

The Authority to Forgive Sins

Mark 2:1-12

We have just finished the first chapter of Mark's Gospel – and I want to draw your attention to a word that is repeated 6 times in that chapter. The Greek word I am referring to is “eramos” – which is translated in the New International Version as “desert”. In verses 3 and 4, multitudes of people went into the desert to hear John the Baptist and repented of their sins and were baptized. In verses 12 and 13 Jesus was sent into the desert by the Holy Spirit, where He encountered and defeated Satan. In verse 35, Jesus went into the desert, a “solitary place” to pray. Verse 45, tells us that so many people were seeking Christ for healing, that He had to stay in the desert, “lonely places.” It was there that people went to hear Him preach and see Him cast out demons and heal multitudes of people. By drawing attention to these important activities that took place in the desert, Mark is pulling us back to the Old Testament passage of **Isaiah 35:1-8**,

“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the desert will rejoice and blossom [a desert is a vivid outward picture of the inward spiritual barrenness of fallen people] . . . ² they [spiritually barren people] will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God. ³ Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’ [Jesus was wrecking havoc against Satan's domain by casting out many demons. Everything we read in verses 5-6, Jesus was doing in the Gospel of Mark]. ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert [which transforms barrenness in to life] . . . ⁸ And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those

who walk in that Way”

Acts 9:2 and 19:9 inform us that Christians were initially known as followers of the Way. And so Mark is letting us know that the glorious blessings promised in Isaiah 35 were being fulfilled by Christ. It was a great time of joy and wonder for the nation of Israel.

Let’s now turn our attention to Mark 2:1-2,

“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home [probably referring to Peter and Andrew’s house].² So many gathered that there was no room left, not even by the door, and he preached the **word** to them.”

In the context of Mark’s Gospel, what was the “**word**” that Jesus preached to them? Mark 1:15, has already given us a very good summary of what Jesus was continually proclaiming to the Jewish people, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe this good news.”

When Jesus said that “The time is fulfilled” – He was referring to the Old Testament promises of Messiah’s coming. For example, Genesis 1:15 declares that the seed [the offspring] of a woman will crush Satan’s head. II Samuel 7:12-13, promises that a descendant of David will build a temple and establish a throne that will last forever. Isaiah 7:14 reveals that a virgin will conceive and bear a son – who is Immanuel – God with us.

Isaiah 9:6-7 states with prophetic certainty,

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”

The time for these great blessings to begin unfolding had come. Jesus, God's Messiah, was present on earth and the Kingdom of God was breaking out. And so what is the **"kingdom of God"**? Jesus gives us a broad definition of God's Kingdom in His model prayer to God the Father, **"Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."** God's kingdom is manifested on earth whenever and wherever the will of God and the Lordship of Christ is embraced and cherished. The nation of Israel should have been the place where God's will was embraced. But for the vast majority, it was not.

This is why the "word" that Jesus preached to them included the need for the Jewish people to repent of their sin. Here is an important question: **What must happen in order for people to repent of their sin?** They must recognize they are sinners. If you don't think you are a sinner, then you have nothing to repent of.

What is God's standard, His measuring stick for determining if we are sinners? God's Moral Law. I have yet to speak to a person who claims he has never stolen, lied or coveted what belongs to someone else. In other words, the 8th, 9th, and 10th commandments show that all have sinned and come short of God's standards. Mankind's dilemma is our sin. If God gives us what we deserve, we will be condemned. And if we are to escape condemnation, we must throw ourselves on the mercy of the One who has every right to condemn us.

The good news of the gospel is not that we can fix ourselves. We cannot enter into peace with God until our sins are forgiven and cleansed.

The good news of the gospel is that this can happen through repentance and faith in Christ. Embracing Christ as our Savior, Lord and King is the only way people can become citizens of God's Kingdom.

Let's continue reading at Mark 2:3-12,

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus [probably the roof of Peter and Andrew's house] and after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ ⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming [which means they thought Jesus was a boldfaced liar – multiplied by 10]! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ [this is absolutely true] ⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things? [If they really understood who the Messiah is, they would have known He has the authority to forgive sins] ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ [if this man had not walked for many years, then his legs were withered and looked like bones with skin on them]. ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all [he had instantly gained healthy muscles and the ability to balance himself to walk]. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

This is just me, but when I read this account I could not help thinking that the men who dug through the roof of Peter and Andrew's house, had a responsibility to repair that roof. Not to do so would have been a form of thievery. I say that because if those men just walked away after their friend was healed, then Peter and Andrew had to buy the materials to repair the

roof and then invest their time and labor to fix it. If we damage what belongs to our neighbor, we need to make it right. That is what loving our neighbor looks like. If Peter and Andrew told the men not to worry about it, then that is what forgiving our neighbor looks like – which is also a tangible demonstration of loving our neighbor.

Mark 2:10 is the first time Jesus refers to himself as the “son of man.” He uses this title 15 times in the Gospel of Mark. It is his favorite way of referring to himself. From where does that title come? It comes from **Daniel 7:13-14**, which is a vision Daniel saw about 500 years before Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension in heaven,

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was led into his presence [this is Christ’s ascension].¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him [some translations say “served him” – but in the book of Daniel, “serve” is a synonym for “worship”. To serve is to worship – not just in word, but by deeds as well. We all know that only God is to be worshiped because that is what the 1st Commandment says]. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

Daniel 7:14 tells us some important truths about Christ and His Kingdom. The fact that the Son of Man is worshiped, means He is Divine as well as being human. Because Christ is God the Son, He has the authority to forgive sins. The teachers of the Law, who were condemning Christ, demonstrated that they did not understand that God’s Messiah has that authority. Nor did they believe Jesus was the Messiah.

What do we learn about Christ's Kingdom from Daniel 7:14? It is a kingdom that will never be destroyed. The enduring nature of Christ's Kingdom – stands in contrast to the temporary nature of the four world empires mentioned in **Daniel 2:31-35**. Listen as Daniel explains Nebuchadnezzar's God-given dream,

“You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue – an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance [this statue was made of four different metals, which represented four world empires in which the kings were worshiped. Daniel continues to explain].³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold [representing Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire], its chest and arms of silver [referring to the Medo-Persian Empire – which conquered the Babylonian Empire], its belly and thighs of bronze [the Greek Empire – which conquered the Persian Empire],³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay [iron, which is the strongest of the metals, represented the Roman Empire – which conquered the Greek Empire and is the most emphasized of the four empires].³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands [the rock is referring to the incarnation of Christ and the Kingdom he planted. Both had a humble beginning]. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them [Christ began his Kingdom during the days of the Roman Empire].³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces [the mighty Roman Empire, which incorporated into itself the three previous world empires – is no more] . . . But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.”

The source or origin of Christ's Kingdom – is from heaven. But it is a kingdom designed to function here on earth.

Let's get back to Christ's authority to forgive sins. I can't help but think that if Jesus had just physically healed the cripple man, things may have gone pretty smoothly that day. But Christ intentionally spotlighted

His authority to forgive that man of his sins. And that is what scandalized the teachers of the Law. They may have also been upset by how Christ defended that claim. Let's face it, Elijah, Elisha and the Apostles performed healing miracles – but they never claimed to be God or to have authority to forgive sins. Why did Jesus make that claim? Because it was true. And by stating that He had the authority to forgive sin, Jesus identified Himself as the suffering servant of **Isaiah 53:5**, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” The One who took our sins upon himself and paid the penalty in full upon the cross, has the authority to forgive sin.

And so does the One who inaugurated the New Covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31. Listen to one of God's promises for those who enter into the New Covenant, “For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more” [**Jeremiah 31:34**]. We are going to be taking Communion this morning, and I want you to remember that when we drink of the cup, Jesus said, “This cup is the New Covenant in my blood.” In Old Testament times, people trusted in God's temporary provision for their sins, which was the shed blood of a ram or bull without blemish, which was designed to point to Christ, the sinless Son of God. When people trusted in God's temporary provision for their sin, it was reckoned by God as trusting in Christ, who is God's perfect, once-for -all-time provision for our sin.

I believe that when Jesus saw the paralytic's faith in Him, He reckoned

it as faith in His coming atonement for the sins of that man and for all those who trust in Him. Friends, what Christ accomplished on the cross is a sufficient atonement for the sins of all people of all ages. But it is only efficient and effective for the sins of those who repent and trust in Christ alone for their salvation.

Let's go back to Mark 2:10-12,

“He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ ¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”

I would like to think that when this healed man later walked the streets of Capernaum, and people who had known him when he was crippled – asked in amazement what happened? – that he explained Jesus had healed him of his physical malady. But I hope he then went on to praise Jesus for doing something for him that was far greater. Jesus had forgiven him all his sins and enabled him to be a citizen of Christ's Kingdom.

And may I ask each of you this morning, are you a citizen of that Kingdom? We can only enter into it by being born again through faith in Christ. I am pretty sure that some of you here this morning **hope** you are a citizen of Christ's Kingdom, but you are not sure. If that is true, then you are not yet in the place where God wants you to be. And where does God want us to be? The Apostle John tells us in **I John 5:13**, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” God doesn't want you to **hope** you have eternal life, He wants you to **know** you have eternal life in Christ.

In **I John 1:6** we are told something that genuine Christians don't do, "If we claim to have fellowship with him [God] yet habitually walk in darkness [known sin], we lie and do not live by the truth." If I am comfortable and enjoying what I know to be sin, then I do not yet know Christ in a saving way. **I John 2:9** states, "Anyone who claims to be in the light [of Christ's Kingdom] but hates his brother is still in the darkness." If we refuse to forgive someone who has sincerely asked for our forgiveness, then we do not yet have eternal life. We should know that something is dreadfully wrong if we say we believe that Jesus has forgiven us an Empire State Building amount of sin against Him – and yet we adamantly refuse to forgive someone who has committed what is in comparison – a thimble sized sin against us. If Jesus has forgiven **us** all our sins, then **we** must be forgiving people as well. Let's pray.