

# **First Serve**

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Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 2:1-12

Topic

Four godly friends of a paralytic man are undeterred by the crowds and improvise a unique way of carrying him to Jesus for healing

Title

*"Carry On My Godward Friends"*

## Introduction

Bill and Maya Donnelly woke up to a loud, crashing sound at their Arizona home in the border town of Nogales. Thinking the boom was thunder from a lingering rainstorm, they went back to sleep.

Imagine their shock later that morning when they discovered a large plastic package in the destroyed remains of their German shepherd's doghouse. It was a twenty-three pound parcel that police say contained about \$10,000 worth of marijuana.

The illegal drugs had likely fallen from a smuggler's aircraft that had taken off from Mexico, officials said.

A different sort of 'package' came through the roof of Peter's humble home to rest gently at the feet of Jesus.

Too bad this wasn't captured on video. It would certainly have gone viral. The click-bait would read something like, "Four friends carry paralytic to see Jesus. *You won't believe what happens next!*"

What happened next blew the minds of everyone present: Jesus healed the paralytic, of course, but not before announcing that the man's sins were forgiven.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Do You Think It Easy For Jesus To Forgive Sins?, and #2 Do You Think It Easy For Jesus To Heal Sickness?

#1 Do You Think It Easy  
For Jesus To Forgive Sins?

(v1-5)

"It's not easy... being green." You recognize that as the melancholy musings of Kermit The Frog.

It must have been too hard to be green, because he's gone blue, as in off-color humor. I read that the recently rebooted *Muppet Show* on TV is full of family unfriendly sexual innuendos and situations.

As Miss Piggy would say, "O, Kermee."

Is it easy to forgive sins? It is if you are God. Otherwise, it's not just hard; it's impossible.

Mark 2:1 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.

This might be the origin of the expression, "in the house." Word spread rapidly that Jesus had returned, and people sought Him out.

Are you a person others might seek out in their time of spiritual need? I know you want to be, so if the Lord is showing you anything that needs to change, let Him change you.

Mark 2:2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.

In the Jewish culture of the first century, when hospitality was huge, folks just popped-in anytime, without any invitation. Imagine having several hundred, maybe a thousand, people suddenly show up at your door.

"He preached the Word to them." You might be aware that Pope Francis was in the United States visiting. There's a sound byte circulating on FaceBook, a portion of a Sunday sermon by Pastor Jack Hibbs (Calvary Chapel Chino Hills). He summarizes that the Pope addressed some 1.2billion people, but not once did he preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or let the world know that "unless a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Mark 2:3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.

This man had somehow lost the power of bodily movement. He could not, on his own, get to Jesus.

He becomes a picture for us, a type, of the sinner.

We are born dead in trespasses and sins. As Pastor Don McClure used to put it, "we are physically alive, soulishly active, but spiritually dead."

We cannot, on our own, get to Jesus. We must be carried along.

We **are** carried along, thanks to the Cross on which Jesus died, by God's grace affecting our hearts. God's grace enables us by freeing our will. When our will is freed, we can either accept God's saving grace, by faith, or we can resist it and reject salvation.

Mark 2:4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

There was no handicapped ramp or special paralytic entrance to Peter's house. Four guys, carrying a paralytic on his own bed, were not going to be able to squeeze through the crowd; and, apparently, the crowd was not parting for them.

The crowd always wants to block your path to Jesus - to keep you *from* the Lord, and *for* the world.

The houses in Capernaum had flat, earthen roofs with tiles laid over support rafters, then packed with mud. Since these one-story roofs served as patios most houses had an outdoor stairway leading to the roof.

Just picture it - Jesus in the house, thronged with people, when suddenly debris starts falling into the room from the roof until a man is let down, probably by four ropes tied to the corners of his mattress, right in front of the Lord.

Mark 2:5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

This man was carried along to Jesus when he could do nothing for himself. Jesus commends his faith, and the faith of his friends.

God uses means to carry us to Jesus. His word, anointed by His Spirit, taught and shared by men and women, carries us to Jesus. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Throughout this chapter mention is made of Jesus seeing the thoughts and the motives of hearts. When He said, "Your sins are forgiven you," He was responding to the thoughts and motives of this man's heart. I believe this man came to Jesus by faith seeking forgiveness for his sins.

Where is that in the text? It is implied, first of all, in the verb tense, which is, "your sins are, right here, right now, being forgiven." Jesus wasn't saying they were or would be forgivable; **they were forgiven.**

The second reason I say the paralytic had faith is that forgiveness is not automatic; it is not unconditional. Jesus is the Savior of all men, but not everyone is forgiven - only those who come to Jesus by faith, believing God to save them.

The word "forgive" means *to wipe the slate clean, to pardon, to cancel a debt*. When we wrong someone, we seek their forgiveness in order for the relationship to be restored.

Forgiveness is not granted because a person deserves to be forgiven. No one ever deserves to be forgiven. The need for forgiveness implies an offense - a genuine offense against another person.

Forgiveness is an act of love, mercy, and grace. Forgiveness is a decision to not hold something against another person, despite what they have done to you.

Let me reiterate what I said earlier. We are spiritual paralytics incapable of getting to Jesus. God must take the initiative.

He has. He sent Jesus, Who came of His own volition, to die on the Cross to pay our debt of sin in full and to offer us forgiveness. God's grace issues from the Cross, where Jesus is lifted-up, drawing all men to Himself.

So, "Yes," it **is** easy for Jesus to forgive sins. It was costly; but it's easy, because He is the unique God-man.

## #2 Do You Think It Easy For Jesus To Heal Sickness?

(v6-12)

I think we'd answer "Yes" to this as well. Jesus went around healing sickness and delivering from demons. He is no less able today, seated in Heaven, to do those things.

What bothers us is that He definitely doesn't do it as often as He seemingly did it in the first century.

Let's see if we can find some encouragement in these verses for the twenty-first century.

Mark 2:6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,

Mark 2:7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

There were two main sects among the Jews, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

- Pharisees generally were considered the more spiritual by the Jews. They believed in the supernatural - things like angels and the resurrection from the dead.
- Sadducees were more liberal, denying the supernatural, and especially denying the resurrection from the dead. They also were more sympathetic to Greek culture, more willing to compromise with it, and adopt its customs.

Both sects had Scribes. Scribes were serious scholars of the Jewish Scriptures.

These were Scribes of the Pharisees, and they reasoned like this:

- Only God can forgive sins;
- This man claims to forgive sins;
- Therefore, he blasphemes, being a mere man.

As we know, the proper reasoning goes like this:

- Only God can forgive sins;
- This man claims to forgive sins;
- Therefore, Jesus is both God and man.

As Josh McDowell is fond of repeating, Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic...or He is the Lord. Jesus would demonstrate to them He that He was Lord.

Mark 2:8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?"

"In His spirit" means in His human spirit. It wasn't because He was God that He perceived this. Jesus was fully God, and never ceased to be God, but He did willfully lay aside the prerogatives of His deity while He was on the earth. He lived as a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led man.

Most likely this is what we would call a Word of Knowledge, where the Holy Spirit spoke to Jesus' spirit something He could not otherwise have known.

Mark 2:9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"

The Scribes were denying Jesus' authority to forgive sins, thinking Him a mere man.

Jesus would therefore show Him He was not a mere man. In the very next verse He calls Himself "the Son of Man."



"Son of Man" was Jesus' favorite title for Himself. Most scholars trace it to the Book of Daniel, where the promised Messiah is called the Son of Man.

The Scribes knew from reading their Scriptures that when the Messiah came, he would perform many miraculous works - like healing paralytics. Jesus was letting them in on the fact that their promised Messiah, the Son of man, was not a mere man, but God come in human flesh.

Mark 2:10 "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"; He said to the paralytic,  
Mark 2:11 "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Everything rested on this. Either the paralytic would be healed, and Jesus demonstrated to be the Messiah. Or the man would remain paralyzed, and Jesus' ministry would end in His being stoned to death for blasphemy.

There's a miniature altar-call in Jesus' words to the paralytic. "I say to **you**" is a personal moment of decision. The paralytic hears the Word of God, and has a decision to make.

If you came to Jesus later in life, there was a moment like this when you had to make a decision. The Lord was speaking directly, personally, to **you** about your sin, and the forgiveness of your sin that was only possible at the Cross.

"Arise" is a command that required the paralytic to exercise faith. His faith would be shown by his believing he could do what he was told to do by Jesus.

I don't want to compare getting up out of your seat and coming forward to the healing of a paralyzed man, but there is a similarity. Will sin keep you paralyzed and in your seat? Or will you receive spiritual healing, and signify it by getting-up, coming forward, and receiving the Lord?

"Take up your bed" was a demand for prompt obedience. I mean, why take up his bed? He could just as easily left it there. But a disciple will do as he or she is told.

Once you're saved, the Lord has good works for you to discover and accomplish by His now indwelling Spirit, and by the baptism of the Holy Spirit coming upon you. Whatever He asks of you, He has enabled you to do. The paralytic could now take up his bed; and you can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you.

"Go to your house" meant he would remain in Capernaum, a living testimony to Jesus Christ's authority to forgive sins.

After you are saved, you generally return to your life, but now with a testimony to give. You were once paralyzed, but now you walk in new life, in the power of the resurrection - a new creation in Jesus.

Mark 2:12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

We need to realize how miraculous these miracles really were. I'm no doctor, but I'm guessing that this man's muscles had atrophied; that he probably didn't weigh very much, and generally looked wasted.

"Immediately" he was on his feet, with restored muscle tone, perfect balance, and at a reasonable weight.

It might have even been hard to recognize him at first. Think of the lepers Jesus healed as a more extreme example. They would be greatly deformed, in face as well as body. Full-blown leprosy leaves a person looking grotesque - barely human.

A healed leper would be totally changed in appearance, immediately.

When you got saved, weren't you somewhat unrecognizable? I think many of us have the testimony that our friends and family could instantly tell that there was something different about us.

You probably talked differently. I remember one guy who got saved here, who called me the day after he gave his life to Jesus, and asked me, "Guess what I didn't do today?" Then he answered, "I didn't cuss."

Your personal vices probably changed. Maybe your entertainment choices. Not because someone gave you a list of do's-and-don'ts, but because God the Holy Spirit, Who was now in you, was communicating to your newly born-again spirit what is pleasing to God.

If nothing else, there was a joy that we never had before - the joy of the Lord, and of His salvation.

He "went out in the presence of them all." There were hundreds, if not thousands, of people in that crowd. It was a crowd that had not let the paralytic through; a crowd that had hindered him.

But he took his time, wandered serpentine through them, so all could wonder at his physical and spiritual healing.

Can you imagine the conversations? "Excuse me, I'm just leaving. Remember me? Four guys were carrying me on my bed, this bed that I now carry, and you wouldn't let me through. But, Praise the Lord!, it was all to His glory, 'cause now I'm healed."

"All were amazed and glorified God." A better translation, in this case, is "**they** were amazed and glorified God." The crowd - *not* the Scribes. The Messiah they constructed from their studies was not compatible with the man claiming to be Him, so they rejected Him.

Do we have our own version of Jesus, that is not Who He really is? On a very basic level, you'd have to say "Yes."

Take Hollywood, for example. Most of the great Jesus' on film have been British. All of the TV events we tend to rave about - whether it's the old *Jesus of Nazareth*, or the more recent mini-series, *The Bible*, have wrongly portrayed the ethnicity of Jesus.

In a credible source, *What did Jesus Look Like?* Justin Taylor wrote, "From an analysis of skeletal remains, archeologists have firmly established that the average build of a Jewish male at the time of Jesus was 5' 1", with an average weight of about 110 pounds."

Of far greater significance, of course, is how we portray the character of Jesus Christ. I think we generally prefer the righteously indignant table-turner-over Jesus to the turn-the-other-cheek Jesus.

Let's be Scribes who see Jesus as He is portrayed on the pages of the Bible and try, as much as is humanly possible, to overcome our biases. Let's see the Jesus-style of ministry in the first century, then translate it for our own day and age.

Now let's talk about sickness. We feel as though, if we had been alive when Jesus was on the earth, we'd have been immediately healed. Almost everyone was. Not everyone... But so many that John, at the end of his Gospel, says that if all the things Jesus did were written down, the world could not contain the record of them.

Now that Jesus is in Heaven, you'd think healings would be easier still, and more abundant.

Yet there are many sick, even among us. What gives?

I think we need to understand that there **was** a greater emphasis on physical healing when Jesus was offering the kingdom of God.

As I already mentioned, healing and deliverance from demons were going to be the signs the Messiah would perform as His credentials.

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was in fact the promised Messiah, Jesus answered, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Luke 7:22).

Jesus still heals. We believe in the miraculous. If you are sick, we keep praying you will be healed, that your cancer will be gone, your tumor disappear.

But we must recognize that we live in a different time. The poster boy for the church age in which we live is the apostle Paul - himself gifted to heal others on occasion.

At the very beginning of his walk with the Lord, Paul was not told how many people he would heal, but he was told "how many things he must suffer" (Acts 9:16).

He gave this record of his sufferings:

2Co 11:23 ... I [have] far more extensive and abundant labors, with far more imprisonments, [beaten] with countless stripes, and frequently [at the point of] death.

2Co 11:24 Five times I received from [the hands of] the Jews forty [lashes all] but one;

2Co 11:25 Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been aboard a ship wrecked at sea; a [whole] night and a day I have spent [adrift] on the deep;

2Co 11:26 Many times on journeys, [exposed to] perils from rivers, perils from bandits, perils from [my own] nation, perils from the Gentiles, perils in the city, perils in the desert places, perils in the sea, perils from those posing as believers [but destitute of Christian knowledge and piety];

2Co 11:27 In toil and hardship, watching often [through sleepless nights], in hunger and thirst, frequently driven to fasting by want, in cold and exposure and lack of clothing.

On top of all that Paul reported,

2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Paul then turned to us, and made these promises:

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Rom 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Rom 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Rom 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dorothy said to Toto, "I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore." Well, "Believer, we're not in the first century anymore."

Signs and wonders still follow the preaching and teaching of God's Word. The gifts of the Holy Spirit - **all of them** - are available to the church today.

It's not from lack of faith, or unbelief, or conservative teaching, that most people are not healed.

It isn't because we now have the completed Bible, making the miraculous unnecessary.

It's because we live in the unique church age between Jesus Christ's two comings to establish the kingdom of God on the earth.

It has its own characteristics. In this mean-time, "His strength is made perfect in our weakness" (Second Corinthians 12:9). It's a period of time when "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty" (First Corinthians 1:27).

Healing is easy. Counting it all joy when we fall into various trials; thinking it not strange when a fiery trial comes along; **that** requires faith, and it builds faith.

You know the expression, "through the roof?" It means something that has increased dramatically.

The four friends of the paralytic, and the man himself, had through-the-roof faith.

If **you** want through-the-roof faith, today it mostly comes through patiently enduring your troubles and sufferings - *not* from avoiding them, or being healed from them.