

## **Omniscient Love**

Mark 2:1-12

With the internet today, everybody is all of a sudden an expert on everything. There are forums where you can try to diagnose the weird sound your car is making, or fact-checking websites that keep you informed on political rhetoric. But perhaps the biggest blessing and curse is the vast availability of medical information on the web. All of a sudden, everybody's an armchair doctor. It's a blessing in that it can save you a trip to the clinic, or help you to stop worrying needlessly about some new pain or symptom. But it's also a curse, because now you can know the symptoms of every single ailment out there (which, if you have even a hint of hypochondria, is not a good thing). But even more dangerous, is that it's easy to think that we have figured out exactly what we need, and therefore how to treat it, not realizing that there's a huge difference between comparing my symptoms with some article online, and a doctor using an X-ray or CT or MRI to actually look inside. Because of their technology, they're able to know things that I don't know and can't know. Which might shock me at first, when their diagnosis differs from what I thought I had figured out. But because they can see inside us, they are therefore better able to treat us than Siri or WebMD.

This past week our brother CJ Godfrey had a scare. If you receive our prayer chain you saw the request to pray as he went to the ER with severe abdominal pain (and CJ's given me permission to talk about this). The doctors initially worried that it could be an appendicitis or something worse. But a CT scan revealed that it was a kidney stone. Not fun, by any stretch of the imagination! But thankfully not an appendicitis or worse.

But imagine if they had just gone in and taken his appendix out, without first doing the CT? Not only would they have created a whole new set of problems, they wouldn't have solved the first problem. Without looking inside, they would be unable to see what CJ really needed.

To love someone well requires an intimate knowledge of that person. If you don't know who they are, or what's really going on, it's hard to come alongside and help. And as we consider this morning the heart of Jesus revealed in the Gospels, what we'll see is that Jesus is able to love us perfectly, because he knows us intimately and thoroughly. He can see inside us to know exactly what's going on and meet us where we need it most.

The story before us is a pretty familiar one, if you have spent much time in the New Testament. It picks up just after the story we looked at two weeks ago, where Jesus healed the leper. It's early in his ministry, but his reputation has been growing (cf. Mk. 1:28, 45), such that more and more people are coming to hear him or be healed by him.

The scene picks up inside a house in Capernaum (in the region of Galilee), where Jesus is now living. And it's packed out. "And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them" (v. 2). But people are still coming. In particular, four men carrying a paralyzed man, trying to get to Jesus so this man can be healed. "And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the " (v. 4).

Now we read those lines and we don't think a lot about them, because this is such a familiar and iconic scene. If you grew up in church, you've seen the flannel graph of the guys lowering their friend down. But think about what it would have been like to be in that room, the sheer chaos of it.

You're in a stuffy Middle-Eastern house, with way too many people and not enough ventilation. There's Jesus preaching, and all of a sudden there's this noise up above. Little lines of dust start falling, then chunks of debris. Then daylight breaks through as these men start peeling back the roof. Then the hole gets bigger and bigger, and down comes a body.

That's not normal. That had to be a major distraction. If something like that happened right now, none of you would be listening to me; you'd all be staring at the ceiling. "Pastor's really outdone himself with the sermon illustration this week. Wonder if he consulted the deacons on this..."

That's a pretty chaotic situation. Imagine all the different things going through people's heads in that moment. Perhaps some were outraged at the reckless interruption, or the blatant disregard for private property. Perhaps some were moved by the loyalty of these men; they would stop at nothing to get their friend to Jesus. Certainly some had to have looked on the paralyzed man with compassion. Being unable to walk meant you were unable to work. You were entirely dependent on others. For everything. There were no wheelchairs. You either lay on the ground near the gate begging, just stuck there. Or in the rare case that you had a support system, you were dependent on your family and friends. So no doubt, when the dust cleared and they saw the paralyzed man, they had compassion. He needs healing.

But what did Jesus see? In all of that chaos and distraction, what did Jesus see? Verse 5: he saw their faith. He saw their faith.

And what do we expect him to do now that he has seen their faith? We expect him to *heal him*. To tell him to get up, take his bed, and go home! That's what the guy wants. That's what he needs. But what does he say? "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" (v. 5)

Now why would Jesus do that? Why, when someone so broken and desperate comes looking for a miracle to walk again, why would Jesus tell him instead, "your sins are forgiven"? That doesn't make sense to us. Imagine the disappointment. It feels a bit like ordering a steak and being served an empty plate with a little garnish on the side. That's kind of a nice finishing touch there on the edge of the plate, but I'm not sure how that's going to fill me up or address my need, my hunger. It's a nice bonus to be forgiven of sin, but I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do with that laying here on the mat. That doesn't feel particularly loving of Jesus. It feels cold and insensitive. *Why would Jesus see faith and pronounce forgiveness instead of healing?*

Hold that question, and let's keep looking at the story. Because there were other people in the room who were also somewhat taken aback by Jesus' actions—not because he didn't heal the man like they expected, but because he had the audacity to pronounce forgiveness of sins.

Verse 6: “Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” (vv. 6-7).

Just who does Jesus think he is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins over this man? Only God can do that, as he says in passages like Isaiah 43:25, “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (cf. Exod. 34:6-7). In pronouncing this man forgiven of his sins, with no sacrifice or offering at the temple, Jesus is exercising an authority that only God has the right to exercise. And so from the perspective of the scribes, he's blaspheming. He's slandering God by making himself equal with him.

And of course, if Jesus were mere man, the scribes were right to be outraged. But Jesus is no mere man. He is both fully God and fully human. And as such, he alone is qualified and authorized on earth to forgive sins. And so look at what he does next.

First, he exposes publically what they were thinking in private, which is the first tip of the hat that the person they're dealing with is no mere human. Verse 8: “And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’”

Second, he challenges their logic in v. 9. “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’” If they're waiting around for him to heal the guy as some proof of his authority, they've missed the point. Jesus has already accomplished the more difficult task in forgiving him—again, something only God can do.

But because they still don't get it, Jesus says, ‘I'll play ball.’ He proves his authority to forgive by accomplishing the easier task as well. Verse 10: “‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’ And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” (2:10-12).

It's a beautiful ending to a classic story. But what do we do with Jesus' strange activity? Why does Jesus see faith and pronounce forgiveness, and then see unbelief and pronounce healing? We expect the reverse—that he would announce healing to the paralyzed man (since that's what he wanted), and that he would announce his authority to forgive sins to the scribes (since that's what they disputed).

But Jesus shows his love in unexpected ways because *he knows things we don't know*. Like the CT or the MRI that can look inside us to see what's really going on, what's really wrong, Jesus, as the eternal Son of God in the flesh, knows us intimately and exhaustively, so that his love is able to penetrate our wants and expectations and meet us where we need it most. In a word, his love is *omniscient*.

What does “omniscient” mean? That’s not a word we use too often in daily conversation. It simply means “all-knowing.” Jesus knows everything. We typically see that word in classic theology—the “three omnis”—God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. He is *omniscient*—all-knowing; *omnipotent*—all-powerful; and *omnipresent*—he is everywhere at the same time.

So Jesus, with respect to his divinity, is omniscient. He knows everything about us—not just what we say and do, but what we think and feel. As Psalm 139:1-4 says:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! <sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. <sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

And Hebrews 4:12-13:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

So what does Jesus do with that intimate and exhaustive knowledge of us?

What do *we* do when we get privileged information about someone that’s potentially damaging? The human impulse is to try and leverage that knowledge for our own gain. To expect the other person to give us something or do something for us in return for our silence. Either that, or we just go parading it out there for everyone to hear, so they look bad and we look better. In fact, most of us are so afraid of what people will do if they were to see who we really are, that we keep so much of our true selves hidden. We put on a mask, project an image, put on a show. It’s a deeply sad dilemma, because on the one hand, we desperately want to be known—we want that intimacy, and yet we desperately fear it for what it might cost.

But Jesus sees us, and knows us. Whether we realize it or not. There’s nothing in our lives or in our hearts that’s hidden from his sight. So what does he do with that intimate and exhaustive knowledge? He uses it to perfect his love for us. To love us in exactly the way that we need it.

Now there are two shocking things there: first, Jesus knows us intimately and exhaustively, and *he still loves us!* That, my friends, is what’s called *grace*. Receiving something amazing when we actually deserve something terrible. For Jesus to see our sin and respond with love is nothing short of grace.

But second, that he actually uses his omniscience to perfect his love. To penetrate our wants and expectations and meet us where we need it most. That’s amazing. But that’s what we see in our story. Look again at the story of the paralytic.

Amid all of the chaos of people digging through the roof, amid the loyalty of the friends, and the desperation of the paralyzed man, when Jesus looks at them, what does he see? He saw their *faith* (v. 5).

Now how do you see someone's faith? We can see evidence of someone's faith, based on what they say or how they live. But I cannot see into your heart to tell whether your faith is genuine or not.

*Jesus can.*

And when he looks into their hearts and sees their faith, he knows exactly how to love the paralyzed man well. By pronouncing forgiveness of sins.

Because Jesus knew that what this man needed most was not to walk, but to be forgiven. Which is shocking for us to think about. The obvious need is for healing. But that's our WebMD self-diagnosis. Jesus is able to love us perfectly, because he knows us intimately and thoroughly. After all, which is worse? Being dependent on others your whole earthly life, or being separated from God for all eternity? *Which is the greater need?* The forgiveness of sins.

And we need to understand that this is true for us as well. There are so many ways that we deal with brokenness in this world, and we long for all of them to be dealt with. And when Christ returns, they will be. Everything will be made new. But whatever earthly trouble we face, our greatest need as humans is the forgiveness of sins. Sin is rebellion against God; it makes us enemies of God. As we talked about last week, it brings us under the righteous condemnation of God. It separates us from the source of life and beauty and truth and meaning and peace—from God himself. It destroys our relationships on earth. It corrupts our hearts. And so our greatest need is to have our sins forgiven. To be made clean and new and reconciled to God. And that's what God offers to us through faith in Jesus Christ. That's what he came to do—again, from last week: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

Jesus used his omniscience to perfect his love for the paralytic—he saw faith and pronounced the forgiveness of sins. He used his omniscience to perfect his love for the scribes as well. Look again at the second part of our story, starting in v. 6. Notice how the scribes never verbalized their frustration or criticism. They “questioned him in their hearts.” But look again at v. 8: “And immediately Jesus, *perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves*, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’” Just as Jesus can see faith in the heart of the paralyzed man and his friends, so he can hear unbelief in the hearts of the scribes. And that's why he pronounces healing in the second half of the story. Because what the scribes need in their unbelief is evidence that Jesus has authority to forgive sins.

And Jesus is the only one uniquely qualified to do this. Because only Jesus is able to stand in our place, as our substitute—offering his life of perfect obedience in place of our idolatry and rebellion, and receiving in himself the punishment we deserved for our sin, as he died an innocent death on the cross. Jesus dealt decisively with sin, therefore he is qualified to offer forgiveness. What the scribes needed most was to come to grips with that. What some of us here need is to come to grips with that—that sin really is sinful, because God really is holy. And that grace really is sufficient to deal with our sin, because the blood of Jesus really is enough. “In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all *wisdom* and *insight*” (Eph. 1:7-8). Jesus loves us with an omniscient love.

Do you realize that Jesus knows you intimately and thoroughly, and therefore exactly how to love you in each moment. Which means he might not always love us in the way we expect. There are times where we may scratch our heads or shake our fists at him, for not dealing with us in the way we think he ought. For leaving us in our trial or trouble, in our pain or frustration. And no one is saying that's easy. And no one is telling you not to cry out for deliverance or shout to heaven 'How long?' But one thing we can be sure is that *it's not because Jesus is uninformed*. He doesn't express his love through trial and error, or cut first and look at the film later. He knows what he's doing. He knows us intimately and completely. And therefore his love is able to penetrate our wants and expectations and meet us where we truly need it most.

The paralytic wanted to walk; what he needed was forgiveness for his sins. The scribes wanted Jesus to be wrong; what they needed was to understand his authority to forgive sins. Jesus loved them both by giving them what he alone knew they truly needed. And though we won't always see it or get it, that's exactly how he loves us as well. Why would we ever allow a doctor to cut open our stomach and pull out an organ? Because we trust that he can see something we can't see, and knows what we need better than we do (even if it hurts). So it is with the omniscient love of Jesus.

And we need to think about that in how we reflect Christ's love as well—in how we love others. To love someone well requires an intimate knowledge of that person. If you don't know who they are, or what's really going on, it's hard to come alongside and help. Now we're not Jesus; none of us are omniscient. We can't see into people's hearts and minds to know them. We'll never know someone fully the way Jesus knows us. But one thing we can do: we can listen. We can make a genuine effort to know someone. We can ask meaningful questions of one another to get to know each other.

One of the ways we do this in the Lead Pastor cohort I've been participating in the last two years, is when we catch up, we start by asking each other two questions: what are you carrying that you want to share so we can celebrate with you? And what are you carrying that you want to share so we can cry with you?

That doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build a trust where we can really be honest with each other. But the more we listen, the more we focus on knowing the other, rather than just waiting to talk, the more we will know what's going on in someone's life, and the better equipped we'll be to love them well. Our love might not be omniscient, but it can be informed.

And while we will always run into limits in our knowledge of each other, there is someone we can point them to who can know them fully, who *does* know them fully, and who not only still loves them, but applies his intimate and exhaustive knowledge to love them perfectly. To penetrate their wants and expectations and meet them where they truly need it most.

Only someone with omniscient love can look at the chaos of the situation and actions of the paralytic and his friends and see not simply desperation, but faith. Only someone with omniscient love can look at the paralyzed man himself and see that his greatest need is not simply to walk, but to be forgiven for his sins. Only someone with omniscient love can perceive the unspoken criticism and questions within the hearts of the scribes. Only someone with

omniscient love can address those criticisms and vindicate his authority to forgive sins by making a paralyzed man walk again.

Jesus loves us with an omniscient love. May we resist the temptation that think that because things aren't going the way we thought they should, he must be a novice. May we trust that he knows us better than we know ourselves. May we trust him not merely for what we want or think we need, but that he knows us well enough to love us perfectly, and meet us where we truly need it most. May we see and experience the omniscient love of Jesus.