

# JESUS AND THE PARALYZED MAN

## MARK 2.1-12

Justice & Righteousness Series

### OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit of God, open my heart to receive God's word to me today. Make us aware of the presence of Jesus, that we might be touched by him. Amen.

### EXEGESIS

This is such a vivid story – the friends' loyalty to the paralysed man, their desperation in breaking through the roof, the confrontation with the scribes, and the dramatic healing. It gives us an insight into the excited chaos that must have often surrounded Jesus. But what does it tell us about him?

The clue is not to be misled by the scribes' outburst in verse 7: "He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" For Jesus had not in fact said, "I forgive your sins", but rather, "your sins are forgiven". This matters. In the law, which the scribes were supposedly such experts on, God had provided for forgiveness to be declared – in the temple. The whole point of the temple – the centre point of Jewish religion at the time – was that people could find forgiveness there.

Quite what the scribes were thinking is unclear. Crying 'blasphemy' is certainly a crowd-catching way to oppose Jesus. It would also imply that Jesus was in fact making himself out to be God, which would label him as something of a religious lunatic. Perhaps in their mind the semantics didn't matter: it was blasphemy enough to be claiming that sins could be forgiven here in a house in Capernaum, not in God's temple in Jerusalem. Of course, John the Baptist had also broken free of the temple system when he preached a baptism in the Jordan 'for the forgiveness of sins'.

Jesus does not engage in discussion with them; instead he claims that he will demonstrate his authority by healing the man - and he does. In the game of crowd-catching, he has clearly won. On a theological level too, what else could the scribes conclude but that God was on Jesus' side?

'Son of Man' (verse 10) is a complicated phrase. But we need not get drawn into it here. It is clear that Jesus is, at least, using the phrase to refer to himself. Perhaps more is implied about the role of humanity (the 'sons of men') in bringing forgiveness to others, but if so that is in the background. Jesus' words to the paralysed man 'I tell you ...' definitely put the focus on him (Jesus). Forgiveness, it seems, is available in a new way, outside of the bounds of the law, away from the temple, through the person of Jesus.

### REFLECTION

The scribes had a clear understanding of the system through which God worked. It was a system revealed by God himself. Indeed, that was the contrast made between Jesus and the scribes in Mark 1.21-28: the scribes did not have authority to challenge or develop what had been laid down. But Jesus shattered this system, refusing to be contained by it, claiming that, with him, everything had changed. Later in the chapter he speaks as if he is ‘the bridegroom’ and compares his actions to King David’s!

We too today have a system- drawn from the Bible, Christian theology, our experience of God, and cultural ideas of what human rights and justice demand. Instinctively, we believe that God works through this system. We believe we know what God does and doesn’t want. Indeed, those of us in some form of Christian leadership believe that God’s system involves us, just as the priests in the temple believed that forgiveness came through them. Do we run the risk of shouting ‘blasphemy’ at Jesus when he chooses to act outside of ‘the system’? Can we recognise and celebrate God when he is working in ways which don’t involve us?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How and where do you think we can access God’s forgiveness?
2. Jesus initially seems more concerned about the paralysed man receiving forgiveness, rather than healing. Would your priorities be the same?
3. Do you find it hard to cope with the idea of God working in ways which you don’t understand?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I pray that you would open my eyes to see the signs of your kingdom around me. Give me eyes to see you in unexpected places, and a heart to welcome you when you come in unfamiliar ways. Amen.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Duff, J., Peter’s Preaching: The Message of Mark’s Gospel (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2015)
- Ched Myers: Binding the Strong Man- A Political Reading of Mark’s Gospel (Orbis Books, 1988)