

The Priority of Deliverance

Deliverance

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As we read through and look at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, if there is one story outside of the resurrection itself that demonstrates God moving in somebody's life, it would be the young man who was lowered through the roof of a house to meet Jesus. His story is found in Mark 2. As you're turning to Mark 2 this morning, if you're a guest or visitor with us, I want to welcome you to a journey through the gospel of Mark. The gospel of Mark is the shortest of all the four gospels, in fact, one of the things that we've somewhat joked about is that stories in Matthew and Luke and even in John that may contain half a chapter here in the gospel of Mark sometimes it's just two or three verses. In fact, in 16 chapters, over 60 times the phrase "and immediately" is recorded. It has been called by some of the gospel of action, yet today when we come to chapter 2, one of the most famous stories in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospel of Mark, it's going to almost appear somewhat backwards and here is why. The gospel of Matthew in chapter 9 and in Luke 5 record the same story and yet in Mark there's actually more to the story. In fact, it's an unusual place in the Bible where in the gospel of Mark he actually goes to great lengths to extrapolate all the details of this story.

Why is that so critical to the text? Because as we walk through the gospel of Mark, one of the things that we're seeing is that God desires to deliver us. Now that word "deliverance" somewhat makes us unnerved in our culture today but it means "to be set free"; it means "to have the shackles or the bondage of whatever it may be released from our life"; it means "to be removed from a situation that is detrimental and harmful into that we desire." And today as we continue in the gospel of Mark looking at our need to be delivered, what we see here is what is the priority of deliverance. And when I say the word priority of deliverance or that phrase, I don't mean that it should be a priority because obviously we would all recognize that, but more than that how do we prioritize our lives so that deliverance is actually viable?

Here in Mark 2, beginning in verse 1, it says,

1 And again he [being Jesus] entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. 2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. 3

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. 4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. 6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? 8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? 10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Here is an individual who had been ravaged physically for years. We addressed last week in chapter 1, sometimes the bondages of life, the shackles of life, are physical and sometimes they're spiritual, they're emotional, they're mental and such, and yet here is this man who is delivered in his situation. How can his story become our story?

Well, I think the first thing we need to do is understand that he and his friends had a very certain and special realization, in fact, they realized, shall we say, the importance of going to Jesus. I want you to think of their perception for just a moment. Now when we think of perceiving things or how they perceived something, this was a man who had been sick for a very long time. This was not something that just came upon him in the last few days, weeks and/or months, this had been a lifetime of agony and pain. And it says that he and his friends come to Jesus, what were they perceiving? Let me share with you, it was this: they had tried everything else, they had gone to the doctors, they had gone probably to the philosophers, they had gone to those with wisdom and such, and they perceived – this is important to the story – that Jesus Christ was the only one who could actually handle this matter. That's going to guide us through the rest of the story because it just wasn't that they perceived that but they understood the power that he possessed.

Notice what it says at the end of verse 2. When Jesus is in the house and there are people that are gathered, remember they're trying to get inside. They're unable to. You get the idea that maybe they're 10-15 feet back. They're unable to get not only the bed in but it's so crowded, it says "and he preached the word unto them." This is important because never in the gospels do you see Jesus Christ with a marketing campaign. He simply preached the word and people found out about it, they heard about it, and they showed up and wanted to be a part of it. Why is that critical? Because in John 8, beginning in verse 31, Jesus made this statement, he said, "If you continue in my word you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." What was it, what was the power that they had observed over the course of time? The power was that when he spoke, he explained, he

spoke and he exhibited the power of the word of God, the same word of God that says in Hebrews 1:3 that he keeps the entire creation in order by his word.

They perceived that he was the only one that could handle this. They believed in the power of when he spoke into any and all situations. But I want you to notice the process. It says in verse 3, it says, "And they came unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four." This is important to understand when we talk about the process here because this young man who was struggling with his condition of the palsy, which is a very generic term but nonetheless, he was unable to get there on his own, and at the same time, he had to be willing to get on the bed.

Allow me to explain. When we talk about being free, when we talk about deliverance, when we talk about shackles being taken off of our life, I would daresay that in this context today there are a great multitude of you either here in person or online or listening on the radio that you have somebody near and dear to you that is ravaged and in bondage to something. You've got somebody who's struggling. You've got somebody who's hurting and you have prayed for them, you have wept for them, you have cried, you have done everything you know to do. I want you to understand something about this passage when it talks about the process, that they could not get him in the roof unless he was willing to go. You see, you can cry, you can pray, you can fast, but the thing that is important to the process here is these four men wanted their friend healed but the friend wanted to be healed as well.

Can I flip the script? You may be one of those today saying, "Man, I'm hurting. I'm in bondage. I'm struggling with something and I don't feel like there's anybody to bear my bed. I don't feel like there's anybody who's willing to pick me up, so to speak." I don't mean this as crass as it may sound, please hear me, maybe you need some new friends. You know, one of the great advantages about being a part of a local church body and a part of a Sunday school and a Bible study is hopefully there's somebody there that when you cry out and say, "I can't do this anymore," they say, "Don't worry, we'll pick up the bed for you. We've got this." Do you see the process? It's an imitation of James 5. You know, in James 5 there's this very non-Baptist verse, it says, "If there's any of you sick among you, call the elders to surround them, anoint them with oil and pray that they would be healed." You know, the importance there is it's not only the sick person saying, "I need help," it's the other people coming alongside of, and so what you see here is the friends couldn't make him, he had to be willing to be borne, and he had to make sure he was surrounded by people who had his best interest at hand.

So when you realize the situation here, we notice that that's dramatically different than a lot of scenarios we find ourselves in but, you know, they were taking an extreme risk. When they went through the roof that day or that evening, when they presented this friend before Jesus, I don't know if we realize what a big risk that they were taking. In fact, if we were to look at it from their perception, think about this, that the individuals that were surrounding and within the home would have been the movers and the shakers of their community and they were risking everything they had to make sure that their friend could be delivered.

Let me illustrate this. You know, growing up, I don't know if you've learned this but it's a great word of wisdom, you know there's always somebody smarter than you and always somebody less smart than you. It's just kind of a good check and balance. Have you ever had one of those friends that you're not even in competition with, they're that smart? I mean, they're the curve busters, so to speak, in school. I have such a friend that I grew up with that has the current occupation of being an actuary. Now you may not know what an actuary is but those are the people who raise your insurance rates. His job is to use his mathematical mind to calculate your risk of whatever you're being insured for. You do realize that insurance is just a transfer of risk, that's all that it is. You're willing to pay a certain amount per month or whatever it may be so that if something happens that's detrimental, whatever that might be, somebody else is willing to assume the risk. And what he does for a living is he makes sure, I'm going to go ahead and go there, that you pay more than they pay out. That's his job as an actuary.

Well, some years ago we found ourselves collectively in another state. We were at a wedding. A good friend of ours that we'd grown up with through the years and, you know, typically wedding day on a Saturday. That morning, you've got a bunch of young guys in their 20's go out and play a little football, eat lunch, you know, just kind of distract ourselves before the festivities that evening. We stopped by a corner convenience store and, you know, grabbed a drink and such, and one of the guys that we were with, kind of a guy that's kind of got one of those sideways sense of humor, noticed that in this respective state they had something that our state did not have, they had the lottery. He decided he was going to scratch one. I mean, he was ready. He's like, "Man, my whole life I've heard about it. I've never been in the presence of it. I'm going to do it." So he throws down a couple of bucks and he gets himself a lottery ticket. Well, our friend who is now the actuary gets frustrated with him. He says, "Give me that thing." He says, "What do you mean, this is mine." He said, "Oh, I'll give it back to you, just give it to me for a moment." And he did something that nobody who plays the lottery ever does, he read the back because do you know what the back says? Your odds of winning. So he looked at the back and he started doing some calculations and I'll never forget it, I'm going to get the exact number wrong so I'm going to guesstimate here, he said, "Friend, I've got bad news for you." He said, "What?" He said, "You've got about an 8,000th greater chance of dying today than winning this thing." But think about it, how much did he put up? Just a few dollars.

That's why nobody wins because there's not a lot of risk. Anything that has the opportunity for a real response and reward involves real risk. What was their perception? Can I use the same genre of illustration? They bet the house. You say, "What do you mean, they bet the house?" They were all in. When they went to that roof that day, when they went to where Jesus was gathered, this wasn't those, "I'm gonna put a few bucks down and if it doesn't work, we'll go to the next guy." They were all in. Do you know why? Because the power that these guys possessed. Let me put it in our terminology today. Those men who questioned Jesus, those men who said, "We've never seen it on this wise," most likely that was their bankers, the holders of their mortgage, the ones who could either allow them in or force them out of organizations, entities, whatever it may

be, and here they are going down the roof of a house to circumvent or to go beyond these guys who were such power brokers. They were "betting the house."

So what was the process? What were they risking? What were they willing to say, "I don't care if I lose all this, deliverance is more important." Let's talk about it financially for a moment. I love the way that it expressed it here in the gospel of Mark, you know the other passage that says they went through the roof, they pulled the tiles away, but it says here that they dug through the roof. Last time I checked, somebody is going to have to pay for it. Somebody is going to have to pay that repair bill, right? I've got news for you, if you truly want Jesus Christ to deliver you, it may cost you financially because sometimes for him to set you free means you're not involved in other things that used to make you a whole lot of money. In other words, it costs us financially to be free.

But there's another aspect that costs us, how about our own health? We love to talk about health nowadays, right? And do we not live in a world that is always weighing the balances of risk when it comes to our health? You say, "Why was this a risk on their health?" I'll give you an assignment. By the way, I'm going to make a disclaimer legally on camera, I'm not encouraging you to do what I'm telling you to do. It's an illustrative purpose. If you do it, I'm sorry, it's your own fault. You go home today, grab three of your neighbors, grab a bed, put another neighbor on the bed, crawl up on the roof, dig a hole and get in the living room and see how it goes. I don't know about you, I get nervous just getting on the roof with a ladder. Can you imagine? Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Well, in the Middle East over there, their roofs are flat." I don't care if they're flat, they're still tall. You're digging through a roof. You realize that the moment you "put a shovel in that roof," you don't know what's going to happen. Is the whole thing going to cave in? We don't know. They were willing to say, "Even if it harms me financially, even if it harms me physically, I would rather be free than to have money or health." Now think about that for a moment.

Last but not least, it cost them their reputation. Now number 1, what if it had not gone the way that they desired, which it did? What about their reputation? All of a sudden they were marked. You know, one of the great conversion stories of the last half century is an individual who was up in the Chicago area. He wrote a book. They made a movie about it, about how he was an atheist trying to disprove the faith. And in the movie the biography of his life, one of my favorite scenes of the movie, you see, his wife was a believer and in the whole movie he kept calling her and her Christian friends crazy. "Y'all are just crazy. I can't believe you believe what you do. You're crazy." Well, there was a scene toward the end of the movie, he's sitting on his couch and he kneels down with tears in his eyes and he prays for Jesus to save him. Now you would think this is one of those solemn moments. I mean, this guy has just turned from atheism to Jesus. He's just gone from death to life and in the movie do you know what the first statement he makes to his wife? He says, "I guess I'm one of the crazy people now." Why? Because he understood the risk. As a reporter for a major secular paper, he knew his job could now be at risk. Those that he had talked about how awful Christianity was, now he would have to go back and say, "You know, I was the one that was wrong."

You see, when we understand and realize that Jesus Christ is the only one who has the ability to set us free, I think oftentimes we forget the risk that is involved, but what about the results? I want you to see what happens here in this passage beginning in verse 6. It says, "But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" I want you to understand the perception or what Jesus could perceive. You did not have to speak in his presence for him to know what you were thinking.

Now what I'm about to share with you is hopefully going to be seen as a good thing but in some of your lives it may be a struggle. If you're that person today and you're hurting, you're fighting a silent battle, you're holding onto righteousness when the world around you falls to debauchery, when you're the only one who will stand for the truth of God's word, whatever that looks like in your life, and you question like Elijah, "Is there anybody else?" I've got news for you: Jesus knows your heart. He knows your faithfulness. He knows you're sticking to truth. He knows that but you know unfortunately there are some of you that are like the scribes and Pharisees here. You do know these guys went to church every time the door was opened. You understand that when it came to "tithing and giving," they gave more than even the law said to give. I mean, these were individuals that if you could do religion, they did it as good as anybody was known to do it. But what does it say here? Oh, he knew what was in their heart. Can I give you one of those good old Southern phrases? We have become very good at perfuming the pig, have we not? In other words, we can dress it up, we can make it smell a little different, we can change the exterior but it doesn't change what's underneath. Hopefully that's comforting to you because hopefully you're that one who is staying tried and true in the midst of all that's happening around you. Jesus knows your heart but I've got news today. If you're one of those folks who's faking it until one day maybe you'll make it, you're one of those individuals who is just putting on an exterior, Jesus knows your heart as well.

I want you to see the power that Jesus exhibits back in verse 5, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Now switch to verse 8, "And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." So the perception here when it comes to the results is that Jesus knows your heart no matter what you posted on social media, whatever you have or you have not said. He knows what's going on on the inside but I want you to see the power. When we talk about power today whether it be horsepower, power tools, we mean the ability to make a change, to make a difference. Look in verse 5, "your sins be forgiven." You know one of the most famous statements Jesus Christ ever made was don't fear them who can simply harm the body but he who is able to determine where your soul spends for all of eternity. Jesus Christ goes beyond the bed this man is on, he goes beyond the situation that has unveiled itself and he says, "All right, let's get to the heart of the matter here. Your sins need to be forgiven." One of the things that we

need to realize with these individuals is that we may be in bondage to the past, we may be anxious about the future, whatever our struggle may be, no matter what those temporary battles are, at the end of the day our days will end and the question will not be about those struggles as much where will our eternal destiny be?

He says "your sins be forgiven." Now I want you to see the process here. From our perspective, from an earthly fleshly perspective, it seems a little bit backwards. I mean, after all, this guy's hurting, this guy's in pain, this guy's in agony. He's willing to give up his finances, he's willing to give up his reputation, he's willing to give up all these things just so that he can walk again. But that's not what Jesus did. He said there's a more important matter at hand. You know, back in Matthew 6, Jesus made a pretty profound statement in the Sermon on the Mount. I'm going to paraphrase it, he said, "What good is it to go to hell with both hands when you can go to heaven with one?" Meaning it is more important if you never walk again to make sure that you're in heaven one day than to walk yourself right through the doors of hell.

The process that Jesus lays out is incredible because we oftentimes get it backwards. How many times do we say, "I'm gonna take care of the kids. I'm gonna take care of my finances. I'm gonna get my retirement set up. Oh, and when the day comes, then I'll get all right with God." No, no, no. Get right with God, then let the rest sort itself out. And the process that he did here, here's what I love, notice why he did it. I want you to hang your proverbial hat on this, verse 10, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Jesus didn't heal this guy just so that he could run wind sprints again. Jesus didn't heal him just so that he could go back to work and make a living for himself. The reason Jesus healed him is so that those that were present would know that he had the ability to forgive our sins.

Now why is this critical? Because a lot of times we're in the midst of battles, we're in the midst of struggles, there's difficulties in life, there's this shackles of life, whatever it may be, and oftentimes you've begged, you've pleaded God to change your situation. And I'm going to ask a very rhetorical, very difficult question that I, myself, have had to answer as well. Whatever that issue is, whatever that struggle is, are you just simply wanting an easier path in life or do you really want God to move in people's lives? Do you see the difference there? Because even the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 begged the Lord three times, "Take this thorn out of my flesh!" And God said, "Nope, because this is the only way you will truly give me the attention and the honor that I deserve. Your infirmity will lead others to the forgiveness of their sins."

You see, here's the issue with the shackles and we don't know this guy's heart, obviously Jesus Christ did, but his physical healing was what it took for those around to see that Jesus had a more important healing that he was speaking of and oftentimes the struggles of our life, the difficulties of our life, we pray, "God, please take this away from me. I can't do this anymore. I can't get up anymore. I can't go on anymore." But how often do we pray, "God, if there's any way possible, could you let me walk again so that others would be saved? Would you allow me to be broken from this addiction so people would actually believe that you can break the addiction of sin? Would you, O God, not just

allow me to 'live the life I'd hoped,' but allow me through what you've done to be the testimony that maybe somebody else needs to lay their sins at the foot of the cross."

You see, when we talk about the priority of deliverance, how do we get things lined up? One of the faults of our mindset is we say, "Okay, God, if I do A, B, C and D, then like this guy I'm gonna walk again." The problem is it was his heart. His heart was in such a place that when Jesus said your sins be forgiven, he didn't say, "That's not what I signed up for." Do you notice that about the passage? Jesus said your sins be forgiven and he didn't argue, he didn't gripe, he didn't say, "No, no, no, I came for my legs not my heart." Jesus said, "I'm going to forgive your sins," and do you know what he said? "I'm good with that. That's good enough for me." Then Jesus said, "Oh, by the way, these guys are struggling, take up that bed and get out of here." And immediately he ran.

Now do you know how important that is? Some of you are getting a little more snow on the top of the mountain, so to speak, you try getting up and running first thing in the morning. Now try it after years. In other words, what he saw was, "As my legs have been changed, so has my heart." The priority of our deliverance is it's got to be all about him and has nothing to do with us.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're that individual who has never "had your sins forgiven." Maybe you're that person whether in person or online who has sought for physical healing, has sought for mental healing, has sought for emotional healing but you've never called out for spiritual healing. The Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today is the day where you cry out to Jesus to save you. It's not about taking a course, passing a test, jumping through a hoop, it's about your heart's cry to the Lord, you don't even have to do it out loud but maybe your heart's cry, again it doesn't have to be exactly what I would say or somebody else would say, maybe your heart's cry today would go something like this. "God, today I've tried every way but yours but, God, today I understand, I finally understand, God, that my sin problem is never going to be fixed with religion, it's never going to be fixed with being good or less bad or even giving a whole lot of stuff or money away. God, I believe that the only way my sin condition is going to be taken care of is by Jesus Christ alone and, God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he rejected all opportunities to do it as the world would do it and to fall into temptation. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. And God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he paid the price for my sins on his cross. And God, I believe today just as we saw it pictured in baptism that Jesus Christ did not stay in the grave but he rose from the grave which means that he's the only one who can possibly forgive me and has the ability to save me. So God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and struggles of life but I do know this, that Jesus Christ is the only one who has the ability to forgive me and save me and I'm calling out right now for you to do so. Lord, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person this morning in this place that had that conversation with the Lord. Can we encourage you in

a moment when we stand and sing, just step out and step forward, we've got a whole lot of folks that would just love to hear your story and pray with you and for you. And maybe today you say, "Well, I've been a believer for years." Maybe some of you could testify to decades and those shackles and those struggles have become more about you than they have about him. Maybe today is the day that you leave here free. Maybe today is the day you leave without those shackles because it's no longer about what you experience but the glory and honor that he receives.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you so much that you desire our eternity even more than our temporary state. Thank you, O God, that you're willing to operate and move through us in spite of us. And God, thank you the testimony of this young man and his four friends, God, we pray today that it would be our testimony as well. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.