

¹ And when He returned to Capernaum after some days,
it was reported
that He was at home.
² 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.
³ And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men.
⁴ 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 paralytic lay.
⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith,
He said to the paralytic,
"Son, your sins are forgiven."
⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there,
questioning in their hearts,
⁷ "Why does this man speak like that?
He is blaspheming!
Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
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?
⁹ Which is easier,
to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,'
or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'?"
¹⁰ But
that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"
-- He said to the paralytic—
¹¹ "I say to you,
rise,
pick up your bed,
and go home."
¹² 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!"

He returned to Capernaum after some days – Time has passed between the last story of Jesus healing this man with leprosy and the current story. What has been

happening in the interval? Jesus has been going to the surrounding villages, preaching and healing people, just as He said He would do. We do not know how much time has passed, but the word around Him continued to spread, so much so that this story will introduce us to “the scribes” who were from Jerusalem. For them to pay any attention to “backwater” Capernaum means that the things Jesus had been doing were attracting some major attention.

At home – Mark is a bit vague here, but the implication seems to be that Jesus had a home in Capernaum. Whether he was staying with someone else (say Simon) or renting a place, we have no idea, but the point seems to be that Jesus was “on a break” and no longer moving around from place to place, but he was at a known place where local people could find him again.

No more room, not even at the door – Jesus’ popularity has grown considerably. This particular detail about the size of the crowd around the house is a necessary piece of information which will explain why the paralyzed man’s entrance into the house is via the roof.

He was preaching the word – Jesus’ work was never finished. Previously we heard of His preaching in the synagogue, but even in the domestic sphere, He sets about preaching. This is exactly the focus He said He had (Mark 1:38). Here He is described as preaching “the word,” but the exact content of His preaching is not described. The focus for Mark continues to be on Jesus’ preaching activity, that He is acting as one who has authority, and then he describes to us the reactions of the people who heard the actual words of Jesus without giving to us the words. Part of this could be ascribed to Mark’s narrative style and purposes, but it could also be part of how Simon (considered to be Mark’s source) related these events himself. The actions of Jesus spoke as loud, if not louder than His words. Ironically though, it is Jesus’ very words that will be called into question in this story.

They removed the roof above Him – “Many houses had two storeys, though, since no building in ancient Israel has yet been preserved with a complete roofed ground floor or ceiling, the original height of a building is not always certain. Upper rooms were reached by stairs or ladders. These rooms provided the main living and sleeping accommodation (cf. 2 Ki. 9:13, 17), and guests could also be looked after there (1 Ki. 17:19; 2 Ki. 4:10–11). Roofs were constructed from beams covered with branches and a thick layer of mud plaster, though the rafters were sometimes supported by a row of pillars along the middle of the room. Cylindrical stone rollers about 60 cm. long were used to keep the roofs flat and waterproof, though roofs needed to be re-plastered annually prior to the rainy season to seal cracks which had developed during the summer heat. The family would often sleep on the roof in summer or use it to dry raisins, figs, flax, etc., in the sun. A parapet was to be built as a safety precaution according to Dt. 22:8. Vaulted roofs were certainly in use in Palestine by the Persian

period, while the tiled roof also appeared before NT times. The rooftop was also a place of worship, either for Baal and especially the host of heaven (Je. 19:13; Zp. 1:5), or for the true God (Acts 10:9)."¹

When they made an opening – The details of the practical aspects of this entry might be a bit fuzzy to us, but what is written speaks an awful lot about the persistence and determination of these four friends to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. One wonders how long Jesus continued to talk while these men were at work, with debris falling onto the people below. What obstacles do we let get in the way of bringing ourselves (and others!) to Jesus? More examples will follow of other people's determination to get to Jesus (5:23, 25–34, 36; 7:24–30, 32; 8:22; 9:24; 10:46–52).

they removed the roof – The Greek here literally reads, "they unroofed the roof," which I kind of admire. The English translation means the same thing, but loses a bit of luster.

When Jesus saw their faith – The language is ambiguous as far as who "their" is. Clearly it must refer to the four friends, but does it also include the paralyzed man?

Son, your sins are forgiven – While Jesus' previous words refer to the whole group, why is he now only speaking to the paralyzed man ("your" is singular, not plural). But why is he the only one whose sins are forgiven? Once again, we must understand that to most people of Jesus' day sickness was not just a physical problem, it was a spiritual one (John 5:14, John 9:2–3, Luke 13:1–5). To all present, this man's sins would have somehow been responsible for his hapless physical condition. Jesus' words speak immediately to that perception, but His words speak to a much greater reality. Physical healing and spiritual healing may or may not overlap. People who look perfectly healthy on the outside may be spiritually dead on the inside, and vice versa. Yet, we probably shouldn't kid ourselves. Do you think the four friends brought this paralyzed man down through the roof, so that Jesus would forgive his sins? Undoubtedly what they were hoping for was another miracle of physical healing. Jesus' ministry was holistic and physical healing was always a symptom of a greater picture of the new creation that were part of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' words can be interpreted in a couple of different ways. In the Old Testament times, the priests would announce forgiveness to people who brought sacrifices to atone for their sins and prophet Nathan announced forgiveness to David (2 Sam. 12:13), but that is not how the scribes understand Jesus' words and Jesus doesn't correct their understanding (Mark 1:6–7, 9). But is Jesus merely announcing God's forgiveness as a mere spokesman? No. What Jesus is saying here is that He has the

¹ Selman, M. J. (1996). [House](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., p. 489). InterVarsity Press.

authority in Himself to forgive sins and He is actively exercising that authority by His speaking now.

Some of the scribes – Different English translations will translate the term differently. Literally, “scribe” is a good translation, but it lacks a little bit of the background necessary for us to understand what is going on. The alternative translation is “experts in (or teachers of) the Law” (that is, the Law of Moses). While this is the first time we’re seeing them, they were mentioned in Mark 1:22 as the straw man against whom Jesus’ own teaching was superior. The scribes’ main aim was to conserve and preserve the written words of the Law, neither adding to them or subtracting from them. However, in their literalism, they lost sight of what the words were actually pointing them to: Jesus, the Messiah, who was the fulfillment of the Word.

Mk. 1:22 ESV And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

To be a scribe was to be a professional, skilled in the written words of the Law of Moses. Pharisees, on the other hand, tended to excel in the oral traditions of Judaism, and were also considered a political faction or party. A person could be both a scribe and a Pharisee, but in the Gospels, people from both of these groups will ally together against Jesus as their common enemy.

Mk. 2:6 ESV Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,

Mk. 2:16 ESV And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Mk. 3:22 ESV And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”

Mk. 7:1 ESV ¶ Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem,

Mk. 7:5 ESV And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”

Mark doesn’t explain their motives for being among the crowd seeking out Jesus, but given their accusing thoughts, it is quite likely that they have heard some things about Jesus and have come to measure His words for themselves. Clearly, they believe He is a sham, but now His words drive them to more serious charges.

Jesus, perceiving in His spirit – Though they said nothing, Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking. His divine intuition itself should have given them pause.

He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone! – The charge of blasphemy, which we may think of as no big deal, was extremely serious to these scribes. The Law of Moses commanded stoning as the penalty for blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-16). So by charging Jesus of blasphemy, the subject of His death has already been pondered. To them, it's not even the case that they would say Jesus is their enemy, blasphemy is a charge whereby the guilty party has made himself the enemy of God. The death penalty is reflective of the serious nature of the crime. To us some crimes of murder would justify capital punishment, but here the one attacked is not a mere mortal, but God Himself. Therefore, the penalty is, if anything, far too insufficient for the heinous nature of the crime. But the question remains, is Jesus really guilty of blasphemy or not? The answer to that question depends completely on who one believes Jesus to be.

but God alone – In Greek, it reads, "Who can forgive sins, but one – God!" This translation seems to be influenced by the same story in Luke's Gospel, which says "God alone." The reason to be nitpicky is that the "one" hearkens back to the great Shema in Deuteronomy 6:3 which was an Old Testament creedal statement, recited daily by faithful Jews making explicit the Jewish belief in one God (monotheism).

Lk. 5:21 ESV And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Deut. 6:4 ESV ¶ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Whereas God is the sole authority in Scriptures, the scribes allege that Jesus is usurping that role for Himself.

Jn. 5:18 ESV This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jn. 10:33 ESV The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."