice   
As a sign of our bonds of love around the table of the King.   
  
The blood that cleanses every stain of sin, shed for you - drink and remember   
He drained death’s cup that all may enter in to receive the life of God.   
So we share in this bread of life, and we drink of His sacrifice   
As a sign of our bonds of grace around the table of the King. 

And so with thankfulness and faith we rise to respond, - and to remember   
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ as His body here on earth.   
As we share in his suffering, we proclaim Christ will come again!

And we’ll join in the feast of heaven around the table of the King.

(Getty Music)

Amen.

The Benediction today is from Ann Graham Lotz’s statement on the day her father, Billy Graham went on to heaven:

“While he may be physically absent and his voice silent, I am confident that his message will continue to reverberate throughout the generations to come. My prayer on this day of his move to Our Father’s House is that his death will be a rallying cry. That tens of thousands of pastors, teachers, evangelists, and ordinary men and women will rise up to take his place. That they will take up his message like a baton being passed in a relay race and faithfully pass it on to those with whom they come in contact. Because Daddy’s message is God’s message. And it’s a message of genuine hope for the future, of love for the present, of forgiveness for the past.

It’s a message, when received, that brings a fresh beginning, unshakable joy, unexplainable peace, eternal significance, meaning and purpose to life, and opens Heaven’s door.

It was this message, which Daddy carried to the world, that penetrated my own heart as a young girl and has created in me a personal, passionate resolve to communicate it myself to as many people as possible. And so, even as my tears seem to be unending, I silently rededicate my life to picking up and passing on the baton. Would you do the same?”