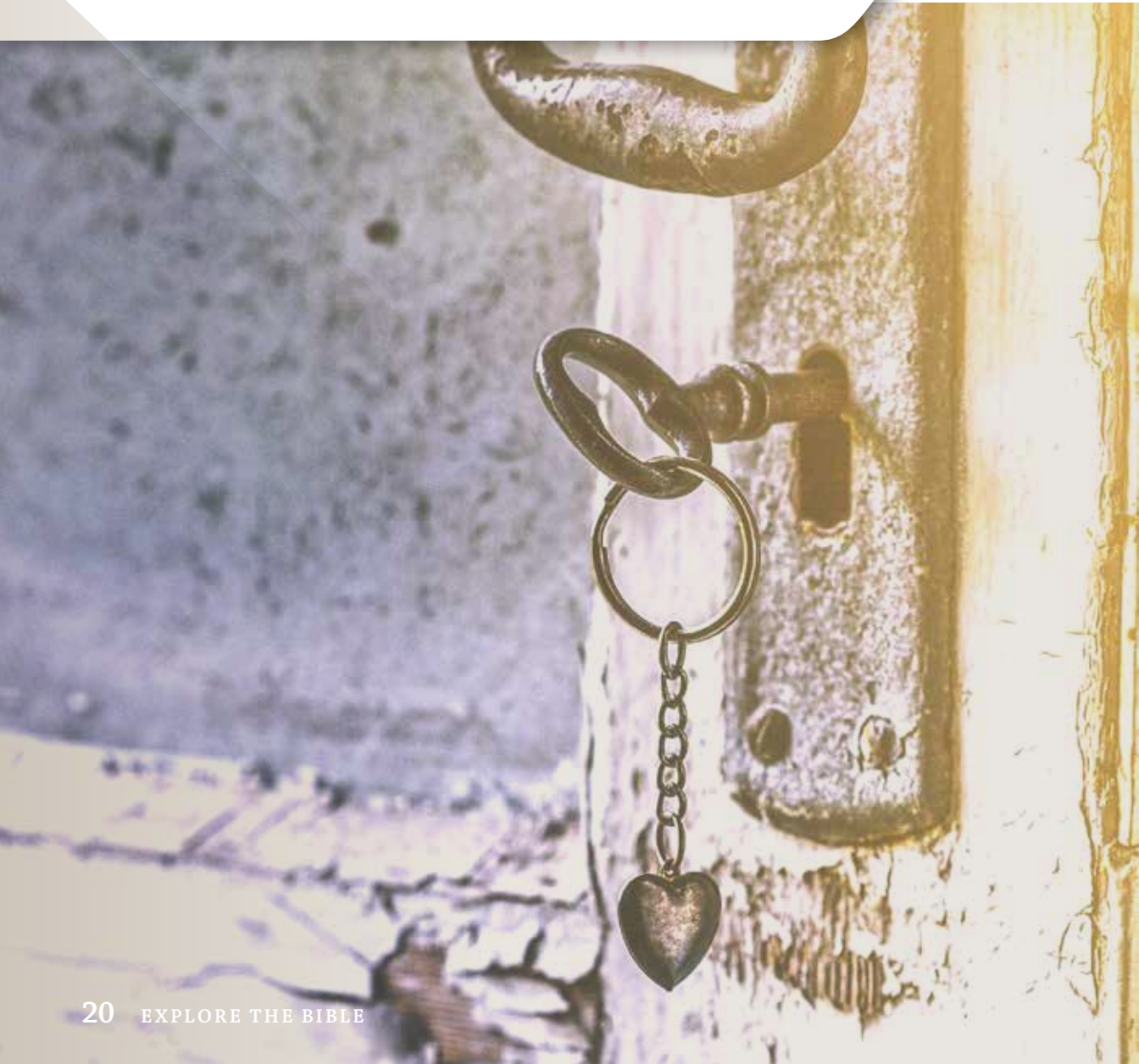


Session 2

Forgives

Jesus has the authority to forgive sins.

Mark 2:1-12



**What are some outrageous claims you heard someone make this week?
Did that person have the authority to back up those claims? Why or why not?**

In a world where complex arguments are summarized in brief social media posts, there is bound to be confusion and misunderstanding. Famous people fire off controversial messages that set the news cycles on fire. Then, after thinking it through, they take a step back. They distance themselves from their own words. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said a lot of things that ruffled a lot of feathers. But He never backed down from them—including His claim that He could do the unthinkable: forgive sins.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

After recording Jesus' interactions with His first disciples (Mark 1:16-20), Mark described a series of miraculous events. In addition to revealing Jesus' power and compassion, these accounts validate Mark's argument that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and that the kingdom of God had come to earth.

In the first account, Jesus displayed His authority over Satan by exorcising a demon (Mark 1:21-28). Then Mark shared how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, along with many other residents of Capernaum (1:29-34). This was followed by the cleansing of a leper in another part of Galilee (1:39-45). The people were astonished and recognized that Jesus was no ordinary person. In just a few short verses, Mark showed Jesus' authority through His teaching, calling, exorcising, and healing.

In this week's focal passage, Mark recorded Jesus' power not only over spiritual and physical illness but also over sin (2:1-12). Seeing the faith of a lame man and his friends, Jesus went a step further and declared that the paralytic's sins had been forgiven. This proclamation created a stir among the religious leaders. They rightly claimed that only God could forgive sins but refused to believe Jesus had authority on par with the Father.

To counter their accusations of blasphemy, Jesus healed the man's physical affliction. Like forgiving sins, such healing was something only God could do. So the argument was clear: Jesus had the same authority and power as God.

This was the first indication of a conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. It would not be the last.

MARK 2:1-12

1 When he entered Capernaum again after some days, it was reported that he was at home. **2** So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and he was speaking the word to them. **3** They came to him bringing a paralytic, carried by four of them. **4** Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after digging through it, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying. **5** Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, “Son, your **sins** **A** are forgiven.” **6** But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: **7** “Why does he speak like this? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins **but God alone** **B**?” **8** Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, “**Why** **C** are you thinking these things in your hearts? **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 so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he told the paralytic— **11** “I tell you: get up, take your mat, and go home.” **12** Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Passage Outline

Faith Expressed
(Mark 2:1-5)

Authority Questioned
(Mark 2:6-7)

Power Proclaimed
(Mark 2:8-11)

Authority Demonstrated
(Mark 2:12)

Keywords

- a. Jesus suggested a correlation between the paralyzed man’s sins and his paralysis. While sickness can be a result of sin, that’s not always the case. Sometimes sickness is present in a person for other reasons (John 9:1-3).
- b. The scribes did not recognize Jesus as God and therefore accused Him of blasphemy; this was the same charge that was brought against Jesus before His crucifixion (Mark 14:53-65).
- c. The Pharisees didn’t verbally request proof of Jesus’ authority. However, Jesus understood the inward thoughts of the scribes and therefore posed a question to them, demonstrating both His divine perception and His power.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Capernaum was a major fishing city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus used Capernaum as a kind of home base for His ministry.

After revealing how the man got to Jesus, Mark introduced the primary focus of the narrative: faith and forgiveness. Jesus recognized the faith of the paralytic and his friends. Faith always leads to action, and the efforts to bring the man to Jesus demonstrated a genuine belief that Jesus could restore his health. But Jesus saw more than healing faith in their actions; He saw saving faith as well.

How might a person show faith in a tangible way today?

In ancient Jewish thought, the heart was the equivalent of our heads, leaning more toward logic than emotions. The phrase “questioning in their hearts” indicates the scribes were struggling intellectually to reason through Jesus’ words and actions. They weren’t yet ready to openly argue with Jesus—that would come later. But their minds were thinking what their mouths would not say: Jesus was stepping over a very dangerous line.

How were the scribes right and wrong at the same time? What are some things about Jesus that challenge one’s ability to understand?

The scribes may have been keeping their thoughts to themselves, but Jesus knew exactly what was going through their minds. Whether this was divine knowledge or uncommon insight, Jesus knew there was a problem and chose to deal with it head on. Mark’s comment about Jesus’ perception again reminds readers of His Messianic identity.

How does accepting the teaching that Jesus is God affect other beliefs a person may hold?

On the question of authority, Jesus followed up His initial question by turning His attention from the religious leaders to the paralytic. Indicating that one who could forgive sins could also heal a lame man, Jesus commanded the invalid to get up and walk. In addition to proving His authority over physical ailments, the command to rise and go home would provide visual evidence of Jesus’ authority over spiritual matters as well. People would know that the man’s sins really had been forgiven because they had seen him walk out of the house under his own power.

 **KEY DOCTRINE: Jesus the Son** – Christ is the eternal Son of God (Luke 22:70).

The paralytic was healed in front of a packed house—literally. And he walked out in front of the very people who questioned Jesus’ power and authority.

What impact should Jesus’ ability to heal and forgive have on our lives? How should we respond to demonstrations of Jesus’ deity?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Jesus offers forgiveness to all who come to Him.
- Only God can grant the forgiveness of sin.
- As the Son of God, Jesus has the authority to forgive sin and bring healing to His creation.
- Jesus has the power to forgive and heal, which moves us to act obediently, invokes our awe, and causes us to worship Him.

Who is someone you and your group can help find Jesus? What are some practical ways you can work together to be Jesus' hands and feet on behalf of that person?

How do you see Jesus' authority over sin and sickness affecting your life today? How could that authority encourage you to step out into an area where you had been hesitating to trust Christ's power?

Faith always produces action. What practical steps can you take this week to grow in faith? How can you demonstrate your faith more effectively? In what areas should you seek forgiveness to clear the way for God to work in and through you?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Jesus often drew a crowd.

Read Mark 2:1-2, considering what drew the crowd to Jesus.

When Mark said that Jesus was at home in Capernaum, he likely meant that Jesus was staying in the home of Peter's family. The Gospel writer had already pointed out Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law in the fisherman's house, along with several other residents of the village (1:29-31). A similar standing-room-only crowd gathered for this stop in Capernaum. Mark noted that the crowd was so great that they couldn't all fit in the house. Most houses in this era would have had a handful of rooms, with the front door opening into a courtyard. Mark's phrasing suggests that even the courtyard may have been full.

Jesus was speaking the word to them. Mark had already shared that Jesus' message declared that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth (1:15). This was the word that Jesus likely taught on this occasion as well.

**What do you think drew people to Jesus? Do you feel that same draw today?
How do you show it?**

BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major

doctrine. – The question of the authority to forgive sins goes to the heart of Jesus' identity and to the heart of salvation. Read the following passages and take note of what they teach about forgiveness: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13; 3:13; Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:9. How can you relate these passages to Mark 2:1-12?

Day 2: Jesus provided spiritual and physical healing.

Read Mark 2:3-5, identifying the steps the friends took to help the man.

Because crowds packed the house and possibly the courtyard outside the house, the men had to be resourceful. First-century homes had flat roofs where items could be stored or people could sleep on comfortable evenings. A stairwell would run up one side of the building to provide access. The roof would have been built with a thin layer of tile or clay and some thatch or sod.

The four friends probably tied some type of rope to the corners of the mat to lower the man into the crowded house. Readers are left to imagine how the people reacted to pieces of roof falling on their heads as Jesus taught or how the homeowner (possibly Peter) felt about the hole in his ceiling.

While the physical healing was important, Jesus provided spiritual healing first. Healings had been recorded among the Old Testament prophets, but only Jesus claimed the authority to forgive sin.

How might you show faith in a tangible way today?

Day 3: We cannot always understand Jesus' abilities.

Read Mark 2:6-7, noting the scribes' questions.

We are not sure why the scribes were sitting in the house listening to Jesus. They had likely heard of Jesus' teaching and His miracles. As scribes, they served as the guardians of the law and probably wanted to make sure Jesus' message lined up with the accepted rules of the day.

Some things in life are beyond argument. Two and two always equal four, and gravity always keeps us from floating away. That's essentially how the religious leaders looked at the question of forgiveness. In their minds, only God can forgive sins. Anyone else who claimed to forgive sins was committing blasphemy.

Logically, their argument was spot on. No one besides God can forgive sins, and by claiming to forgive sins, Jesus was claiming to be equal to Him. That was blasphemy. In Jewish law, the penalty for blasphemy was death (Lev. 24:16). In fact, the Jewish leaders would raise this very accusation at Jesus' trial (Mark 14:55-64).

What are some things about Jesus that challenge your ability to understand?

Day 4: Jesus is God.

Read Mark 2:9-10, circling the word authority.

While Jesus' question may have given the scribes a chance to resolve one thorny issue, it created another problem that was even more troubling for them. If Jesus could bring a paralyzed man to his feet, then it follows that He also had actually forgiven the man's sins. That would mean He is God—and they would need to worship Him as such. For all Jesus' talk about the kingdom of God coming to earth, the religious leaders were not ready to accept Him as the Ruler of that kingdom.

Having posed a tough theological question about the authority of God, Jesus left no doubt in anyone's mind about what He was claiming. The term Son of Man appears in Mark's Gospel fourteen times, with this being the first. First-century Jewish listeners would have recognized it as a Messianic reference. Son of Man emphasized both Jesus' humanity and divinity, and He may have used it to challenge people to decide who they thought He was.

How does accepting the teaching that Jesus is God affect other beliefs you hold?

Day 5: Jesus' power leaves people amazed.

Read Mark 2:12, looking for the witnesses' response.

This display of power produced two primary responses from witnesses. First, they were astounded. While this was not Jesus' first miracle in Capernaum, the impact still left onlookers in a state of utter amazement. Second, they gave glory to God. They recognized this as an act of God, and Mark may have been pointing to this as further proof of Jesus' deity—along with the forgiveness of sins.

While Mark did not state it explicitly, we can assume that neither of these reactions pleased the scribes. They, along with the rest of Israel's religious elite, would continue to raise questions about Jesus' authority for the duration of His earthly ministry.

What impact should Jesus' ability to heal and forgive have on your life? How should you respond to demonstrations of Jesus' deity?



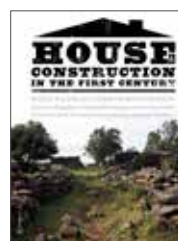
TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Mark 2, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

How do expressions of love show faith?

How is sin like paralysis? How can we move beyond our sin to take the fresh start Jesus gives us?

Jesus has the power to forgive and heal. How does this move you to obey Him? How does this invoke awe?



For additional context, read "House Construction in the First Century," available digitally in the Spring 2019 *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.