

Prayer

Dear Jesus, Son of the Father, Saviour of the world
 You are the Source of our greatest joy and happiness
 You are the One who brings hope and meaning to all we do
 You are the Love that brightens our hearts and colours our lives
 You are the most incredible Gift a woman or man could receive
 Dear Jesus, we receive You today with delight and expectation!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'New beginnings'

Ask the Lord to help you be someone who is ready to learn the lessons of the past and move on after things have gone wrong. Pray for the gifts of zeal and godly enthusiasm.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for news editors who decide what we hear about on the news*
 - *Pray for all who live in polluted cities where a short life is expected*
 - *Praise God for His mercy in keeping you safe as you travel*
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Meditation

Where can the care be found to feed the hungry today?
 Where can the will be found to challenge corruption today?
 Where can the strength be found to act for justice today?
 Where can the heart be found to meet the needs of the poor today?
 Where can the vision be found to safeguard our planet today?
 Where can the intellect be found to defend the truth today?
 Where can the courage be found to confront all evil today?
 Where can the passion be found to fight for what is right today?

Only where people discover that God is good,
 And Christ has won the victory over evil,
 Only where people face the fact of life
 That only He who made the world can save it.

Bible Study - Mark 2:1-12

¹ When He came back again to Capernaum a few days later, it was made known that He was in a home. ² So many gathered that there was no longer any room for them, not even around the doorway; but He preached the word to them. ³ Then they came to bring Him a paralysed man carried by four of them. ⁴ Because of the crowd they were not able to bring him near to Jesus, so they removed the roof near Him, and when they had broken through, they lowered the mat on which the paralysed man lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Child, your sins are forgiven.'

⁶ Now, some of the scribes were sitting there, thinking in their hearts, ⁷ 'Why does this person speak like this? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except God alone?' ⁸ Jesus immediately perceived in His spirit that they were questioning like this in their hearts, and He said to them, 'Why are you going over all these things in your hearts?' ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Stand up, take up your mat and walk?" ¹⁰ But so that you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...' He then addressed the paralysed man, ¹¹ 'I say to you, get up, take up your mat and go to your home!' ¹² The man stood up, picked up his mat and walked out in front of all of them.

This astonished all of them and they gave glory to God and said; 'we have never seen anything like this!'

Review

This powerful story adds considerably to our understanding of Jesus' early ministry. He went beyond performing healing miracles (as in chapter 1) to speaking with people about the forgiveness of sins (2:5). Mark reports that Jesus' first message was 'repent and believe ...' (1:15), and this preaching demanded a response. Up to now, people's response to Jesus' healing ministry had been predictable; Simon's mother-in-law received her healing and the leper rejoiced in his liberty, but no one had responded to the message Jesus brought about the Kingdom of God. All this was about to change. In the story of the healing of the paralysed man, Jesus did not confront evil like a demon He could dismiss (1:25,32), instead, another form of evil raised its head. Jesus had to deal with the evil of religiosity amongst the religious authorities, with scribes who believed they knew more about God than Jesus, God's Son (2:6). This was a pernicious evil, and Jesus fought it throughout His ministry

Mark describes how four friends brought the paralysed man to Jesus for healing, and everything that happened aroused a substantial response from the crowd (2:12). Initially, Mark tells us about the zeal of those who brought the paralysed man to Jesus (2:3,4), and Jesus perceived this action as faith on the part of the paralysed man, but probably his friends as well (2:5). Many others present at the scene would have seen what happened, and they would have perceived the same, that the man had been brought because of considerable practical faith that Jesus would heal. This faith enabled Jesus to deal with the paralysed man in a different way; He dealt with the man's spiritual as well as physical needs as He said, 'Child, your sins are forgiven!'

Such words astounded those who heard (2:6f.). The scribes who were watching and waiting, having heard of the reports of a 'Messiah', had remained silent until now, but they spoke out, saying, 'Blasphemy' (2:7)! This man Jesus claimed to forgive sins (1:5-9), and this meant that He claimed to do the work of God. They would not let Him get away with that!

The heart of this story is the tense moment when Jesus said to the scribes in the hearing of all, 'Which is easier, to say to the paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Stand up, take up your mat and walk?"' (2:9). Now, if we were faced with someone who was paralysed, we would have to be very careful about what we said. It would sound presumptive to say to someone 'your sins are forgiven.' What sins might these be? How are sins connected to illness? What would it do to a paralysed man to be told to walk? We would be concerned about all these questions and more, as people are to this day, but on that day and faced with that man; Jesus knew exactly what to do. He was in total command of both the man's spiritual and physical needs, Jesus said what the man needed to hear; so when Jesus told Him to walk, he knew he was healed, and was able to stand, pick up His mat and go home. To this day, we do not know what spiritual and inner needs were healed in that man by Jesus, but why should we know? Jesus did for the man what was required

This was not the interpretation of the scribes, however, and neither is it the interpretation of many scholars today, who find the passage impossible to handle. One commentary on Mark says this, 'There is no connection between sin and sickness, so this story makes little sense to us as it stands.' It is tragic that the foolishness of the scribes is repeated throughout history. The truth is that Jesus dealt with a man's spiritual and physical needs together; Jesus knew what He was doing and the paralysed man knew what Jesus was doing, because he responded to his healing and walked. Jesus was not just a healer; He was the Son of God come to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, demonstrated through forgiveness and healing.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Does it matter whether the paralysed man showed 'faith' or not, and why should Jesus ask for faith before healing people?
2. How are sins forgiven in the life of the church today, and what does this passage tell us about how this might be done?
3. Who are the equivalent of the 'scribes' in the world today; those who oppose Jesus and the evidence of His work amongst us?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It was many years ago that I first began to realise that spiritual things were not somehow different from everything else I knew about life. I think I was the victim of much common thought that says what we experience now is the physical world in which we live, and the spiritual world in which God exists, is somewhere else. Looking back, such a way of looking at things seems like the devil's ploy to keep people away from their God who loves them. Now that I have found the truth in God's Word, I find myself liberated; I am not physical and spiritual as if these were two different things. I am one person in Christ. In fact, when I am at peace with God, I am at peace with myself!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Consider how you think about the 'spiritual' world and the 'physical' world. Do you think of them as two different things? How do they relate to each other? Reflect on how the spiritual relates to the physical in your own life, and ask the Lord to show you your spiritual needs as well as your physical needs.*
- *Pray, and ask God to demonstrate the truth of His Word to people today, especially that each person is one creation, of body mind and spirit, and that all of us are most fulfilled when we are well in every area of our lives.*

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord, conquer our fears, have victory over our inhibitions, dispel our doubts and calm our failing nerves. Then, when we have found our peace in You, may we praise You with all our being, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN
