

January 17
Lesson 7 (NIV)

CALLED IN AUTHORITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 103:1–14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:1–12

MARK 2:1–12

¹ A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ 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. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ 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? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, ¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” ¹² 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!”

KEY VERSE

“Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?” —Mark 2:9

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 2: Jesus and Calls in His Ministry

LESSONS 5–8

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the account of the paralyzed man who was made whole in body and spirit.
2. Compare and contrast the differing perspectives of those present.
3. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the assurance of Jesus' forgiveness.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. No Room in the "Farm"
- B. Lesson Context
- I. A Packed House (Mark 2:1-2)
 - A. Coming to Capernaum (v. 1)
 - B. Capacity Crowd (v. 2)
Standing Room Only?
- II. A Paralyzed Man (Mark 2:3-5)
 - A. Extraordinary Entrance (vv. 3-4)
 - B. Surprising Statement (v. 5)
- III. Cynical Bystanders (Mark 2:6-9)
 - A. Silent Skepticism (vv. 6-7)
A Reformed Cynic
 - B. Perceptive Judgment (vv. 8-9)
- IV. An Amazing Miracle (Mark 2:10-12)
 - A. Absolute Authority (vv. 10-12a)
 - B. Glorifying God (v. 12b)

Conclusion

- A. A Different Diagnosis
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Capernaum Kuh-*per*-nay-um.

Corinthians Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Galatians Guh-*lay*-shunz.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Isaiah Eye-*zay*-uh.

Leviticus Leh-*vit*-ih-kus.

MessiahMeh-*sigh*-uh.

NazarethNaz-uh-reth.

Introduction

A. No Room in the “Farm”

In October 2018, the owners of a popular Denver restaurant announced it would be closing at the end of the year. White Fence Farm had served family-style fried chicken dinners for 45 years. The gift shop, the “barn” with live music, a children’s slide, and the petting zoo (in addition to the good food) had made White Fence Farm more than a restaurant. It was a place to create wonderful memories.

My siblings and I have a tradition of taking each other out to eat for our birthdays. As soon as I heard the news, I announced that I wanted to go to White Fence Farm since my birthday was approaching. Although the restaurant had stopped taking reservations, we were told that since we were coming on a Thursday, we should be OK as long as we got there at 5:30. Well, when we arrived, we discovered a two-and-a-half-hour wait! So we decided to go elsewhere.

The following Thursday my brother-in-law called and asked if I was game to try again. This time we got there just before the restaurant opened at 4:30. I groaned—the line leading to the door was about 50 yards long!

When we got inside, we were told the wait might be two hours. Not wanting to leave with an empty stomach again, I persuaded the others to stay. Thanks to the hostess’s cautious estimate and two sweet ladies who were happy to include us in their party, it wasn’t long before I was savoring all the chicken, sides, and fritters I could eat!

Today’s lesson considers an occasion when a crowd of people wanted to get into a house where Jesus was. The venue was so popular that one couldn’t even get near the door. For those who faithfully persisted, the reward was *much better* than a fried chicken dinner.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Mark is a book of action. After an introduction of only three verses, the record begins with “John the Baptist appeared ... preaching” (Mark 1:4). Jesus continued to be on the move (1:9, 12, 14). While the other three Gospels often slow down the action, Mark moves right along with his condensed style.

Mark 2:1–12, today’s text, is parallel to quite similar accounts in Matthew 9:1–8 and Luke 5:17–26. Although the chronological order of events varies in the three synoptic Gospels (see Lesson Context for lesson 5), all three locate this scene in Capernaum during Jesus’ initial ministry in Galilee.

According to the passage just prior, a man with leprosy had come to Jesus and pled with him to be made “clean” (Mark 1:40–45; also Luke 5:12–15). Jesus healed the man but told him not to tell others about it. Jesus may not have wanted to ignite the popular but erroneous hope that a miracle-working Messiah had come to deliver the Jews from Roman oppression. But the man

“Began to talk freely ... As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly, ... Yet the people still came to him from everywhere” (Mark 1:45). That shock wave continued into today’s passage.

I. A Packed House (MARK 2:1–2)

A. Coming to Capernaum (v. 1)

1. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.

Although Jesus grew up in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee (Matthew 2:21–23), he had made *Capernaum* his base of operations when he began his public ministry in that region (4:12–16). Capernaum was a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had frequent interactions there (Matthew 4:12–13; 9:1–9; Luke 7:1–5; etc.).

As news spread of Jesus’ presence in Capernaum, he was likely at the *home* of Simon and his brother Andrew (Mark 1:21, 29). Simon’s mother-in-law had been healed there and showed herself happy to offer Jesus hospitality (1:30–31). Many female disciples supported Jesus in his ministry through funds and hospitality (example: Matthew 27:55–56); Simon’s mother-in-law was probably one of these women. Although there is no indication that she left Capernaum, her daughter—Simon Peter’s wife did (see 1 Corinthians 9:5).

B. Capacity Crowd (v. 2)

2. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Partially as a consequence of a healed man’s spreading the news about Jesus (see Lesson Context), *there was no room* in or even near the house where Jesus was. The house was probably a rectangular, one-story building surrounded by a large, walled courtyard.

The site where archaeologists believe Peter’s house had been is about 28 feet long. Evidently the door was left open so that others could at least cram close to it and hear what was being said. Those who could do so listened to Jesus’ preach *the word*—that is, the good news regarding the impending kingdom of God and the necessity of repentance and faith (see Mark 1:14–15).

STANDING ROOM ONLY?

Many years ago, a young congregation was looking for ways to raise community awareness of their small church. One of the elders, a strong-willed man, was convinced that a certain tent-revival preacher could achieve this. So that man was called to do an evangelistic crusade.

The evangelist was known for the somewhat circus-like atmosphere that pervaded the services held inside his “big tent.” The meeting got off to a small start, with about 90 percent of the seats empty. Undeterred, the revivalist went on local media the following day to report “capacity crowds.”

Even though the meeting continued for two weeks, there were never any “standing room only” crowds. It took the church several years to recover from the embarrassment.

There was no need for false reports to get a crowd around Jesus. What happened when Jesus came to town was more spectacular than anyone imagined. But do we still tend to look to gimmicks to bring people to Christ?

—C. R. B.

II. A Paralyzed Man (MARK 2:3–5)

A. Extraordinary Entrance (vv. 3–4)

3. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

Meanwhile, *four* men carrying a fifth man approached the packed house. The only thing we know for sure about this man who was *paralyzed* is that he was unable to walk. He may not even have had use of his arms.

His condition could have been from birth (compare Acts 3:2; 14:8) or as the result of an accident, a stroke, etc. The determination of the man's friends to bring him to Jesus suggests that he was in dire straits, and those four believed Jesus could help.

What Do You Think?

What could you do to help your church start or expand a ministry of driving people to medical appointments when they are unable to do so themselves?

Digging Deeper

What role should 1 Timothy 5:3–16 play in limiting or focusing such a ministry, if any?

4. 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.

The action of breaking a hole in *the roof* isn't as destructive as it seems. Houses in Israel in Jesus' day generally had a flat roof that was accessible by a ladder or stairway. The wooden crossbeams were overlaid with reeds, branches, and baked mud or clay. This thatched material had to be repacked with a stone roller every fall before the winter rains. It wouldn't have been difficult for the four men to dig through the thatch, and their deconstruction could be repaired with relative ease.

Even so, imagine the drama of the scene: people in the house below are being sprinkled with debris; they are startled and confused. Then light begins to filter in as the hole becomes bigger. Then the light is blotted out by something being lowered through the hole. Not just something—a man on a bed! Where there was no room before, certainly the crowd jostles and divides to make room for this newcomer. Likely a few step forward to help with the lowering once they realize what is happening.

What Do You Think?

If you were attending a modern-day ministry event that was as crowded as the one in the text, under what conditions would you give up your seat or ticket to someone else? Why?

Digging Deeper

Were those gathered around Jesus selfish for not making way for the disabled man and his friends in the first place? Why, or why not?

B. Surprising Statement (v. 5)

5a. When Jesus saw their faith,

The reason given for what Jesus said in response is *their faith*. The plural *their* is important since it includes the faith of the friends rather than just that of the afflicted man. Seeing the great lengths these men went to, Jesus realized that they believed he had the power to heal their friend (compare: Matthew 9:2; Luke 5:20).

What Do You Think?

How can you do better at developing the kind of faith that others can see?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance Matthew 5:14–16 with 6:1–4 in this regard?

5b. he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

What Jesus said in reaction to this extraordinary entrance surprises us! Wouldn't we have expected Jesus to say something like, “Son, be healed”?

Instead, what Jesus said got at the heart of most people's assumptions about illness. The Old Testament frequently assumes a direct connection between sin and sickness. God's forgiveness is often required for physical healing, and healing is often the evidence of forgiveness (examples: Exodus 15:26; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Psalm 41:3–4; Isaiah 19:22). This belief persisted into Jesus' own day; it's what led the disciples to ask regarding a blind man, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2).

Back to our text at hand, the sequence of events suggests that Jesus treated the paralysis as being the result of a spiritual malady. Every issue of humanity's physical frailty can be traced in a general sense to the sin of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16–17; 3:1–19). But that doesn't mean every specific illness is traceable to a specific sin of a person (see John 9:3). Regardless of why the man was paralyzed (a discussion Jesus did not engage in with this crowd), Jesus recognized that the man's greater need was to be *forgiven* for his *sins*.

III. Cynical Bystanders

(MARK 2:6–9)

A. Silent Skepticism (vv. 6–7)

6a. Now some teachers of the law were sitting there,

Teachers of the law were educated both in God's written law and its oral interpretation. By proportion, Mark mentions them the most frequently of the four Gospels. But only one time is one of them depicted in other than a negative light (see Mark 12:28–34). *Sitting* was often a posture of teaching, which suggests that these teachers of the law were anticipating more of a debate with Jesus than being taught by Jesus (also Luke 5:17).

6b–7. thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Mark does not describe the reaction of the paralyzed man, his friends, or the larger crowd to Jesus' surprising statement, but only the unspoken skepticism of the teachers of the law. Priests could offer sacrifices for forgiveness on behalf of those who took the proper steps of repentance (example: Leviticus 5:5–6). The teachers of the law were well aware that the Old Testament taught that no one *can forgive sins but God alone* (Exodus 34:6–9; Psalm 130:2–4; Isaiah 43:25).

But Jesus spoke as though he had the same power to forgive sins as God. If the scholars even considered whether Jesus could be God, they would have rejected the idea out of hand. There was no precedent for God becoming man.

The teachers of the law were therefore left to conclude that Jesus was *blaspheming*. They viewed Jesus' presumption to forgive sins as an arrogant offense to the authority and majesty of God. The Law of Moses pronounced the penalty for blasphemy to be death by stoning (Leviticus 24:10–16; Numbers 15:30–31). That will indeed be attempted later (John 10:31–33), but not on this occasion.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to guard against jealousy when someone else's ministry results in attention and honor that you do not share?

Digging Deeper

In addition to Philippians 1:15–18, what passages help you most to answer this?

A REFORMED CYNIC

Every Bible professor has to deal with the occasional student who “knows it all.” One such student—let's call him Jim—started the semester with a perpetual smirk on his face. His body language let his classmates know that whatever I said was already old stuff to him. If Jim disagreed with me, he would look around with that smirk.

I don't know what eventually shattered his sense of pride, but Jim changed during that semester. By the end of the school year, he had accepted a ministry position in a community where many citizens were cynical about the Christian faith. Jim seemed to know what drove their cynicism. He was able to counter that attitude, and the church began to grow.

The cynics in Jesus' audience were know-it-alls. Unlike Jim, they persisted in refusing to learn, even when the Messiah was their teacher. Who are you more like: the skeptics in the text, who never learned, or Jim, who grew in humility?

—C. R. B.

B. Perceptive Judgment (vv. 8–9)

8a. Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts,

We can be confident that Jesus' judgment here went beyond merely reading the body language of the skeptics. Scripture clearly affirms God's ability to know people's hearts (Jeremiah 17:10; Acts 1:24; 15:8; etc.).

8b–9. 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’?”

Jesus met the teachers of the law' unspoken disapproval with questions of his own. The use of counterquestions was common in rabbinic debate and employed frequently by Jesus (example: Mark 11:27–33). Here Jesus' counterquestion challenged the skeptics' belief that Jesus had offered the man something that wasn't in his power to give. And it paved the way for Jesus' upcoming declaration of physical healing.

As far as verbal effort is concerned, saying that someone is forgiven requires about the same use of mouth muscles as telling that person to *walk*. But that's not Jesus' point. Forgiveness can't be objectively verified but healing has physical proof. Even so, the factual declaration of forgiveness is more essential—and difficult. Most likely, Jesus was emphasizing that both declarations are impossible for human beings and easy for God.

IV. An Amazing Miracle

(MARK 2:10–12)

A. Absolute Authority (vv. 10–12a)

10–11. But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

In this climactic pronouncement, Jesus refers to himself as *the Son of Man*. This rather mysterious title seems to have its origin in Daniel 7:13–14, which states that God would bestow on this heavenly figure dominion and glory in the end times. “Son of man” was a favorite self-designation Jesus used. The phrase occurs some 80 times in the Gospels—and only on one occasion on the lips of anyone other than Jesus (see John 12:34).

The ambiguity of the title spared it from preconceived ideas in Jesus' day. Therefore, he was able to infuse it with his own definition. In the Gospels, this messianic title is connected with the nature of Jesus' person and work—who he is and what he does. In addition to having authority *to forgive sins*, the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), who came to give his life as a ransom (10:45) and rise from the dead (8:31; 10:33–34). He is the one who will one day come “in clouds with great power and glory” (13:26; see also 14:62).

Jesus was able and willing to show the teachers of the law—and everyone else—that he had *authority on earth to forgive sins*. Although there is a technical distinction between power (“the ability to do something”) and authority (“the right to do something”; see Luke 4:36; 9:1; etc.), Mark doesn't make a sharp distinction. Jesus has both! And that is the crux of this story. His ability to heal physically was tangible proof of ability to heal spiritually by forgiving sins.

After Jesus addressed the teachers of the law in particular (and perhaps the crowd in general), he shifted focus to the paralyzed man. If the man could obey Jesus' command to *get up*, it would be evidence that Jesus was capable of miraculous healing. The man's obedience would also imply that Jesus' earlier pronouncement of forgiveness was as effective as his pronouncement of healing.

12a. He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.

To put it simply, the man believed and obeyed. As there could be no evidence of the man's forgiveness without the healing, there could be no evidence of his faith without his obedience. *His mat* was likely rolled and carried.

B. Glorifying God (v. 12b)

12b. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

Mark speaks of people’s being *amazed* several times in his Gospel to describe reaction to what Jesus said with authority and/or did as miraculous. The evidence Jesus offered affirmed that his declaration of forgiveness was legitimate. This event was startling evidence that the kingdom of God was indeed at hand (Mark 1:15).

We might think Mark’s statement that *everyone ... praised God* is overstated. Surely the teachers of the law weren’t included! But they too had to acknowledge the miracle, whether or not they believed that forgiveness had also been granted. For them to glorify God wouldn’t necessarily mean that they thanked God for sending Jesus. The teachers of the law, along with everyone else, simply had *never* seen events *like this*.

What Do You Think?

What can your church do to help people have a sense of awe in worship? What will be your part in this effort?

Digging Deeper

What is your reaction to this statement: “Worship will be only as meaningful as we have prepared ourselves to make it”?

Conclusion

A. A Different Diagnosis

Today’s lesson reminds us of the spiritual components involved in genuine and integrated health and healing. Whether Jesus diagnosed this man’s paralysis as being a result of sin, the man certainly couldn’t be made whole without spiritual healing.

No significant and permanent healing can occur apart from reconciliation with God. As we have seen, God alone forgives sins. And God alone is the source of healing. Jesus still has the power and authority to provide healing by bringing release from the crippling burden of sin. As God in the flesh, Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the profound statement recorded in Exodus 15:26: “I am the Lord, who heals you.”

This is not always seen in physical healing of maladies in this current life on earth; but it will absolutely be seen in the resurrection bodies that grow from the seed of our present bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42–54).

This story also reminds us of how much we need our fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Although we probably won’t need them to carry us on a stretcher to church or a prayer meeting, we do need to “carry each other’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). And there are times when we need to heed and practice the instruction of James 5:16: “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

As you reflect on Mark 2:1–12 and consider how it applies to your life, write a prayer that brings before the Lord your various needs. Lay out your physical, spiritual, emotional, relational,

and material needs—and your questions about them. Call on the absolute authority of Jesus Christ to make you whole so that you can better glorify, honor, and serve him.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we recognize that you have power and authority both to forgive sins and to heal sickness. We present to you every aspect of our lives; may we love you with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus still has absolute authority and power to both forgive and heal.¹

¹ Sloan, A., Boatman, C. R., Taylor, M. A., & Nickelson, R. L. (2021). [Called in Authority](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, & M. K. Williams (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2020–2021* (Vol. 27, pp. 169–175). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.