



MIRACLE BENEATH THE ROOF

WEEK 8
01.21.18



FOCUS VERSE

Mark 2:5

When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

LESSON TEXT

Mark 2:3–12

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.



FOCUS THOUGHT

When the determined faith and the spirit of a servant join hands, great miracles will happen.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Being a Good Neighbor

After identifying the greatest commandment as “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” Jesus continued, “and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). The four men who carried the paralytic to Jesus may have been being good neighbors.

Today, Christians obey this biblical mandate in a myriad of ways. Some examples are driving an elderly neighbor to a doctor’s appointment; serving food at a soup kitchen; donating clothes to a clothes closet for the needy; donating to a food pantry; providing school supplies to underprivileged children; and helping victims of hurricanes, catastrophic flooding, or other natural disasters.

An opportunity to be a good neighbor, with greater long-term impact, is sharing the gospel. The benefit goes beyond the salvific. Often the socioeconomic lift factor of salvation is overlooked. Respond to neighbors’ immediate needs, and you bless them for a day. But lead them to Jesus, and you bless them for eternity. They experience the peace and joy of the Holy Ghost, and often their socioeconomic standing improves. They quit squandering their money on alcohol and drugs. They become engaged employees resulting in advancement. They give and in return are blessed. (See Luke 6:38.)

Let us be good neighbors and show our love to our neighbors by responding to their immediate needs and by introducing them to the Lord their God, Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS IS GOD

- A. Question of the Scribes
- B. Only God Can Forgive Sins
- C. Jesus Forgave Sins

II. FAITH REQUIRES ACTION

- A. The Challenge of Getting to Jesus
- B. An Unorthodox Approach
- C. Faith and Works United
- D. Faith’s Reward

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Our celebration of miracles continues this week with a palsied or paralytic man being lowered through the roof to Jesus and walking away carrying his bed. In contrast to last week’s lesson where the Samaritan woman unexpectedly met Jesus, four men carried the paralytic to Jesus expecting a miracle. Yet, like the Samaritan woman who, upon encountering Jesus, received more than the drinking water she sought, the man suffering from paralysis received more than a miraculous healing. Jesus offers more than

man possesses the ability to imagine. Paul expressed Jesus’ ability “to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). An encounter with Jesus often goes beyond our expectations of what we think we want to what we really need.

Jesus’ ability to go above and beyond flows from the fact that He is God manifest in flesh. He possesses all the attributes of deity including omnipotence (all power). After His resurrection, Jesus expressed to His disciples that all power in Heaven and Earth belonged to Him (Matthew 28:18). As expressed in John the Revelator’s vision, Jesus is “Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). This fact enabled Him to offer “living water” to the Samaritan woman (John 4:10) and to forgive the sins of the paralytic as stated in today’s Focus Verse:

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5).

Knowing and acknowledging Jesus' deity increases our capacity to believe Him for miracles and motivates us to refuse to let anything deter us from reaching Him with our needs. While the bearers of the paralytic man overcame the crowds that made reaching Jesus challenging, today crowds of unbelievers often deter people from reaching Jesus. Unbelievers who scoff and deny His status as Almighty God, unbelievers who scoff and deny that we need Him to forgive our sins, and unbelievers who deny that miracles even happen can stand between the needy and a loving God.

Born-again believers who acknowledge Jesus' full deity have a mission of helping unbelievers reach Jesus. We have experienced the joy of repenting and having our sins remitted in baptism in Jesus' name. We have experienced the unspeakable joy of being filled with His Spirit. Therefore we must give witness of His deity and mighty works to unbelievers. We cannot allow ourselves to be deterred by obstacles such as the business of life. True faith emboldens us to "tear off the roof" and usher others into His presence where they may receive a physical miracle of healing or a greater spiritual miracle of salvation. The paralytic taking up his bed and walking away produced amazement and rejoicing, but his miracle of being able to walk pales in comparison to walking on streets of gold throughout eternity.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JESUS IS GOD

Acknowledging the deity of Jesus is foundational to Christianity. Unfortunately, some still consider the knowledge of who Jesus is to be a mystery that cannot be understood, confusing the meaning of the word *mystery* in I Timothy 3:16:

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Paul used the Greek word *musterion*, here

translated *mystery*, in the sense of "some sacred thing hidden or secret which is naturally unknown to human reason and is only known by the revelation of God" (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*). Paul spoke of that which the Old Testament intimated but still concealed as being uncovered or revealed in the New Testament. The New Testament reveals Jesus to be God manifest in the flesh. Isaiah prophesied concerning God coming as a man:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus revealed Himself as the mighty God to His disciples through divine actions like forgiving sins and with His statements claiming His deity, such as, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). He further expressed to them that failing to honor Him was failing to honor God (John 5:23), to see Him was to see God (John 12:45), to know Him was to know God (John 8:19), to believe in Him was to believe in God (John 12:44), to receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37), and to hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23).

Thomas, upon seeing Jesus after His resurrection, became a believer in the fullness of Jesus' deity. Jesus challenged Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Saul, a zealous persecutor of Christians, became convinced of Jesus' deity before converting and becoming the apostle Paul. While on his way to Damascus to locate and arrest Christians, Saul encountered a blinding light from Heaven. Upon falling to the earth, Saul heard a voice inquiring, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4). He responded, "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest" (Acts 9:5).

The significance of this declaration

resounded deep within Saul. As a devout Jew, He grew up daily hearing and quoting the *shema*, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The realization that Jesus was the one and only Lord, led to his repentance, baptism in Jesus’ name, and reception of the Holy Ghost. He converted from a zealous persecutor of Christians to a zealous preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Later becoming known as Paul, he penned much of the New Testament and became an apologist for Jesus’ deity.

He reminded the Corinthians that God was in Christ:

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19).

In Colossians Paul stated a goal he had for everyone he had not yet met: “My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,” (Colossians 2:2, NIV). He then admonished the Colossians concerning the full deity of Jesus in the form of a warning:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:8–9).

On the road to Damascus, Saul gained an understanding of the identity of Jesus, and it became his passion to share this understanding with everyone. Paul realized that Satan employs any means he can to undermine, deny, or obscure the truth of Jesus’ deity. Satan understood the significance of Jesus’ warning to the Jews: “For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins (John 8:24). Keeping people from understanding Jesus’ deity keeps them from salvation.

Apostolics emphasize the full deity of

Jesus Christ. We do not believe the question of the Godhead qualifies as an unsolved mystery. God revealed Himself to us in Scripture as Jesus and desires for man to gain that understanding. The Apostolic doctrine of the Godhead, often referred to as Oneness, consists of two assertions summarizing the biblical teaching concerning the Godhead: “(1) There is one God with no distinction of persons; (2) Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead incarnate” (David K. Bernard, *The Oneness View of Jesus Christ*). This belief is integral to our faith. Sometimes as Apostolics we speak of others needing a revelation of who Jesus is; however, the New Testament supplies the revelation of who Jesus is. The world needs an illumination of what the New Testament reveals. We need to renew our passion of sharing this truth with the world. It needs to be our goal as it was Paul’s.

A. Question of the Scribes

Mark 2 introduces the subject of how Jesus’ ministry brought conflict between Him and Jewish religious leaders. The Jewish religious leaders’ inability to accept Jesus as God manifested in the flesh ultimately led Him to the cross.

In chapter 1, Mark recorded the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Capernaum. His healing ministry, along with His exorcism of demons, got the attention of the multitudes, and His disciples noted that all men sought Him (Mark 1:37). Jesus chose to make His ministry available to others throughout the region and left Capernaum on a successful preaching tour throughout Galilee. Mark 2 records His return to Capernaum. The news of His return spread throughout the community, and crowds gathered in and around the house where He temporarily resided. Observers in the crowd included a group of religious leaders called scribes. The scribes, originally professional writers for hire within the Old Testament Jewish community, rose to prominence during the exile in Babylon by gaining a reputation as experts in God’s Word. *The Holman Bible Dictionary* states that by New Testament times, “They interpreted the law, taught it to disciples, and were experts in cases where people were accused of breaking the law of Moses.”

It seems appropriate for religious experts of their stature in society to seek out an upcoming religious teacher and miracle worker like Jesus. Some scribes may have been genuinely interesting in His teaching, some may have desired a miracle of their own, while others possibly sought a leader who could liberate the Jews from Roman oppression.

Others potentially possessed an ulterior motive of protecting their own stature as religious leaders in the face of the crowds turning to this upstart, Jesus. Perhaps they were the same ones sent by the priests from Jerusalem to question John the Baptist concerning his identity and ministry (John 1:19). John told them of one that was coming after Him. Was Jesus the one? If their motivation included a desire to accuse Him, Jesus supplied them with the opportunity they sought. As recorded in the Focus Verse, when the paralyzed man descended from the roof to Him, and “when Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5).

No one saw this coming. It exceeded everyone’s expectations. Many, if not all, expected miracles. But a declaration of forgiveness of sin shocked them. In Judaism for a man to claim to forgive sins constituted blasphemy. Claiming to perform activities uniquely belonging to God indicated a claim to be God or arrogance and complete disrespect for God. Either one qualified as blasphemy. The scribes, as teachers of the Law, understood the significance of Jesus’ statement. Being unwilling to entertain the truth of Jesus’ deity, they began reasoning together as to how to respond. The law prescribed death as the penalty for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16), and they felt justified in self-righteously moving forward.

B. Only God Can Forgive Sins

Forgiving sins is one of several divine attributes and activities that belong uniquely to God. Sin can be viewed as missing the mark of righteousness established by God (Hebrew, *chata*; Greek, *hamartia*). Ultimately all sin is against God; therefore, He alone can forgive sins. The Old Testament identified forgiving sins as an activity of God (Exodus 34:7; Psalm 103:3; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22). The

King James translators of the Book of Daniel indicate the context of Daniel 9:9 means that forgiving of sin belongs to God, further indicating its uniqueness as His prerogative.

William W. Lame, in *The Gospel According to Mark*, stated that “later Judaism adhered scrupulously to this understanding.” Certainly the scribes adhered to this view and concluded that Jesus committed blasphemy when He told the paralytic “thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5). Lame also indicated that the scribes considered Jesus’ assertion “an affront to the majesty and authority of God.”

C. Jesus Forgave Sins

The scribes correctly understood the words Jesus spoke. Jesus unequivocally stated that the sins of the paralytic man who lay before Him were forgiven (Mark 2:5). Matthew’s and Luke’s records of the narrative confirm Mark’s:

“And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matthew 9:2).

“And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee” (Luke 5:20).

Contrary to the scribes’ opinion, Jesus was not blaspheming. As Almighty God manifest in flesh, Jesus had the authority to forgive sins. He was not a mad man having visions of grandeur, thinking He was God when He was not. He was not a bad man lying and giving false hope, claiming to do something He knew He could not do. Jesus operated within the divine authority He possessed. While He had not yet gone to the cross to give Himself as a ransom for the sins of others (I Timothy 2:6), He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Later, on the cross of Calvary, Jesus bore our sins and washed them away with His own blood (Galatians 1:4; Hebrews 1:3, 4:15; 9:28; I Peter 2:24; Revelation 1:5).

Jesus’ forgiving sins proved His deity, but forgiving sins serves as just one of several

uniquely divine activities Jesus performed that testified to His deity. Others are Creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17); providence (His care for and guidance of His creation: Luke 10:22; Colossians 1:17); being an object of prayer and worship (Luke 24:51–52; Philippians 2:10–11); and raising and judging the dead (Matthew 25:31–32; II Timothy 4:1).

Knowing the scribes' thoughts and knowing that anyone could say they were forgiving sins, Jesus asked the scribes, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (Mark 2:9). The answer was obvious. There was no immediate sign that the sins of the paralytic were forgiven, but Jesus' healing of the man's paralysis indicated Jesus' power and authority (Mark 2:10–11). When the man picked up his bed and headed home, the scribes faced the dilemma of accepting Jesus as Almighty God who could forgive sins, or rejecting Him as a blasphemer in the face of evidence to the contrary.

As the crowd observed the former paralytic exit the building with his bed in hand, "they were all amazed, and glorified God" (Mark 2:12). They got more than they came for that day. They walked away saying, "We never saw it on this fashion" (Mark 2:12). Observation of miracles often serves as a faith builder, but Jesus' performances of uniquely divine activities, including forgiving sins, along with His possession of uniquely divine attributes, proved the validity of our placing our faith in Him as our Lord and Savior. His gracious forgiving of our sins and filling us with His Spirit is the greatest miracle He accomplishes in our lives. We should never cease to be amazed and glorify Him for it.

II. FAITH REQUIRES ACTION

A. The Challenge of Getting to Jesus

The cause of the paralysis of the man in Mark's narrative remains open to speculation. Did he contract polio as a child? Did he have a stroke as an adult? How long had he lain at home unable to walk? Did he hear about Jesus on his own or from family or friends who told him of a miracle worker called Jesus? Was it his idea to be carried to Jesus, or did his four helpers propose the idea?

The authors of the Gospels do not give us this interesting but unnecessary information. We do know they made plans to get the palsied man to Jesus, the miracle worker. By the time they arrived, however, a crowd too large to enable them to enter the house had already gathered. The members of the crowd possessed their own reasons for wanting to get close to Jesus and chose not to make room for four men carrying a paralytic. The plan of getting the paralytic to Jesus seemed to have come to a fruitless end.

B. An Unorthodox Approach

People of faith refuse to give up when confronted with obstacles. The bearers of the paralytic were men of faith who were convinced that if they could find a way to get their charge to Jesus, their efforts would be rewarded.

First-century Palestine homes had flat roofs with stairs that led to the roof. The roof was made of trusses covered by a layer of mats of straw or other material covered by smoothed hardened clay. Yearly, before the rainy season, they patched and resealed their roofs with fresh clay. These men had probably been involved in building or patching their own roofs and knew that tearing off a portion of the roof was not an insurmountable task. They carried the man up the stairs and proceeded to tear off a section of the roof above where Jesus taught. They lowered the paralytic man down between the trusses, capturing Jesus' attention. Jesus acknowledged their efforts as an act of faith. Faith elicits a response from Jesus.

C. Faith and Works United

James shared an important truth: "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). Earlier in the chapter James expressed, "I will shew thee my faith by my works" (verse 18). While it may appear at first glance that James and Paul disagree on works, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that they do not.

James and Paul both understood that faith and obedience are doctrinally synonymous. It is impossible to believe God without obeying Him. A couple of metaphors help express the relationship between faith and works: Faith and works are two sides of the same

coin. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised or it will become weak. You not only have to believe but also have to be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). Not only did the four men believe that Jesus could heal the paralytic, but they also put in the necessary work to get the man before Jesus so He would heal him. Jesus did not ignore the exhibition of their faith.

D. Faith's Reward

Jesus responded by going above and beyond even what their faith expected. The palsied man not only received the desired healing of paralysis but also walked away with his sins forgiven. Jesus removed the malady that kept his limbs from working and gave them the strength to work immediately. When the object of our faith is Jesus, miracles are reasonable expectations. When approached in faith, Jesus graciously responds with love and compassion.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Take time to consider these three important takeaways from this lesson. First, we all need to acknowledge Jesus' deity. Jesus inquired of His disciples, "But whom say ye that I am?" (Matthew 16:15). He previously asked them who others said He was. But the most important issue was who they said He was. That remains true for us today.

Reading what Apostolic writers tell us about the oneness of God is of value. Listening to great Apostolic preaching on the oneness of God is inspiring. But at the end of the day, we must conclude for ourselves who Jesus is.

REFLECTIONS

- How passionate are you concerning the oneness of God?
- Have you lost any of the amazement over your sins being forgiven?
- Consider what obstacles your faith has helped you overcome recently.
- When was the last time you went out of your way to help someone to be ushered into the presence of God? How did that experience make you feel?
- Whom do you know who needs a miracle and what can you do to facilitate that person's receiving it?

Ideally we will come to an acknowledgement of His deity and say as did Thomas that He is "my Lord, and my God." C. S. Lewis stated in *Mere Christianity*, Jesus is either Lord, liar, or lunatic. He could not have been just a good man. He claimed to be God, and if He was not He was either lying or crazy. We cannot remain neutral on the matter.

Second, everyone needs the salvation that uniquely comes through His name (Acts 4:12), for only He can forgive sins. Jesus, Almighty God, possesses the authority to forgive sins. He exercises that authority when we express our faith in repentance and submit to baptism in His name (Acts 2:38). Everyone needs to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name to receive the remission of their sins, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Those who know who Jesus is and have received the miracle of salvation made possible by His death on the cross have a responsibility to share the gospel with the world.

Our third takeaway is that we need to exercise our faith in Jesus, continually believing Him for miracles. Born-again believers live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). It is imperative that we exercise our faith in God and share our faith with others. The world is filled with people paralyzed by sin, whose only hope is Jesus. They desperately need someone to carry them to Jesus and assist them in overcoming any obstacles to reaching Him. Jesus is in the house. He bids the weary and heavy laden to come (Matthew 11:28). We should exercise our faith and help usher them into His presence. ■