

What's Your Problem? – Mark 2:1-12

Series: Look and Live #7

The closest I ever came to experiencing what Jesus experienced in our text was during one Wednesday night prayer meeting at Villa Hills Baptist Church. In the middle of my Scripture lesson, in staggers Kenny, reeking of alcohol. Kenny was the church's neighbor. He was known for being rude, obnoxious, and drunk. He came in that night and sat *smack dab* in the middle of everybody. As I was teaching, he started verbally scoffing at me. Then, during our prayer time (while some poor older lady was in the middle of her prayer) Kenny actually started laughing and making fun of her praying. That was the one and only time that I ever kicked somebody out of church.

Reading this story today, I think I know *exactly* how Jesus must have felt when a man and his four friends *rudely* burst in and interrupt Jesus right in the middle of his sermon! **Read Mark 2:1-12.**

Some time has passed since Jesus healed the leper at the end of chapter 1. Now Jesus has come *back* to that same town to continue preaching about the Kingdom. Mark 2:1 says that the community heard literally "that he was in the house." (Mark surely means that he was in Simon Peter's house, just like Mark 1:29.) When everybody hears that the demon-exorcising, fever-healing, sickness-miracle-worker is back, they all *converge* upon this house.

The people were packed in like sardines. The house was so full that people couldn't really get in or out. And all of these folks had come because they wanted to see another miracle. In the middle of Jesus' sermon, the full house is all intently *listening*, eyes *fixed on* the movements and gestures of Jesus, all the sudden, somebody feels something fall on their head! Within seconds, light shines into the dark house through a fresh hole just dug through the roof.

As soon as the hole was big enough, four men on the roof actually being dropping a paralyzed man lying on a stretcher into the room where Jesus was preaching. For some reason, something had happened to this man and he was no longer able to walk on his own. Apparently some men in the house reached up, grabbed the stretcher as it was being dropped through the roof, and they turned and laid this paralyzed men at the feet of the Preacher.

Amazingly, Jesus didn't see an annoyance, a pathetic man, or even an impolite interruption. He saw their *faith* in this act (verse 5). So he says, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Well the scribes were there in the house, and they did not like to hear Jesus forgiving sins. They understood that only God can forgive sins. They didn't think Jesus was God, so they thought he was blaspheming, or in other words, making himself like God.

But they hadn't realized that they weren't dealing with just any old healer. This was in fact the God-man! And Jesus perceived the thoughts of their hearts. (Jesus knows intimate thoughts and feelings of the heart of man, of their hearts, of my heart, and of your heart.

In order to show who he truly was, he asks them the question, "Which is easier? To say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to heal the man in front of everybody?" Well it's clearly easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" because you're talking about something invisible happening. I could say it to you right now ("Your sins are forgiven!" See?). It's really easy to say. It is much harder for me to say, "You're

healed from paralysis” because you’ll know right away whether I’m legitimate or whether I’m a fraud. Healing paralysis is visible. If I’m standing over a paralyzed man and say, “You’re healed.” then either he’ll get up and walk or I’ll be a fraud. If I just say to him, “Your sins are forgiven” then you’re not going to *see* anything change.

So to prove to them that he really could forgive sins, he does the harder thing and he heals the paralyzed man right there in front of everybody. After commanding him, the man who was carried there by four other men and let down through a hole in the roof stands up off his mat, bends over, picks up his bed and walks out the front door! You can understand the people’s response in verse 12, “Wow, we’ve never seen anything like this!”

I’m suggesting that God intends for us all to learn (at least...) three things from this encounter. So three points now.

- 1) Number one: forgiveness is only for those helplessly desperate.
 - a) There were a lot of people gathered in the house that day.
 - i) There were lots of sick sinners who needed a miracle, who waited patiently, who listened to Jesus’ sermon, and who very politely used the door to get in the house (as opposed to destroying Peter’s roof).
 - ii) *Okay Jesus, they sound like much better candidates for your attention and for your blessing than the man who destroyed your disciple’s property and rudely interrupted your worship service.*
 - b) But wouldn’t you know, the only one Jesus singles out and commends for their faith, the only one Jesus pronounces forgiven is the crazy guy who destroyed and fell through poor Peter’s roof. *Why Jesus? Why did you single out the impolite, paralyzed, desperate man?*
 - c) Well, that’s why. Not because he was impolite, but because he was desperate. That’s why Jesus forgave him. What singled out that paralytic is that he was so **helplessly desperate** for Jesus. He came carried, not even crawling but worse, *carried* to Jesus. And his falling through the roof was like he was saying to Jesus and to the crowd, “I can’t move here Jesus! You’re my only hope! I’m sick and only you can fix me. I’m sick; I need a doctor; and you’re the doctor.”
 - d) That helpless man was under no false illusion that he was healthy and safe. And he wasn’t there to ask Jesus for a band-aid, or to fix his sore throat, or even to give him a little bit better job. He was helplessly desperate asking for nothing less than his life. So he received forgiveness of his many sins.
 - e) This is one of those things that you always look for when you’re talking to somebody about Christianity. Do they show a hopelessness apart from Christ? That’s a mark of a true believer. A helpless desperation is the sign that Christ is drawing someone to himself. Anyone who considers themselves competent, healthy, well-off, sophisticated, and self-sufficient has not encountered Jesus Christ.
 - i) If you’re not desperate, Jesus is not for you.
 - ii) If Jesus is just a good way to raise your children, Jesus is not for you.
 - iii) If you’ve got your life together, if you’re fine and you think God is pleased with you, Jesus is not for you.
 - iv) Jesus is for weaklings. Jesus is for the pathetic, the helpless, the murderers, the haters, the thieves, the idolaters, and the adulterers.

- v) Jesus is for those who are dying and have come to the point of crying, “Save me or I die!”
- f) Spiritually speaking, we’re all paralytics. We’re all helpless and desperate. You see, grace, forgiveness, *Christ* is for people like Kenny.
- g) God help us if we’re a church that reads “No Kenny’s welcome here”. God help us if we are a place where no hurting, messed up people are welcome. Or where we, when we’re messed up, can’t talk about it.
- h) Isn’t it the height of hypocrisy to pretend to belong to a place and a Lord who takes the helpless and the desperate and then to speak week in and week out as though everything is hunky dory and as though we don’t need any help?
- i) Isn’t that a living contradiction? How could God’s people be fine? No, we’re not fine. We have sin and we need Jesus. We need Jesus or we die.
- j) Let’s not pretend like we don’t need him every second of every day. Paul says, “I will boast in the things that show my weakness... for when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 11:30ff.
- k) We don’t run from acknowledging our weakness and helplessness. That’s exactly what we need other people to see! When they see us as weak in ourselves and strong in Christ, then he will be the one who gets the glory. If we give the prideful air of, “I’m strong. I’ve got this” then how is Christ’s power on display in us? **Our** power is on display, but where is **Christ’s**? No, let this church have the reputation of being filled with weak people who have been made strong by Christ!

2) Point two: Jesus tells us that our problem in life is really sin.

- a) Were you surprised when this paralytic drops from the ceiling and the first thing Jesus says is, “Your sins are forgiven”? You’re supposed to be surprised. That’s certainly not what the paralytic was expecting. The parallel account in Luke makes it pretty clear that this lame man wanted to be healed. He was expecting to be healed. (Or at least *his friends* were expecting Jesus to heal him.)
- b) Who can blame them? Can you imagine his life?
 - i) Was he born like this, unable to walk or move? Did some tragic accident occur? Did he ever have a real relationship with a person or was he always that “pitiful guy who couldn’t walk”? Was he married with children when some stroke set in and now he’s helpless to provide for them and take care of them (in a day when there was no health-care or disability insurance).
 - ii) One thing’s for certain: when he dropped from the ceiling, everyone knew immediately what he wanted and what he was after. That’s the thing about being in a wheelchair. You can’t hide your disease. Everybody knows you’re sick. When this man came on his paralysis bed, everyone knew what he wanted and what he needed.
 - iii) Who could have doubted that taking away his paralysis, giving him his life back, enabling him to live normally, healthily, providing for his family and having normal relationships without having to beg, *surely* that is what this man needs...right?
 - iv) And just as surely, this kind man Jesus who helps people and meet people’s needs, surely he will heal this paralyzed man right away.
- c) And Jesus stares him in the face and he doesn’t say, “Get up and walk.” Instead he says, “Your sins are forgiven, my *son*.”

- d) Now Jesus is *really saying* something right there about what our real problem truly is and which problem has priority.
- e) As soon as the presidential election was over, the transcript of an interview was released where Cathleen Falsani sat down and asked Obama penetrating questions about his faith.
 - i) If you read that conversation with our new president, our biggest problem in life is that we're not true to ourselves. Obama said that God wouldn't send people to a place called Hell for not believing in Jesus; he said Hell is now, on earth, when you don't live true to yourself. That's our problem, not being true to self. Conversely being true to yourself and trying to live a good life is heaven today; it's its own reward.
 - ii) So there you have it, man's *big problem* is that he chooses to not be true to himself (meaning, he chooses to not follow his true feelings and fulfill his real desires and ambitions).
 - iii) That's what's wrong in our personal lives and in our world. Hamas terrorism, 9/11 hijackers, child-abusers, and corrupt Illinois Governors, all of them are not being true to themselves.
 - (1) Coincidentally, Oprah does the same thing. She promotes the same redefining of sin, hell, and heaven as Obama does.
 - (2) *** Oprah has a book club and an online community discussion group. I checked out their latest discussion and found the following. They're reading Tolle's book called A New Earth. The discussion started with this quote:*

... According to Tolle, sinning actually means to, "miss the point of human existence," not to be sinful or do sinful things. I was raised in an ultra-conservative Christian home where I was taught that almost everything humans do is sinful and we should constantly repent for being "bad." In other words, I was told to believe that we are all, "poor, miserable sinners." This idea gradually has faded in my life after moving away from home and living on my own. Although I still attend church, I do not feel "sinful" or "bad." I do not feel the need to repent. This idea is so negative to my way of thinking now. Instead, I feel being positive should guide my life and choices. When Tolle quoted St. Augustine as saying, "Love and do what you will," (75) I was thrilled. This makes much more sense to me than the idea of following commandments. (from <http://www.oprah.com/community/>)
 - (3) The most influential woman and the most powerful man in the world are telling us: our problem is that we feel things and we have ambitions but we don't listen to them. We don't listen enough to our inner self.
 - iv) *So is that our problem?* That couldn't *possibly* be any more non-Christian.
 - (1) Genesis 6:5 "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."
 - (2) Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
 - (3) Ephesians 2:1-3 says that mankind is "dead in trespasses and sin walking in them, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, living in the passions of their flesh, carrying out the desires of their body and mind and are by nature children of wrath."
 - v) "Be true to yourself" is the least Christian advice in the history of the world because your self is the whole problem. The Bible says that we ourselves are corrupt. Our desires are

sinful; our passions are set against God. Our *selves* are sinful. So biblically our biggest problem is not that we're *untrue* to ourselves, actually our problem is that we're completely *true* to ourselves. We have sin in our hearts; we desire wicked things; therefore we commit sin and do wicked things. When we sin it's because we *are* sinners.

- vi) The *sin* of the Pharisees was not that they were being untrue to their inner selves; Jesus says their problem was that they were being completely true to their hearts and that their hearts were evil. They were filled with corruption and wickedness and that is why they were doing wicked and corrupt and evil things like hating and rejecting the Messiah.
- f) I want you to be prepared to be inundated with falsehood like that. You're going to continue to hear it more and more. Pretty soon we're going to be called stupid rednecks because we actually think that homosexuals should *deny* their passions and be *untrue to their desires* if those desires are contrary to the Word of God (which homosexual desires are). We're going to be called idiots for telling somebody to deny themselves. Of course, we're in good company though because we're just parroting Jesus' very own words. It's a sign of the times when Jesus says, "Deny yourselves" and our president essentially says, "Sin is denying yourself."
- g) But honestly, I don't think that that's where most of us are today. If we were the ones being interviewed, we wouldn't have said that our problem is being untrue to our feelings and desires.
- h) On a more real level, almost *all of us*, if asked to fill in the blank to "The biggest problem in my life right now is _____" or "The one thing ruining my life right now is _____" would fill in a circumstance or a situation in our lives right now.
 - i) My daughter-in-law is trying to steal my son from me.
 - ii) My mortgage rate is just robbing me blind.
 - iii) My roof is getting ready to collapse and I don't have the money to pay for it.
 - iv) My son is getting bad grades and keeps getting in trouble at school.
 - v) I just don't have enough time in my day to get my chores done and the bills paid and the children fed.
- i) Those would be problems. But you notice, they are all circumstances and situations. Is that really what's *wrong* with your life? Jesus wasn't denying that the paralytic had a *real problem*! His paralysis was a problem. But, it wasn't the biggest, most important, most pressing problem.
- j) Although we *always* walk through our day thinking our biggest problem is outside of us, Jesus shows us that we are our own biggest problem. Our *sin* is always a bigger problem than our situation and our circumstances.
- k) There *is* something killing us, but it's not our cancer. There *is* something ruining our lives, but it's not our relative. There *is* something keeping us from being happy, but it's not our poor-paying job. There *is* something corrupting our marriages and our homes but it's not our wives. I have a big problem, and you have a big problem, and it is ruining our lives and killing us and **it's called sin.**
- l) That's what makes life a living Hell. That's what makes marriage so hard. That's what makes teenagers so hateful. That's what makes the world so violent. That's what makes our hearts so frustrated at the ones we love. That's why even good things, things we look forward to, things we anticipate and plan for (holidays with the family, vacations, expensive gifts), even *they* have frustrating moments and hateful times and interchanges... because of sin.
- m) Sin ruins *everything*!
- n) Now just to be clear, let's define sin.
 - i) At one point in that Obama interview, Cathleen asked Obama (and I'm quoting here):

Cathleen: “What is sin?”

Obama: “Being out of alignment with myself.”

- ii) That is neither Christian nor even close to what the Bible calls sin. That’s using biblical *language* for a pagan idea.
 - iii) God defines sin as living in defiance of him.
 - iv) The first *sin* was when God told Adam and Eve that they were not permitted to eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They decided to eat of it anyway. They decided to *defy* God and his command. That was sin. That is where sin entered the world, and from Adam, sin has passed to all men.
 - v) So you shouldn’t think of sin just in terms of social evils like hunger and poverty.
 - vi) And, you shouldn’t think of sin just in terms of doing bad things.
 - vii) At its root, sin is an attitude and a disposition of defiance and rebellion against God. Sin is first and foremost ***against God***.
 - o) The fact that we *are sinners*, that we *have sins*, that we *commit sins*, and worst of all, that there is *sin dwelling in our heart*, there is an attitude and feeling of *defiance* at the very root of our heart, that is our biggest problem in *all* of life.
 - p) That’s our state at any moment, enemies of God, hostile to God (not neutral but hostile, and our hostility is a cancer that is killing us, ruining our lives, and ruining our world).
 - i) It’s a bigger problem than our self-esteem.
 - ii) It’s a bigger problem than our weight.
 - iii) It’s a bigger problem than the grayness or baldness of our heads.
 - iv) It’s a much bigger problem than our boring jobs and our clinking cars falling apart.
 - v) Sin is ruining us and it will ultimately *destroy* us.
 - q) Whatever we do, we cannot allow Satan to trick us into thinking and speaking as though our big problems are all outside of us.
 - i) Sometimes a group of guys can stand around in a circle, and we get to going about the perils of the world. “This is wrong and, oh yeah, did you see that? I just can’t believe it. What’s the world coming to? That’s what’s wrong today!”
 - ii) Sometimes, that’s not just how we talk, but also how we feel.
 - iii) And that’s a really subtle shift then to thinking that the problem is not us but everybody else. And then where are you? Now we’re open to pride and to exalting ourselves. We’re the ones who’ve got it together and the rest of the world is the one who’s all messed up.
 - r) Let’s not talk or think like that. Let’s be clear that we know we are our own problem because our hearts are fallen and rebellious.
- 3) Point number three: the Son of Man has the ability and authority to deal with our life’s problem.
- a) We’ll see Jesus referring to himself as the “Son of Man” 14 more times in Mark so we’ll be talking *more* about it in the future. It’s Jesus’ favorite and most often used name for himself.
 - i) He took it from the Old Testament book of Daniel.
 - ii) He intended for it to teach people that he is the long-awaited for one whom Daniel foresaw and prophesied about, who will restore God’s people and bring in God’s eternal Kingdom.
 - iii) Jesus is saying here that *he* is that very one. And the fact that he *is* the Son of Man means that he has authority on earth to forgive sins.

- b) After saying that, Jesus turns around and heals the paralyzed man. He did that to *prove* to everybody that he really was who he said he was; he really was the Son of Man.
- c) So let's connect the pieces here.
- d) We all have that one and same disease killing us, ruining our lives in this world and in the age to come, tearing us apart, keeping us from living as we are intended to live, and worst of all, making us God's complete enemies. It is hands down our life's biggest problem.
- e) The good news is that God sent his Son to be the Son of Man. God sent Jesus to be the Son of Man because the Son of Man comes with the power to forgive.
- f) Jesus is able to heal us of our life's disease. He is what we need, and he is what God has given us.
- g) And praise God, Jesus has done his job so well! He doesn't just take away the consequences of our sin like Hell and God's wrath, he actually goes right to our heart and takes away the desire to sin, the rebellion and the defiance; he actually changes us.
- h) What everybody *needs*, what the world needs, what your *marriage* needs, what your children need, what your job needs, what all of your problem-situations and circumstances in life that are causing you distress need, is Jesus!
- i) What everybody needs is the Gospel of Jesus taking our sins and restoring us to God's favor and giving us his very own gift of righteousness.
- j) Doesn't this make Jesus Christ appear supremely valuable? In that sense alone, he is the most valuable being in the Universe.
- k) It's not a hollow statement to say, "*What the world needs most is Jesus Christ!*" It's really true. It's true because our problem is sin and because every other solution outside of Jesus just tries to manage our sin. Secular counselors help us *explain away* our sin (it's our father's fault). Self-help books tell us we're not trying hard enough and that we should use a different technique. Oprah says that we should just try to be true to ourselves and not talk about sin and wrath. Jesus alone really takes away sin and gets to the corruption of our hearts. He is the only one who can *truly change us* because he alone has paid for and defeated the defiance of our hearts.

“What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus; What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing can for sin atone, Nothing but the blood of Jesus; Naught of good that I have done, Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace, Nothing but the blood of Jesus; This is all my righteousness, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

“Nothing But the Blood” Words & Music: Robert Lowry, in Gospel Music, by Howard Doane and Robert Lowry (New York: Biglow & Main, 1876)

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December 28, 2008*