

Drop in Visitor, Part 1

Mark 2:1-12

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At some time in your life, you've probably received unexpected, drop-in visitors. How you felt about that probably depended on how prepared you were for them; if the house was clean, laundry put away, enough food to feed them, &, of course, on the visitors themselves. Jesus, who'd been overwhelmed by throngs of people wanting to see Him, once had an unexpected, drop-in visitor unlike any you've ever had. We find it in Mk 2:1-12; turn there. This begins a section where Jesus is being opposed. Between here & Mk 3:6 there are 5 clashes Jesus has with the religious rulers about His methods, men, & ministry. In each episode Jesus supersedes the Torah & the tradition of the elders, showing what happens when the Messiah goes public, exploding the customs & conventions of the day. John reports that **He came to His own, & those who were His own did not receive Him** (1:11). This collection of 5 stories is a good elaboration & commentary of that statement.¹ You know today's story well. It's a famous one we've all heard many times. **1-12**

1. The Place (1-2) After a preaching trip to various synagogues throughout Galilee (1:39), Jesus came back to Capernaum where He'd been based until the crowds mobbed Him & He went elsewhere. Vs 1 says this preaching tour took **several days**, which is a vague time reference letting us know Jesus has been gone for some period. When He came back, people at 1st were unaware He'd returned. Vs 1 also says Jesus was **at home**. What does that mean? Did He own a house, maybe a condo on the lake? Some think He moved His family from Nazareth to Capernaum, so now His mother, & possibly sisters & brothers, have a home here. Others say this is Peter's house, which Jesus used as a base of operations. Either way, everyone hears Jesus is back & once again a large multitude gathered to hear Him teach & watch Him perform miracles. The phrase, **it was heard**, is literally, *it was noised*. The news Jesus had returned created noise & stirred excitement. Mark emphasizes Jesus' popularity in Galilee by referring to crowds nearly 40x before chpt 10. Crowds form audiences for His teaching & are the recipients of His compassion, but Mark never

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, p 73

describes crowds turning to Jesus in repentance & belief as the gospel requires (1:15).² Notice again what Jesus is doing. He's about the business He knew was most important. As we'd expect, & is customary so far, the end of vs 2 tells us, **He was speaking the word to them.** Once again, His emphasis is on His message not on His miracles. This **speaking** isn't preaching as we know it but simply Jesus talking about God's Word. Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? The Living Word is speaking the written Word & explaining it. Remember, this is one reason why He came. His focus wasn't on miracles, healings, & supernatural experiences. His focus was on proclaiming the Word. Mark has already made this very clear (1:14-15, 21-22, 27, 38). Many people have **gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door** (2). When the residents of Capernaum heard Jesus was back, they all came over. Remember, His teaching with authority amazed them & His healing ability was thrilling. It's also possible they'd heard some religious leaders were in town to check up on Jesus & wanted to know what they thought. Vs 6 tells us **the scribes** were present & Luke makes it clear the Pharisees from all over Israel had come as well (5:17). These religious leaders considered themselves to be the most holy of all Jews, but their *holiness* was only external & superficial (Mt 23:28). It consisted mostly of keeping their own man-made rules & regulations they'd added to God's law (Mt 15:2-9).³ Along with the scribes & Pharisees, so many people had showed up, **there was no longer room inside.** & as others kept coming, you couldn't even get near the **door.** So here is Jesus in this home crammed with people & religious leaders, speaking God's Word. Now for the unexpected visitor.

2. The Paralytic 3-4

The account moves from the curious crowd of spectators to focus on **a paralytic, carried by four men.** His condition had made him dependent on others. Unlike lepers (1:40-45), those who suffered from paralysis weren't shunned by Jewish society. But, because disease & disability were assumed to be the consequence of sin, this man was probably looked down on by many. The crowd was so large that the door to the house was blocked. To get this man to Jesus, his friends carried him up

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, p 74

³ John MacArthur, *Mark 1-8*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary, pp 99-100

the stairs to the roof, & began breaking through the roof so they could let him down to Jesus. Houses then were normally one-story with a flat roof. Roofs were constructed of beams laid across & resting on the walls of the house. Between the beams were interlaced sticks & reeds & within these was woven a kind of thatch. On top of the thatch lay several inches of mud. The mud was then packed down until it was hard & stable. Stairs outside the building led up to the roof, which was the place where people would go for fresh air, something like a deck or patio today. As Mark tells us, **when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying** (4). It's amazing how determined these men were to bring their friend to Jesus. They didn't let the crowds defeat them, they damaged someone's roof, & they interrupted Jesus' teaching to get him there. These 4 men are on a mission to bring their friend to Jesus. I don't know about you, but I want to know the backstory. How was this guy paralyzed? Birth defect? Spinal cord injury? Degenerative disease? How long has he been paralyzed? How did he live? We don't know. But we see these 4 guys trying to get through an impassible crowd to the door of the house where Jesus was teaching (Lk 5:18), while carrying a litter with a paralyzed man. Look at the 1st 2 words of vs 4. Mark says, **being unable**. They were continually trying to get through, but couldn't. People weren't giving up their spot. They tried every way they could but the throng of people was too large, too packed, & too immovable (Lk 5:18). Then one of them came up with a brilliant idea. They must have gone up the stairs on the outside of the house & got on the roof. Refusing to give up, they concocted a creative plan for reaching Jesus. As Luke explains, **Not finding any way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof & let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus** (5:19). Or as Mark tells us, once there, **they removed the roof above Jesus; & when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying** (4). Don't you love these guys? *We're going to get our friend to Jesus. He can heal our friend, so if you aren't going to let us in the door, we'll find another way.* They literally *unroofed the roof*. It wasn't merely lifting a few shingles off. This was a process. Ever wonder what was going on in the room below them as they did this? What did people think was happening? Did Jesus keep teaching? Were the scribes irritated at the dust falling on them? If it was Peter's house,

was his wife or mother-in-law saying, *Peter! They're wrecking our home! Do something!* Whatever the case, finally some sunlight cracks through a small opening, which gets larger & larger while dirt & debris spills down on those inside. Was there coughing, concern, & comments like, *What are you guys doing? Knock it off!?* Once the opening was big enough, they lowered the pallet on which the man was lying. I don't think they brought ropes with them because this wasn't their original plan. Maybe they borrowed some of Peter's fishing gear to do the job. We don't know. But here he is & his friends had gone to extreme measures to get him to Jesus. I think we'll get to meet these guys in heaven because vs 5 tells us Jesus wasn't merely looking at the paralytic but was also looking at the 4 of them & He saw **their faith**. Don't miss that & we'll come back to it in a moment. But no one can doubt, they had...

A. Great love for their friend. They wouldn't be put off by the crowd & went to extreme measures to achieve their goal. They ignored the protests & judgments of those around them for the sake of their friend. Maybe he was family or someone they'd grown up with. Whatever the relationship, they loved him & whatever happened that day, healing or not, the paralytic was a blessed man because he had true friends. But along with great love, his friends also had...

B. Great faith in Christ. There's no way they would've gone to such extremes if they didn't believe that Jesus could heal their friend. A wavering faith would've objected when they couldn't get through the crowd or when they began lifting the stretcher up on the roof or began digging through it. Not these guys. They truly believed Jesus could & would heal him. Jesus saw **their faith**. This is the 1st mention of faith in Mark & he links it with actions rather than with knowing or feeling. All 5 appear to have faith. We know nothing of the beliefs of them except that they take action, including outwitting crowds & removing roofs to ensure their friend is brought to Jesus. The paralytic man wouldn't have let them do this if he too didn't have faith. Faith, as we see here, isn't knowledge about Jesus but active trust that Jesus is sufficient for one's deepest & most heartfelt needs.⁴ Maybe they were present at the miracle night in Mk 1:32. Maybe they were related to others who were healed. Maybe one of them had been healed themselves. We don't know. But we do know that

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, p 76

they knew Jesus could heal their friend. As we watch these men, you can almost hear the words of Heb 11:6 when it says, **Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is & that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.** That's the real picture of faith. Faith is rooted in truth, in God's declaration of who He is. It's rooted in the truths of the gospel. Faith isn't some kind of religious leap in the dark. It's rooted in truth, but it's not just that. It's important to know that faith is never just theological. Faith is never just conceptual. Faith is never just a mental approval to something. Faith is always action. It's always a way of living. It's always a lifestyle. With these 4 friends we see...

1) Their faith was persistent. Once they got their friend on the stretcher, there was no stopping them. When they hit a dead end or faced an obstacle, they said, *Let's try another way.* They didn't give up. Their faith showed its reality by its determination & stubbornness in refusing to give up hope. This could be an illustration of Js 2:26, **faith without works is dead**, showing that true faith, unless it shows its reality by action, is unreal & self-deceptive, & can't be expected to save.⁵

2) Their faith was creative. They could have easily given up. No one would blame them. But because they trusted Christ's ability to heal, & since they loved their friend, their faith became inventive. *Since we can't get through the door, let's go through the roof!* Their faith was persistent, creative, &...

3) Their faith was sacrificial. I assume someone had to pay for the roof or repair it themselves. That would take time, labor, & expense. One commentator said, *A faith that brings God's power to the world is always willing to pay the price.*⁶ How is this kind of faith seen? In service. In action. In attitude. That's what it means to live by faith. Oh, that God would give us this kind of faith, that we wouldn't only believe the truths of the gospel, but those truths would change the way we live so we can say we're doing what we're doing because we truly believe & have faith in God. We need to be faithfully persistent, sacrificial, even creative in our dependence on Jesus, just like these

⁵ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction & Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, p 121

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word, p 64

4 were. & now, the scene turns to the center of the room where the Prince & the paralytic meet face-to-face, resulting in...

3. The Pardon Look at **vs 5**.

Jesus doesn't say, *What are you doing? I'm busy here. Get out of here & we'll talk another time.* No, not at all. But it doesn't seem He understands. Jesus sees their faith & what He does next demands attention. Now imagine the crowd watching & listening to Jesus teach. Then the roof begins crumbling & a guy is lowered down. What an amazing event! What's Jesus going to do? My guess is that everybody was thinking, *We know exactly what He's going to do.* It was obvious that the biggest need in this guy's life is for healing, right? You'd think that's exactly what Jesus would be thinking, but it's not. He turns to the paralyzed man, & instead of saying, *Rise up, be healed,* He says, **Your sins are forgiven.** I can imagine the guy saying, *Um, thanks, but that's not what I'm here for. I've got a more immediate problem. I'm paralyzed!* There's nothing in the text that suggests he was looking for forgiveness; he was looking for healing. Notice too that Jesus didn't say, *Sir, your sins are forgiven.* He addressed him as a **son** & told him his sins were forgiven. **Son** is more than a term of endearment or affection, although it is that. It's a word of a superior who acts with authority & benevolence.⁷ Jesus looked past the physical needs of the man's body & saw the deeper need, the spiritual need of the forgiveness of his sins. Jesus knows something this man doesn't. He has a much bigger problem than being paralyzed. It was as if Jesus was saying to that crowded room of people & those who were straining to hear in the street outside:

*You see this man, unable to walk, & you immediately think of his tragic circumstances. You pity him because of the many things he can't do. You know how disappointed he must be about the circumstances of his life. When you see him you can't help but think of anything worse than to be paralyzed. Your heart goes out to him & you'd rejoice to see him healed, able to use his legs again, able to walk about as you can. All of that is well & good & perfectly understandable. I feel that way about him myself. My heart goes out to him. But it's essential you understand that lame feet & useless legs aren't this man's or any person's primary problem. You look only at the outward & the immediate condition of this man. I look deeper & find a far more serious & dangerous disability than being unable to walk. His legs will make his life hard in this world but his sins will ruin it in the life to come. His useless legs keep him from walking & running but his sins bring the judgment of God Himself! It's far better to be paralyzed in this world & go to heaven in the next than to have working legs in this world but find oneself in hell for eternity. & so, caring for this man as I do, I say to him not, "Rise & walk," but "**Your sins are forgiven.**"*

⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, p 76

What is more, I imagine Jesus saying, you think nothing could be more exciting than to see a crippled man miraculously made well. But you aren't measuring things correctly. Nothing more is required of Me to heal this man than that I say so. I have authority over illness, as you've already seen. If I should say, "Get up & walk," he'd get up & not only walk but run & dance. That would be a miracle because no physician can do such a thing. But to forgive this man's sins requires so much more than just saying it. It will require the greatest thing that's ever been done by God Himself. It will take more to forgive this man's sins than it took to create the entire universe, to hang the stars in their places, & to direct the forces that hold it all together. When God created the universe He only had to speak & it was so. Recreating this man's legs is nothing compared to that. But to forgive this man's sins requires the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit to do far more difficult things. It requires nothing less than My incarnation, with the disgrace, the suffering, the humiliation, & My death in your place. That's what's required to forgive even this one man's sins.

Do you see Jesus' point? It's a far greater thing to be forgiven by God than to be healed of even the worst physical condition known to men. Jesus is saying to him, *I understand your problems. I've seen your suffering. I'm going to get to that. But please know your biggest problem isn't your health or your suffering. It's your sin.*⁸

The paralytic & the 4 who carry Him are all determined to see Jesus, because they're all trusting that Jesus can, & hopefully will, heal him. Even though they interrupt His teaching, Jesus didn't rebuke them but approved of their faith. He attributed all their effort of going up on top & breaking through the roof & lowering their friend down as a good thing. It was **their faith**, it's plural. It's referring to all 5 guys. As they drop the paralytic in the Lord's lap, Jesus commends their faith by immediately turning His attention to their suffering friend by saying the greatest words ever spoken. **Son, your sins are forgiven.** Why does Jesus say this? Why doesn't He say, *Son, you're healed, you're no longer paralyzed?* That's why they brought him to Jesus. Why does Jesus start with forgiving his sin? Obviously, forgiveness of sin is the paralytic's greatest need. Cripples then suffered social stigma & the culture made it even worse by the belief that all disease & affliction were the direct result of your sin. If you were sick it meant God was angry at you. Think of Jn 9:1-2 as an example. It says, **As Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. & His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?'** The Rabbis even had a saying, *There is no sick man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him.*⁹ Though it's true that affliction, pain, & hardship are the result of the presence of sin in the world,

⁸ Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life & Death of the Son of God*, pp 29–30

⁹ William Barclay, ed., *The Gospel of Mark*, The Daily Study Bible Series, p 47

they aren't necessarily brought on by the specific sin of the person who's suffering. Like his fellow Jews, the paralytic probably believed his condition was punishment for his sin or that of his parents. That thought would intensify the weight of his suffering. In his mind, & in the minds of those around him, they all thought his paralysis was an indicator of his sinfulness & God's judgment for it. But by faith he was brought to Jesus. & although his theology was wrong, he was right in believing Jesus could help him. Forgiveness of sin is the paralytic's greatest need. Forgiveness of sin is God's greatest gift, because it meets our greatest need. Why? Because we're all full of sin, stained with sin, corrupted by sin, dead in sin, & need to be forgiven of sin. Like a credit card bill of a billion dollars that can never be repaid, we're in debt to God for sin & someone must pay our bill or we're going to suffer the eternal consequences. Sin is transgression of God's law, defiance of God's character, & defiling of God's image. Sin is rebellion against God & ingratitude toward God. The Bible uses words like *iniquity*, which pictures moral uncleanness. It's not just that we do wrong things. We're morally unclean. *Transgression*, which is high-handed sin. It's that drive that's inside us to willingly step over God's boundaries. *Sin*, which is our inability to rise to God's standard, missing the target every time. Sin affects the body, mind, & soul, & is incurable through any human means. Sin brings people under the dominion of Satan & under the wrath of God. Sin subjects us to trouble, emptiness, lack of peace, & results in eternal hell if we don't repent. **For all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God** (Rom 3:23). We're all in trouble & in a horrible, fallen condition. That's what makes forgiveness for sins the greatest news in the world. & it's what makes vs 5 so amazing, **Son, your sins are forgiven**. No one else could even come close to making that promise. But Jesus is God. He possesses the same authority as God. One commentator puts it this way,

Jesus utters no intercessory prayer to God for forgiveness & healing. He completely bypasses any priestly atonement ritual. He's not taking the role of a priest who could pronounce the forgiveness of sins on the basis of repentance, restitution, & sacrifice. He's not speaking on behalf of God as if He had God's power of attorney. Jesus remits sin on His own authority as if He were God.¹⁰

There's no question what Jesus is doing here. He's claiming for Himself to be equal with God, the One who forgives sin. He makes it very clear. The deepest need of each of us isn't for good health,

¹⁰ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, p

education, justice, or financial security. The deepest need of every person is God's forgiving, empowering, delivering grace. & once we experience it we must live that reality in our everyday lives. Try to feel the full impact of what Jesus says. Here are 8 truths from the phrase, **Son, your sins are forgiven**:

1) Jesus' forgiveness is intimate. Jesus didn't send an e-mail or phone call. It was personal. Jesus says, **Son**, sharing tender-hearted words of comfort & caring affection. As the paralytic comes to Jesus, Jesus lovingly identifies Himself with the paralytic & calls him, **son**. That's the intimacy that belongs to all of us who are His children.

2) Jesus' forgiveness is a fact. **Your sins are forgiven.** The verb **forgiven** doesn't indicate possibility or wishfulness. It's a fact, a stated reality, a certainty. When you're forgiven by Christ, it's set in stone, done, completed, certain, both now & forever.

3) Jesus' forgiveness is accomplished for you. The words **are forgiven** don't allow you to take any action in your forgiveness. The paralytic had nothing & could offer nothing for his forgiveness. When Jesus says to the paralytic, **Your sins are forgiven**, He means the forgiveness is done for him. It's Jesus who accomplishes this. Only God can forgive sins, & only a man can be a substitute for people & die in our place, & thus pay the wages of sin, which is death. & only Jesus was both God & man. He alone accomplished our forgiveness & He makes it clear by saying, **Your sins are forgiven**.

4) Jesus' forgiveness is enduring. Jesus makes it clear that forgiveness isn't temporary. When Jesus says, **Your sins are forgiven**, He means your sins are continually, ceaselessly, always & forever forgiven. Jesus is saying to the paralytic, *My son, your sins are forgiven at this very moment & will continue to be forgiven forevermore. You've received a full pardon.* All sin, past, present & future, has been taken care of by Jesus for you if your faith is in Him. &, because He is eternal, your forgiveness is eternal & enduring.

5) Jesus' forgiveness is repairing. When Jesus says, **Son, your sins are forgiven**, the word for **sins** has the idea of missing the mark, deviating from the truth, violating the law, & neglecting responsibility. In other words, you're a lying, lazy, guilty criminal who rebelled against your

Creator's perfect plan for your life & defiantly went your own way. But when you're forgiven of your sins that relationship is repaired. It restores you once again to know God intimately, relationally, & to be able to walk with Him now & forever.

6) Jesus' forgiveness is comprehensive. As Jesus looks down at this man who was dropped in His lap, He says, **Son, your sins are forgiven**, not, *your sin is forgiven*. Not merely the single sin which may have led to his condition. Not merely the sin which he & others wrongly thought brought about his paralysis. No, Jesus says, all **your sins are forgiven**. That's good news for the paralytic & good news for us. Not merely the sins that broke us & brought us to Jesus, but all our sins since then, today, & until our death have been paid for by Christ on the cross. Jesus said, **It is finished** (Jn 19:30). It's all inclusive & comprehensive.

7) Jesus' forgiveness is freeing & brings deliverance. The verb **forgiveness** is literally translated *are being sent off*. It's the sending, driving, or pushing away of our sins. **Forgiveness** is doing away with sins. Is there any sweeter truth than that we're forgiven? Our sins are done away with, driven from us, & sent off. David declared in Ps 103:12, **As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us**. In Micah 7:19 the prophet tells us that when God forgives sins He casts them into the depths of the sea. In Jer 31:34 God declares, **I will forgive their iniquity, & their sin I will remember no more**. The OT likens God's forgiveness to His casting sins behind His back (Is 38), wiping them out (Is 43), & trampling them under His feet (Micah 7). When you come to Christ your debt has been paid. Your slate is wiped clean. Your offenses have been forgotten. Your stain washed white. Your darkness made light. Your crimes pardoned. Your betrayal acquitted. & your offenses forgiven. You've been delivered & your sins have been sent away. Each word of this powerful sentence, **Son, your sins are forgiven**, hit the paralytic, everyone in the room, & all of us today, like a cannonball. In fact...

8) Forgiveness is Jesus' emphasis. When Jesus says, **Son, your sins are forgiven**, He speaks the word **forgiven** with great emphasis. It comes 1st in the sentence: *forgiven are your sins, Son. Forgiveness* is the greatest of all miracles. Our God can forgive the sins of unholy people through His holy Son. In the OT they slaughtered & bled out animals in a gory demonstration of death for sin in the hope

of forgiveness. Today we look back to when God became a man in the person of Jesus, lived sinlessly, & then offered Himself on the cross, dying in our place. There, the Lamb of God bore all of God's punishment for the sins of His children. He paid the price for your sin in His death, & satisfied the wrath of God for your sin, taking your place. He died for your crimes, He suffered because you were guilty, & He bore God's anger because of your sin. But it's only as you put your trust in Jesus that you can be forgiven. Only as you turn from your sin in repentance & turn to Christ with faith can you be saved. PRAY

COMMUNION – Forgiveness, salvation is a wonderful thing. It's infinitely more important than your health & it's also infinitely more difficult to achieve. To be freed from one's sins requires a far greater power than to be healed. To be forgiven, to have peace with God, to have the prospect of eternal life, is a state & condition vastly more wonderful than even that of sound legs for a man who's never been able to walk. Forgiveness is the thing that no one but God can do. No angel in heaven, no person on earth, no church, no preacher, or priest can take away the sinner's guilt, & grant him peace with God. They may declare with authority whose sins God is willing to forgive. But they can't absolve by their own authority anyone's sins. This is God's prerogative alone, & He's put it in the hands of His Son, Jesus Christ. Let us remember how great a blessing it is that Jesus is our great High Priest & our sacrificial Lamb, & the only One we can go to for forgiveness. We must have a Priest & a Sacrifice between ourselves & God. God's righteousness & justice demand an atonement for our sins. God's holiness makes it absolutely necessary. Without an atoning priest there can be no peace for us. Jesus is the One we need to say to us, *Child, your sins are forgiven.* He is powerful to forgive & pardon & tender-hearted & willing to save.¹¹

The writer of Hebrews tells us,

The *former* priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (7:23-25).

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Mark*, Crossway Classic Commentaries, pp 21–22

We eat of the bread remembering Jesus, who is able to forgive & save forever those who come to God through faith in Him.

Hebrews continues,

It was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the *sins* of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself (26-27).

We drink of the cup remembering His sacrifice **once for all** when He shed His blood, when He died in our place.