

MINISTRY: A FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

MARK 2:1-12

THE GOAL OF MINISTRY IS TO ESCORT PEOPLE INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

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MINISTRY: A FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

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I think that throughout the centuries, churches have developed an unhealthy dichotomy between clergy and congregation. In other words, we expect pastors to do ministry and we expect the congregation to be ministered to.

In his letter to the early church, the Apostle Peter said that we are a nation of priests. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are all priests. We are all clergy. We are all ministers. Does that sound unnatural to you? Does that frighten you? You, each one of you are ministers.

Having been a pastor now for over 25 years, I can tell you that being a minister is a risky business, so I can understand your hesitation. You all remember that church that I used to pastor ... the one that was so tough. It was so tough that ministry was indeed a risky business. This church never quite came right out and said things, but their subtle messages were clear. It's funny that we're in the Advent/Christmas season, because they used to choose Christmas as one of their prime times to send me messages as to how I was doing as a pastor. On the first Christmas I was there, the congregation gave me a new Bible and a set of commentaries. On the second Christmas, they bought me a clock. On the third Christmas, they got me a certificate for singing lessons, and on the fourth Christmas they bought me a set of matching luggage.

Believe me; I know that ministering to others comes at great risk. But I want you to know that it also comes with great reward as well.

I have said this couple of times before as we have been reviewing the *Purpose Driven Life*, but I think it's worth repeating again. Christianity is not for the faint or weak-hearted. To live Christianity like Jesus did take a lot of courage. To put yourself out there to be in a love relationship with God and with others takes a lot of courage and faith.

This morning, I'd like to clear up some misconceptions about ministry. Oftentimes people don't want to minister because they think they can't accomplish desired goals. But everybody who is a believer has the necessary qualifications and competency to minister. The main idea of this morning's passage defines the goal of ministry like this. **THE GOAL OF MINISTRY IS TO ESCORT PEOPLE INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD.** In other words, ministry consists mainly of bringing, not doing. It doesn't matter what spiritual gifts we have. It doesn't matter what talents or resources we have. Our job as ministers is all the same. We are called to bring people face to face with God. It is God Who saves people, not us. It is God Who heals people, not us. It is God Who teaches and guides people, not us. It is God Who brings people peace, not us. It is God Who sets people free, not us. So as we study through this morning's text, let's remember that it is God Who accomplishes all things. As ministers, we are simply to be faithful to our job.

I. A FAITHFUL MESSAGE (VS 1-2)

Salvation And Healing Come From God Through Jesus Alone. Jesus Is The Message.

Verses 1-2 remind us that Jesus is a faithful message. In other words, we must remind ourselves and one another that **SALVATION AND HEALING COME FROM GOD THROUGH JESUS ALONE. JESUS IS THE MESSAGE.** As long as we keep this in mind, we will maintain a proper perspective on ministry.

A. JESUS APPROACHES WITH MANY OPPORTUNITIES (1)

Verse 1 is a good example of how Jesus approaches us with many opportunities. Jesus' ministry was very public. His desire was to be with people. He wanted people to find salvation. He wanted people to be set free from the bondage of sin, Satan, and death. Jesus wanted to heal people and make them whole. As we studied through worship and fellowship, we said that Jesus continues to stand at the door of our hearts knocking. He provides unbelievers with opportunities to come to Him and find salvation. Jesus invites the poor, tired, and those carrying heavy burdens to come to Him. Jesus invites you and me to get involved in His ministry to the world.

Just think about how our church has been changing. We have become very intentional about fulfilling the 5 purposes God has given us as individuals and as a church. We are focused on worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism. As we have been reviewing these purposes during this Advent/Christmas season, leaders of these ministries have been coming up and explaining what their areas of responsibilities are. They have job descriptions and have been inviting all of us to participate. In a way, Jesus is providing us opportunities to minister. Have you been giving any thought as to where you would like to serve?

B. MANY PEOPLE ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE MESSAGE (2)

You know, whenever I talk to unbelievers about Christ, they often ask me about people in the jungles who have never heard of Him. They ask, "How will God judge them?" But that's almost always a smoke screen. The point is that as verse 2 points out, many people are all too familiar with the message of Christ. I would say that most people in the United States have heard of Jesus. With all the hoopla about secular Christmas and with all the lawsuits being filed to prevent schools from singing Christmas songs and cities from decorating for Christmas, surely everyone has heard of Jesus. Often the view of Jesus is distorted, but at least people know there is a buzz about this God/Man named Jesus.

Think about our story this morning. Jesus came back to the town of Capernaum and people were curious. He was the hottest ticket in town. He was staying at a private house and when people found out where He was, they swamped the property. The only thing missing was modern day paparazzi. It didn't matter why people came. Some came to see Jesus do some miracles. Some came to hear Jesus preach. Some just came to see a freak show. Nevertheless, news about Jesus traveled far and wide. I say this every year, but I think it's worth repeating. I love all of Christmas. I love the religious Christmas and I love the secular Christmas. I would challenge all of us to be very aware of opportunities to talk about the Christ of the Bible during this season. Secular Christmas buzz gives us a natural opening to talk about the real meaning of Christmas. Let's not waste it. And here is the real message of Christmas. **SALVATION AND HEALING COME FROM GOD THROUGH JESUS ALONE. JESUS IS THE MESSAGE.** Jesus is the answer. He is faithful.

II. FAITHFUL FRIENDS (VS 3-5)

Ministry Involves A Great Deal Of Risk.

Verses 3-5 describe some faithful friends. These verses describe the heart of ministry. But know this. **MINISTRY INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF RISK.** Please don't miss the power of these 3 little verses. Maybe these guys were all friends from childhood. One of their friends was crippled. He was paralyzed and couldn't move. Maybe he fell off a horse or had some kind of accident that left him totally helpless. His friends were perhaps having tea downtown when they heard that Jesus was in town. These four guys could not help their friend at all. But when they heard Jesus was in town, at a local residence, they had an idea. They said to one another, "We can't help our friend, but Jesus can. After all, Jesus healed blind men, lepers, and even demon-possessed people. Surely He can help our friend. Once they make up their minds that Jesus can help their friend, the risk taking begins.

A. RISKING REJECTION (3)

In verse 3 they risked rejection. They were all excited about helping their friend. So they went to his house to tell him the good news, "Jesus is in town. We want to take you to Him so He can heal you." Can you imagine how their crippled friend might respond? "What? You want to take me where ... to do what? I don't think so. You guys are as stupid as I am lame." I think the last thing this guy would want is to become a public spectacle. It would be embarrassing enough to be completely crippled. But his friends risked arguing with him. They must have convinced him, because we see them carrying their friend on a stretcher through town. That's love. The 4 guys are not embarrassed by their friend's condition. All they are focused on is getting their friend to Jesus.

B. RISKING RIDICULE AND LOSS (4)

But they didn't only face the risk of rejection; they faced the risk of ridicule and loss in verse 4. They tried to push their way through the crowd but couldn't make it. We have all been in crowded places where people are pushing, shoving, giving you dirty looks and some even cursing you. Now watch what follows because this is really amazing to me. Keep in mind the four of them are carrying their friend on a stretcher. Look where we see them next. They are on the top of the roof of this house. How in the world did the five of them get up there? It would have been challenging enough for

the four of them to get on the roof, but they got up there with their friend. Can you imagine the comments they got from bystanders? Can you imagine the comments they were getting from their crippled friend? But these guys were not to be denied. They loved their friend and they believed only Jesus could heal him.

Now they risk going to jail. At the very least they are going to have to pay this owner for the damage they did to his roof. Out of their great love for their friend and desire to get him to Jesus, they start destroying this guy's house. They dig through the roof and make a big hole.

Please don't miss the picture here. It's a great picture. Jesus is in the house preaching. All of a sudden, dust starts to fall, Jesus brushes Himself off, and He goes on preaching. Jesus is about to make an important point when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, a stretcher is being lowered down, with a crippled man on it, right in front of Jesus. The four friends are high-fiving each other, pumping their fists, and yelling, "Yes! That's what I'm talking about."

The poor crippled guy must have a frightened, bewildered, and really stupid look on his face. As he passes in front of Jesus, he grins at Jesus with an embarrassed look. Jesus raises his eyebrows as he looks at the poor crippled man. And then Jesus' attention is drawn to the four crazies on the roof. Jesus summed up the situation quickly.

C. RISK VERSUS REWARD (5)

Which brings us to verse 5 where we see an analysis of risk versus reward. The friends risked rejection. They risked ridicule. They risked financial loss and perhaps even jail time. Please follow this in verse 5. With eyebrow raised, looking at the crazies on the roof, then back at the cripple, Jesus says, "My son, your sins are forgiven." There are two points I want to make here. First of all, the thing that moves Jesus to action is not the condition of the cripple, but the love and faith of his friends. Secondly, they may be high-fiving one another too soon. Jesus didn't immediately heal the cripple. He forgave the man of sins. In other words, He gave him salvation. Now what's interesting is that salvation and healing are often the same word in Greek. The four friends stopped their high-fiving. They said, "We brought him here to get healed, not saved."

But here is where we have to remind ourselves of what ministry is all about. These four friends accomplished their mission. They got their friend to the one Person Who could help him. They risked a lot but they did get their friend to the feet of Jesus. In ministry, we don't know what kind of healing, what kind of salvation, and what kind of interactions Jesus has in mind for the people we bring to Him. Our goal is not to determine what kind of outcome or settlement Jesus should bring about with the people we bring to Him. Our goal is simply to bring people face to face with Jesus.

MINISTRY INVOLVES A GREAT DEAL OF RISK but the reward of seeing people find wholeness and freedom is worth it.

Now at this point in the story, there is a lot of tension. The friends are celebrating their victory only to hear Jesus say to their friend, "Son, your sins are forgiven." To say the least, they are disappointed. All that to get their friend to Jesus and He forgives him of his sins. His friends are saying, "What sins could our friend have? He is too crippled to go out and sin."

III. AN UNFAITHFUL RESPONSE (VS 6-9)

Even Though Many People Hear And See The Message At Work, Most Will Continue To Reject Jesus.

A. THE REJECTION OF JESUS (6)

But in verses 6-9 we are introduced to another group of people who exhibit a really unfaithful response. This is the case even today. **EVEN THOUGH MANY PEOPLE HEAR AND SEE THE MESSAGE AT WORK, MOST WILL CONTINUE TO REJECT JESUS.** Verse 6 shows their rejection of Jesus. These are religious leaders. They should be happy that this poor man who had been prevented from corporate worship now found healing from sin. Sure, it's understandable how the guy's friends could be confused, but religious leaders should see the benefit of finding peace with God, no matter what our physical circumstances are. But they don't.

People reject Jesus for all sorts of reasons. As we tell people about Jesus and His love, they will ridicule us and make fun of Christianity. You will find that as you try and bring people into the presence of God, oftentimes their families and

friends will want to hold them back. People reject Jesus out of fear, prejudice, ignorance, or even out and out hatred. These religious leaders were jealous of Jesus and hated Him. Look what they said, "What? This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?" They are right in one sense. Only God can forgive sins. And if Jesus were just a man, they would be absolutely right. However, what they failed to take into account was that Jesus is God, God the Son in the flesh. People today want to discredit Christianity so they try and discredit Jesus. Many of the New Age religions are really cleverly disguised forms of ancient Gnosticism. They say things like Jesus really didn't die on the cross. Someone took His place. Some say that it was all a myth. Today, the popular literature everyone is talking about is *The Davinci Code*. People are so hungry to throw away Christianity that they are willing to believe the most absurd things and accept them as fact. It seems to me that as I grow older, I recognize that society is becoming more hostile to the message of Christianity. We as a modern day society are rejecting Jesus.

B. THE REJECTION OF JESUS (7-9)

But there is a price to pay for unfaithful responses. It is frightening to think about the fact that as we reject Jesus, we may then experience the rejection of Jesus as described in verses 7-9. I admire the way Jesus deals with conflict. He lays out the argument in plain sight. He knew their hearts. He knows our hearts. Jesus spells it out for them. In essence Jesus says to them, "You are right. Only God can forgive sins. For anyone else but God to forgive sins would be blasphemy. And since I forgave this young fellow of his sins, you are accusing me of blasphemy. Do I understand you correctly?" They nod yes.

I hear people say the most horrific things about Jesus. We really need to think about what we say and how we act because Jesus doesn't take kindly to our stupidity. He asks them a question "Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up, pick up your mat, and walk?'" Now Jesus once again has the attention of the four guys on the roof. One says to the other, "What did He just say? Did He say, 'Get up and walk? What did He say? What's going on now?'" One of the other friends says, "I don't know but those religious guys look mad." Finally one says, "Shut up. Let's listen."

Well the answer to Jesus' question is easy. It's much easier to say something, anything than to heal a paralyzed man. I'm sure all of us have gone around saying all sorts of religious stuff. People today in these New Age Religions are saying all sorts of crazy stuff. It is definitely easier to talk smack than it is to deliver the goods. I don't know why this is, but **EVEN THOUGH MANY PEOPLE HEAR AND SEE THE MESSAGE AT WORK, MOST WILL CONTINUE TO REJECT JESUS.**

IV. FAITHFUL RESPONSES (VS 10-12)

Ministry Is Complete When The Person Ministered To Responds To Jesus.

This message of ministry is all about faith. Jesus is a faithful God. The cripple had faithful friends. People who reject Jesus are unfaithful to the truth. But verses 10-12 describe some faithful responses. **MINISTRY IS COMPLETE WHEN THE PERSON MINISTERED TO RESPONDS TO JESUS.** Here is something that I want us to hear loudly and clearly. Ministry is all about our bringing people face to face with Jesus. Once the people are in the presence of God, it is out of our hands. For example, the 4 friends did everything they could and risked a great deal to get their friend to Jesus. Once the cripple and Jesus were face to face, the four friends had nothing more they could do. Now it was between Jesus and the cripple. Let me give you some modern day examples. My gift is teaching. All I can do is bring people face to face with Jesus through faithfully teaching and preaching God's Word. From that point on, it is between the person and Jesus. I am no longer involved. It is the same for all the gifts and ministries. If you lead worship, or have the gift of mercy, healing, or giving. All we can do is bring people face to face with God. They must then decide what they want to do. I think people shy away from ministry because we don't often see the desired results we would like. But remember, the final result lies in the hands of Jesus and the person we brought to Him. We cannot make decisions for the person and we are certainly not God.

A. JESUS IS FAITHFUL (10-11)

The first part of this completed cycle is certain. Verses 10-11 remind us that Jesus is faithful. Remember where we are in the story. Jesus said that they were right. Only God can forgive sins. They agreed it was easier to blow smoke and

say someone's sins were forgiven than it would be to heal a cripple. Now Jesus is saying here, "Just to show you that I am God and I have the authority to forgive sins, watch this."

Then He turned to the cripple and said, "Stand up, take your mat, and go on home, because you are healed." Now Jesus has everybody's attention. He has the 4 friends' attention, He has the religious people's attention, and most of all, and He now has the cripple's attention. Keep this in mind again. Jesus forgave the man of his sins. But there was no guarantee of that. That was just talk. But indeed if Jesus heals him physically, then the man was not only healed physically, he had already been healed spiritually. What Jesus promises, He will do.

B. A FAITHFUL RECIPIENT (12a)

The first half of verse 12 goes on to describe a faithful recipient. When Jesus tells you to stand up and walk, the only proper thing to do is to stand up and walk. The man didn't just stand up. Look at the text. He jumped up! He took up his mat and pushed his way through the crowd. Jesus wants to save a lost and hurting world. Jesus wants to minister to people. We want to see people get saved and healed. But they have to make their own faith response to Jesus. In the end, the people we minister to must make their own faith decision. God built the universe that way. We must respect people's freedom to receive or reject Jesus. The final result lies between them and Jesus.

C. A FAITHFUL OBSERVATION (12b)

But there is nothing like seeing someone who finds healing and wholeness in Jesus. A faithful observation is described in the second half of verse 12. Everybody is now going nuts. The crowd is praising God. The friends on the roof are not only high-fiving and screaming, they're doing a happy dance. The man is running to find his friends and the friends are running to see their friend. Now they can do all sorts of things together. The possibilities are now endless. Believe me, there is nothing like seeing someone find freedom in Christ. It's an amazing sight. That really does complete the cycle. **MINISTRY IS COMPLETE WHEN THE PERSON MINISTERED TO RESPONDS TO JESUS.**

V. EPILOGUE

It's simple. Ministry is not all about doing things. It's all about bringing people to God. Ministry is the action we take based on our love for God and love for one another. **THE GOAL OF MINISTRY IS TO ESCORT PEOPLE INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD ...** Nothing more ... nothing less. Again, in ministry, it's all about attitude. St. Francis, in his famous prayer, *Make me an instrument of Thy peace* prays,

*"LORD, MAKE me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."*

Ministry certainly is risky. We have all been burned and we have all failed. But the key is that we get wiser as we minister. Don't give up because the rewards are great.

My prayer for myself and for us as a gathering of believers here at Devon Church is,

"LORD, Make us instruments of Your peace."