

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL FORGIVENESS"

(Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

8.30.20

INTRODUCTION

While last week featured four specifically recorded miracles, as well as an unknown number of anonymous miracles, this week we're going to be looking at two incredible miracles that are contained in the same magnificent story. Now Mark will be our chief storyteller. He is thought to have gotten the bulk of the information that became his gospel from Peter, one of Christ's disciples and somebody who was an actual eyewitness to this moment. But we will also be bringing in contributions from Matthew and Luke as well to more fully flesh out this wonderful story, making our story a very harmonized one, with each of these gospels contributing their own colors to the overall picture. But first, let's start our study with a **word of prayer**.

TEXTS

Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town - Matthew 9:1.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that He had come home - Mark 2:1.

In the context of the moment, Matthew tells us that Jesus had been ministering somewhere along the southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. If we understand where this ministry had taken place, His crossing to return back to Capernaum (His unofficial headquarters) would have been a boat trip of just over five and a half miles. So, after some time had elapsed following the healing of the man with leprosy, Jesus was back in His "headquarters" city. Now remember the healings we looked at last week, when a man healed from leprosy had, contrary to Christ's command, told everyone who came his way how he had been healed and, as a result, Jesus had to travel almost in secret because of the massive crowds? We're about to get a picture of exactly what that looked like.

They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door - Mark 2:2a.

Have you ever gone to a real popular restaurant and could hardly get in the front door because of the crowd, the waiting area seemingly even more crowded than the restaurant itself? Or maybe tried to get into a really popular store or shopping center at Christmas? That gives you some idea of what this might have looked like - jammed in this place like the proverbial sardines in a can. But what mattered more than being jostled and squeezed by too many people in too small a room was the fact that Jesus of Nazareth - the great teacher and the amazing healer - was there. Being poked and prodded and pushed was just details.

[H]e preached the word to them - Mark 2:2b.

Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick - Luke 5:17.

Once again, we see the dual ministries of Christ - proclaiming the word and healing the sick - coming into play. We have already seen that Jesus presented the word of God in a way that was absolutely stunning and, according to the Greek, had people besides themselves with

what they were hearing, literally stopping them in their tracks. So, His teaching inspired the crowds. And in a time of virtually no way to be healed, either from illness or injury, the guarantee that coming to Jesus meant an end to suffering brought crowds as well. Bottom line: Being with Jesus meant being with crowds. And the Greek tells us that this moment of teaching was actually going on for some length of time. And still the crowds remained.

But notice something else: Luke tells us very specifically that "Pharisees and teachers of the law" were in attendance this day, and that they had come from literally all over the country - "every village of Galilee," plus from the south - Judea and, again being specific, Jerusalem. Including Jerusalem in this narrative, besides emphasizing the lengths to which people were going to see this "radical rabbi," also hints that Jesus was getting renewed attention from the Jewish leadership - the Sanhedrin. Jesus is proving to be much more than just a momentary fad. Instead, Jesus seems to be growing in popularity - and in impact. The attendance of the Pharisees suggests that they are feeling the need to ramp up their scrutiny of this Nazarene.

Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on - Mark 2:3-4. Can you imagine this scene? Jesus is teaching in a house just packed to the gills. And people are just hanging on His every word. And all of a sudden - a light from above. Do you wonder what people were saying? "I don't remember a window there," or "Hey, could you guys wait with your roof repair until we're done down here?" But bit by bit, the hole in the roof was becoming larger and larger. And all of a sudden - the most amazing thing: A guy, lying on a mattress of some sort, was actually being lowered into the room by four other guys. And he was going to wind up landing right in front of Jesus. What's going on here, anyway?

The Greek tells us that the man being brought to Jesus was suffering from a "palsy." Now this disease brought about a gradual paralysis that would eventually render the victim unable to do anything for himself. The fact that he had to be carried the whole time lends credence to just how completely helpless he was.

What is really cool about this moment is that the four guys who brought this man to Jesus did not let the fact of the crowd keep them from their "mission," so to speak; they simply improvised another way of getting their friend in front of Christ. Bottom line: They didn't care what they had to do to get their friend the help they had faith that Jesus could provide - and that should be pretty easy for us to understand: Any of us, either as parents or with dear friends and other loved ones, would stop at nothing to get those special people in our lives the help they would need in some kind of emergency. That's exactly what these four guys are doing here. Needing to carry this guy from some distance? So what. Massive crowd when we get there? So what. Jesus is in there somewhere but we can't even see Him? So what. Let's figure out a way to get past the crowd, to get our friend to Jesus so He can see him. Their faith refused to allow them to give up.

Now Middle Eastern homes of the time had flat roofs. Typically, these one-story dwellings had a stairway directly on the side of the house that could bring somebody up to the roof. And once up there, it would have presented no great difficulty getting the materials out of the way to create an opening large enough to let this guy on his bed down to where Jesus was teaching.

And again, it probably wasn't going to matter what that roof was made of or how it was constructed. Whatever they needed to do to make history's first "sunroof" to accomplish their mission, then that's what they're gonna do. So, they make their hole, and lower their friend down into the presence of Christ.

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

Notice that all three gospel writers continue their reporting with the same words: "When Jesus saw their faith." What a wonderful impression their actions were having, and what a wonderful message their actions were delivering. They had put feet to their faith. This is what "faith looking like something" looks like. Their faith in Jesus was the catalyst for everything they were doing.

Now as this man is lowered into the presence of Christ, it was probably pretty obvious that, whatever the technical condition, he was as helpless as a newborn. So, the probable assumption from people in that moment was, "Oh, cool; we get to watch Jesus heal again." But something else happened first - another kind of healing that, along with bringing another kind of cure, also brought controversy. Jesus looks with love and compassion at the man, being very touched by this expression of complete faith in Him - and then says something totally unexpected, again from all three writers: "Your sins are forgiven." But before that comes the way Jesus addresses this invalid; according to Matthew and Mark, Jesus addresses him as "Son." The Greek word is *teknon* and it is a word that reflects a parent's love and care, or a brotherly affection, even a reverence, from one person to another. It's going to be Christ's comment about this guy's sins that's going to get the attention, but we miss something incredibly beautiful if we overlook Christ's simply address - not just the word but what it expresses about Christ's love for this broken man, and His tender empathy and embrace of His situation. It is a complete love that wraps around this man completely, like a mother tenderly embracing her child, that is going to consume both his spiritual needs and his physical ones. So, everything that is going to happen in this moment is coming from that starting point that Christ expresses so wonderfully to this guy, essentially telling him: "My friend, you are loved."

And then comes the moment, as all three writers record: "Your sins are forgiven." In the Greek, Jesus is literally taking command of this man's sins by telling him: "Your sins have been and now stand dismissed." In other words, in no uncertain terms, Jesus is telling him: "Your sins are finished; they are done. It's over." In fact, his sins are being dismissed so thoroughly that they will never be able to be found again, reminding us of the precious promise of Psalm 103 - a verse that would have been available to people then as well as now: ***[A]s far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us - David, Psalm 103:12.*** And as God Himself had said through the prophet Isaiah: ***"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more" - God speaking, Isaiah 43:25.*** Regarding this man's sins, to borrow a line from Christ Himself: "It is finished."

That so resonates with me. One of the most memorable moments of my life was graduating from Marine Corps boot camp in San Diego. When you start that ordeal, it feels like it is

going to go on forever, like it will never end. But then one day, it does. And I will never forget that moment when our platoon commander, Staff Sgt. Cakebread, turned and said to us, "Platoon 2123! Dismissed!" Standing at attention, we responded as one, "Aye aye, sir," and the platoon as one performed an about face. At that moment, we began to cheer and throw our caps up in the air, and people started taking pictures. Why? We were no longer worms or germs or maggots or things or stuff I probably can't say in church that we had heard for the past three months. We were actually US Marines! Our drill instructors, the most dreaded men in our lives, were suddenly our peers; we were now all, them and us, in that instant, on the same team. And the joy and celebration? Boot camp - the hard work, the pain, the punishments, the demands, the constant drills, the intimidation, the in-your-face shouting, the constant push, push, push to make you do more than you ever thought possible - it was finally done; it was over. I remember thinking those exact words at that moment: "It is finished!" Few completions have thrilled me more. And now this man's sins, every one of them, are being given that exact same message.

Matthew includes that kind of joy in this moment for this paralyzed man; according to his gospel, Jesus invites this man to "take courage, cheer up, be of good cheer"; in fact, in the Greek, Jesus is literally commanding him to be of good cheer. Why? Jesus is removing the gloom that sin had brought into his life and is replacing it with something infinitely better: the presence of Himself. Sin will now be replaced by the love of God through Christ Jesus. That is something to cheer about! And we haven't even gotten to the physical healing yet. But for Christ, first things first. The healing of the soul will always take precedence over the healing of the body.

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" - Mark 2:6-7.

If all these religious guys had come hoping to see if there was some chink in Christ's armor in the way He taught and responded and believed that they could jump on and scream about, this was it. I'm sure at first, because of just how profoundly radical Christ's words were, that they were initially thinking, "Have I just heard what I think I just heard?" But then as they came to the conclusion that they had heard correctly what Jesus said to this poor paralyzed guy, they were all over it. Their conclusion? "This guy is speaking blasphemy." And, as both Mark and Luke report: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

You know what? They're absolutely right. That is something only God can do. For any ordinary man to say these things, he would be pretending to be God - which would be the worst kind of blasphemy. So, there were only a limited number of ways they could go with this: 1) They could accuse Jesus of blasphemy - claiming the authority to do something only God could, that he actually knew what he was doing and did it anyway and therefore, according to Mosaic law, he was guilty of a capital offense worthy of death, or 2) this guy's a loon! Not once did they see or even consider a third option: that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, doing what only God could do because "God" is exactly who He was. They only saw the man, not the Messiah. Their critical hearts and closed minds weren't going to allow for anything else.

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? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - Mark 2:8-10a.

Busted! Guess what, guys? Jesus knows what you're thinking - both your choosing to ignore the evidence that He might be something more than just a man, and your joy at thinking, "Good; we got this guy now!" And notice how Jesus words His response to them: Not "what are you thinking," which would imply that He didn't know their thoughts, but rather "Why are you thinking this way?" which screams loud and clear: "I know your thoughts; I know your intentions. Now tell me why!"

You see, from their point of view, not only was this oddball rabbi blaspheming but, as if that wasn't bad enough, He was totally trying to overthrow the Mosaic Law - literally the most fundamental instructions for life there were. For absolution of sins, it required an animal sacrifice, the person's sins being transferred from themselves to the animal and, in the giving of its life, their sins were removed - a declaration that could only be made on God's behalf by His representatives: the temple priests. And now this arrogant Galilean thinks He has the right to make such a declaration to this guy, who is probably just some "who cares" sinful wretch anyway.

But through Matthew, we see that Jesus not only knew their thoughts, but the intent behind their thoughts. And that's where Mark is in complete agreement when he makes note of the fact that Jesus knew "what they were thinking in their hearts." They weren't simply wrong in their conclusion; they were wrong in their intent. Their wickedness was in their desire to do Jesus injury, to cripple and destroy Him and His ministry. And that was going to be confronted right now.

How? By showing the authority that gave Him the power and the right to exercise forgiveness of sins. The showing was important; that's why He asked them such a profoundly insightful question: "So guys, tell Me: Which is the easier - to tell this guy his sins are forgiven, or to tell him to stand up, pick up his mat, walk on out of here and go home? Please; I'd love to know what you think." Now, who has who, right where He wants them?

It appears to be an obvious, even easy, question. Anybody can say, "Your sins are forgiven." How is anybody gonna know if that's true? You can't look into a person's soul and view all the wrongs, to see how big the pile and then how complete the vanishing. That's a spiritual thing.

But on top of all this, look at how He frames His authority and power; in fact, all three gospel writers acknowledge it with the exact same words: "I want you to know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins." Wow: what a statement - "the Son of man has authority." So, what is Jesus saying? "Who is this 'Son of man?'"

Jesus answers by directing their attention to a prophesy from Daniel. Here are those words - words that would have very likely been known by the leaders to whom Jesus was now directing His remarks: ***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 and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed - Daniel 7:13-14.***

This was a prophecy that had always been understood in Messianic terms, and now Jesus is applying those Messianic terms to Himself.

And here's how He is connecting this prophecy to Himself:

1. The phrase "one like a son of man" refers to God becoming flesh and dwelling among us - in this case, Jesus, being fully man and fully God. He would appear to us as a man and yet continue to be God as well.
2. The phrase "coming with the clouds of heaven" is a phrase that indicates divinity, in this case, the divinity of the son of man.

So, Jesus is unmistakably, unapologetically, declaring Himself to be divine - to be the outcome, the fulfillment of that prophecy.

And then, to demonstrate that He is who He says He is and that He does indeed have that kind of power and authority, Jesus does a physical, visible thing to support the spiritual, invisible thing: He performs a healing, to both verify and validate His claim.

So He said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home" – Mark 2:10b-11.

Not even waiting for an answer to His question, He redirects His eyes away from the religious guys back to the paralyzed guy, and He says: "OK friend, time to go. Get up, take that mattress of yours with you, and walk on outta here. I love your faith. Now go home!"

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!" - Mark 2:12.

Then the miraculous happened. The man, so helpless he had to be lowered down to Jesus, now got up, gathered his mat, and walked out, as Mark writes, "in full view of them all." And that was the whole point. While forgiving sins could not be seen, a healing like this could not be missed. If Christ couldn't do it, He'd look like an idiot, no more powerful than any other guy. But if He could do something like this - taking a man from completely helpless to completely healthy - and do it just by the power of His word, guess what? The same power that enabled the physical healing was available to enable the spiritual healing He had declared when He said, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now remember when we talked last week about the power of Jesus' miracles proving the power of His words, and how the visible power seen in His miracles was supposed to give people the idea that God was, indeed, with them? Well, if you notice their response, while all three of the gospel writers note that everybody "praised God," they also show three distinctly different, and "swing-and-a-miss" wrong, responses to who they think this Nazarene truly is:

1. Matthew tells of people praising God "for giving such authority to men."
2. Mark writes that the people said: "We have never seen anything like this!"
3. Luke says the people declared: "We have seen remarkable things today."

Do you see what's missing? The acknowledgement of who Jesus of Nazareth truly was - the only begotten, one and only Son of the one true God. This was God in human form doing all these things - and people just looked at the surface and never looked into the depths, the real truth of this Man.

And what of the Jewish leadership that was present to witness, to actually see that moment? Oh, what an opportunity they missed by refusing to surrender to the God-man standing before

them. They had just seen what OT Scriptures had proclaimed so clearly, in a wonderful "before and after" picture:

1. A "before" picture from Isaiah, commenting on the results of rebellion against God by the nation of Israel, creating an image much like what they could see in this completely paralyzed man: ***Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness - only wounds and welts and open sores - Isaiah 1:5b-6a.***
2. And then the wonders in the "after" picture provided by the loving grace of God, as shared by David and resonating with what they had just witnessed by the same loving grace of this rabbi from Nazareth: ***Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits - who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's - David, Psalm 103:1-5.***

They saw it all; it was all there for them to claim. Jesus was showing them precisely who He was. And they simply said: "No. He's not for us." And, eventually, they left. How many of them would be standing before a cross holding this same Nazarene, some three years from that moment? How many in looking at His suffering then would have brought their minds back to this moment? And how many of them will one day stand before the judgment seat of God, looking again at this Nazarene, now triumphantly standing before them as King of kings and Lord of lords, confirming everything they heard and saw that day in Capernaum - and realizing that they are going to be living with that mistake of closing their hearts and minds to Him for all eternity.

Now this is relatively early in Christ's earthly ministry, and He would continue to faithfully present Himself, through words and works, as God's answer to a much greater illness, a much greater injury, than this man's shattered body: the brokenness of the human soul. Jesus remained with them, obediently following His Father's plan, obediently declaring His Father's truth.

APPLICATION

Now this is probably a really good point to touch base with the definition of "miracles" so we all know what we are talking about. Now a simple definition of a miracle is: "An ordinarily impossible event that reveals divine intervention in the lives of people."

There are two amazing miracles performed in this story:

1. The first is the healing of this man physically. To go from that level of helplessness to being able to take his mat, stand up and walk his way home was truly amazing. I would have loved to have been there to see it all happen. What an amazing moment!
2. The second is the invisible - but no less real - miracle: the healing of this man spiritually by the forgiveness of his sins. This one was by far the greater miracle. Why?
 - a. It meets the greatest need - our spiritual need.
 - b. It costs the greatest price - Christ went to the cross to offer the spiritual healing of God's forgiveness.
 - c. It brings the greatest blessing - God now looks at one forgiven as though they have

never sinned.

- d. It brings the most lasting results - eternity in heaven in the presence of God himself.

Now as we mentioned last week, there is probably not a whole lot in terms of application where actual, verifiable, physical miracles are concerned. That is simply something that happens from within God's sovereign plan. However, the second miracle we see in this story - the forgiveness of sins - is a miracle through which there is so much to learn and apply.

Specifically, there are two incredibly important applications regarding forgiveness that this picture of forgiveness gives us:

1. How we look at the world - in all its chaos and sinfulness.
2. How we look at each other - in all those moments where stuff happens between people.

We need to live our lives in the light of the "miracle" of forgiveness. I could have never deserved it, or earned it, yet God poured that miracle out on me. I am as much the recipient of a miracle in my life as any miracle in the Bible - simply by the fact that my life has been made "all things new" by God gracing me with the miracle of forgiveness.

With those impacts in mind, two verses to keep in our hearts:

1. ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you - Paul, Ephesians 4:32.***
2. ***When they hurled their insults at Him, [Christ] did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly - I Peter 2:23.***

CONCLUSION

As we close, if we want to see our family fellowship here become better and brighter than it has ever been before, it is going to start with our living in the light of the miracle of forgiveness. And as we live in the reality of a miracle we could have never earned or deserved, let us share that miracle with all those around us - sharing our testimonies with all who have never had that experience, granting forgiveness to all who ask in the light of God's gracing us with His forgiveness, and never being afraid to utter those most difficult words, "I was wrong," to allow for forgiveness to take place between us and another.

When we forgive, we are acknowledging both the need and God's desire that we see each other as God sees us. When we ask for forgiveness, we are acknowledging God's delight in the restoring of relationships. As a church family, let us make the miraculous experience of forgiveness be one of the bedrock, fundamental cornerstones of how we must live if our desired outcome is to be a church family of believers that exists to live, in all ways, pleasing to God. Let's pray!