

FOLLOWING IN THE WAY:

The Gospel of Mark

Forgiven

MARK 2:1-17
(9/20/26)



Let me present the following scenario.

A couple's marriage has been rocky but then, the husband has an affair. He feels ashamed and wants his wife to forgive him? Should she? How? What does that look like? Can God forgive him?

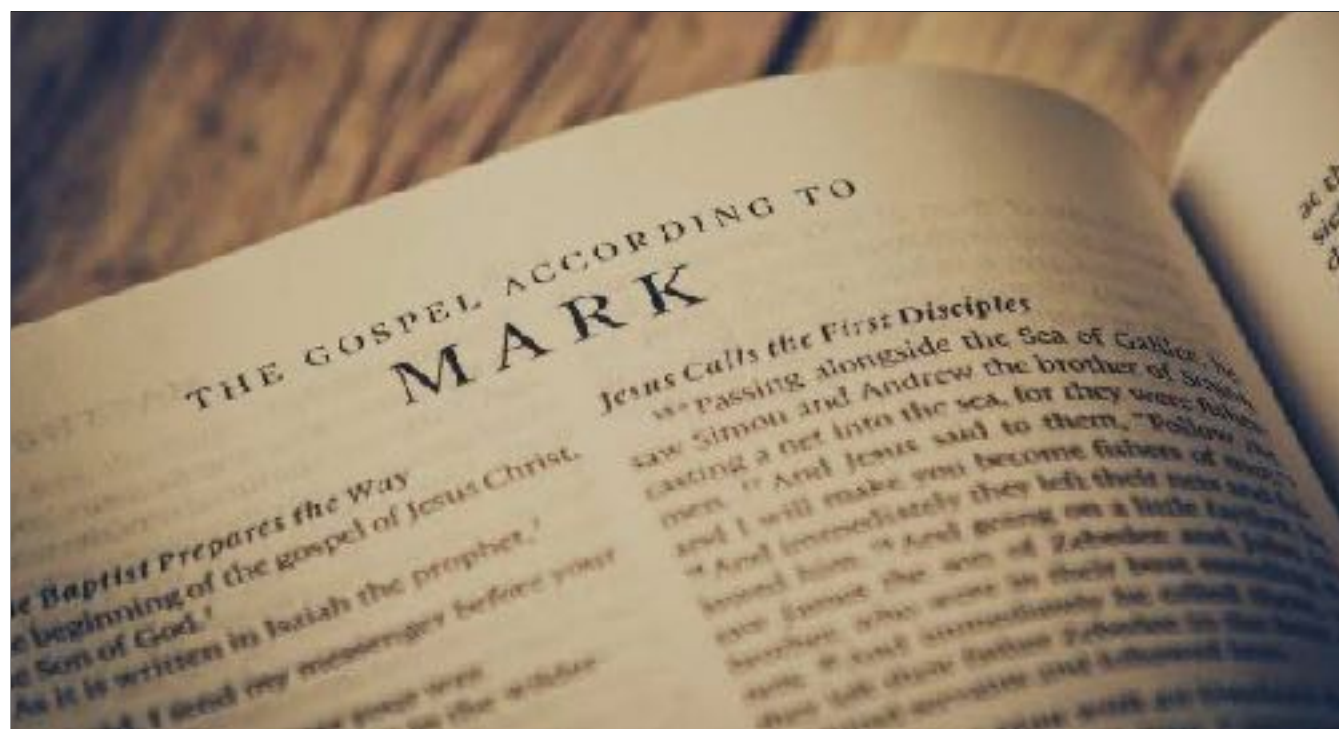


Forgiveness is easily misunderstood.
Forgiveness is hard.

Today's lesson focuses on forgiveness.

It is easily misunderstood. Sometimes it is taken as sweeping everything under the rug, of keeping the skeletons in the closet. Others see forgiveness as cheap way out of problems...say sorry and let it go. But the reason for Christ coming to earth is bound up in the real idea of forgiveness.

Yet, forgiveness is hard. If someone has hurt you and the relationship is damaged, forgiveness seems like the last thing you want to do. Think about a marriage that suffers from an extra-marital affair. How do you get forgiveness back into the relationship to where the bridge can be rebuilt?



What does Mark want me to see?

What does Mark want me to understand?

What does Mark want me to do?

So Mark tells us of an encounter, actually two, where forgiveness takes center stage and in doing so points to the answer to the question, “Who do you say that I am?”

In it, he wants us to do three things. We ask three questions:

What does Mark want me to see?

What does Mark want me to understand?

What does Mark want me to do?



So let's start by opening our eyes to what is happening without having to explain it yet.



The Landscape of the Text

A man is forgiven and healed

2 Confrontations with the “Authorities”

The hated gets accepted

The accepted way gets confronted.

The landscape is again fast paced. A man is both forgiven and healed. But that prompts confrontations with the authorities and it spills over into another situation. Mark wants to emphasize a phrase..so that you may know. In this the hated get accepted but the accepted way gets confronted. We will see all of this.



“That you may know...”

Mark wants to emphasize a phrase..so that you may know.



Lurking in the shadows of this passage is the religious pigeonhole problem.

The Jews (and many times us) put people in pigeonholes that defined who they were and would always be. It wasn't behavior but character and identity.

Sinner or Righteous

Performance Defined by Law and Tradition

Sin dealt with through sacrifice

***Try harder, do more, perform to a higher level to
prove your relationship with God.***

They had two categories with no gray area. Sinners or righteous. You were righteous if you kept the law and the traditions fastidiously. If you washed your hands correctly, observed the Sabbath the way the rabbis instructed. You seldom heard the word grace applied on a personal level. You owed God complete obedience.

If you sinned, it took action on your part. Getting a sacrifice and giving it. Through that personal action, you absolve yourself of the sin of not keeping the law perfectly.

But there were some who were so bad, no sacrifice could take care of it. Those who kept slipping and falling. What's wrong with them? Did they not learn anything the first time? Or those who joined ranks with their hated enemies the Romans to do their bidding? What is wrong with their patriotism?

The answer to sin was simple. Try harder, do more, perform at a higher level to prove your relationship with God.

We are tempted to do the same...to make out a scorecard that measures church attendance, contribution, and events participated in. (I think of the old attendance board that used to hang at the front of a church building...the message was "how are we performing?")

“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.”
(Mark 2:1–2, NIV)

So the passage opens back in Capernaum. Jesus has returned from his itinerant preaching journey and has come back home. And the house he was in was so full, you could not get close to the front door.

The Last Time at Capernaum?

Stunning teaching

Unclean Spirit Dispensed With

Large Scale Healings

Great Expectations!

Think of the last time he was here....

He stunned them with the clarity and forcefulness of his teaching. He cast out unclean spirits and healed many people.

Expectations were great!

“Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.” (Mark 2:3–4, NIV)

And then someone heard tromping on the roof and debris started to fall. Four men carried a man who was paralyzed on a litter. They had climbed to the roof precariously holding the man on the cot. And because they could not get in, they made their own way. They cut a hole in the roof and let down the man between the beams so he was in front of Jesus.



To give you an idea of what a Palestinian roof looked like, they had removed the straw, cut through the small supports and let him down between the main beams.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said
to the paralyzed man, “Son, your
sins are forgiven.”

(Mark 2:9, NIV)

It is the faith of the men that is commended but he forgives the paralytic's sin. Notice the sequence of this chapter. Forgiveness comes long before the healing... important because it the direction sign for Mark's point.

A Silent Objection

“Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, *“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*” (Mark 2:6–7, NIV)

A Counter

“Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, *“Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?”*” (Mark 2:8–9, NIV)

Then, it got tense.

The rabbis who sat there turned sour. They mulled over the statement. Wait, only God can forgive sins and now this guy is saying this. That’s blasphemy for appropriating what belongs to God to himself.

But then, Jesus speaks, not about what they said but about what they thought. (Imagine the look on the rabbis’ faces?)

Why do you think that?

He poses a dilemma.. Which is easier...forgive sins or tell a paralytic to walk and he walks?

The Proof

“But *I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”” (Mark 2:10–12, NIV)

So he answers his own question.

His point is: so you will know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...

So he tells the man to get up and go home. (Think about how ludicrous this must sound...he's paralyzed, he can't get up)

And this got the crowds attention, leaving them with with mouths ajar in amazement.

The Call

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, *he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.*” (Mark 2:13–14, NIV)

A Dinner

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, *many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him* and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.” (Mark 2:15, NIV)

Then, a change of scene. Jesus leaves and goes back to the Sea of Galilee and he is again followed by a crowd who listen to his riveting teaching.

He walked along and sees a man named Levi, the son of Alphaeus, the one we know as Matthew. He is a tax collector sitting in the most hated place in town, the tax collectors office.

And Jesus simply says, “follow me” and he left it all and followed.

That night, to celebrate the moment, Levi invited his friends...fellow tax collectors (after all those kinds don’t have many friends) to a dinner to tell them about his new teacher. Jesus was there having a wonderful time.

A Spoken Objection

“When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: *“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*” (Mark 2:16, NIV)

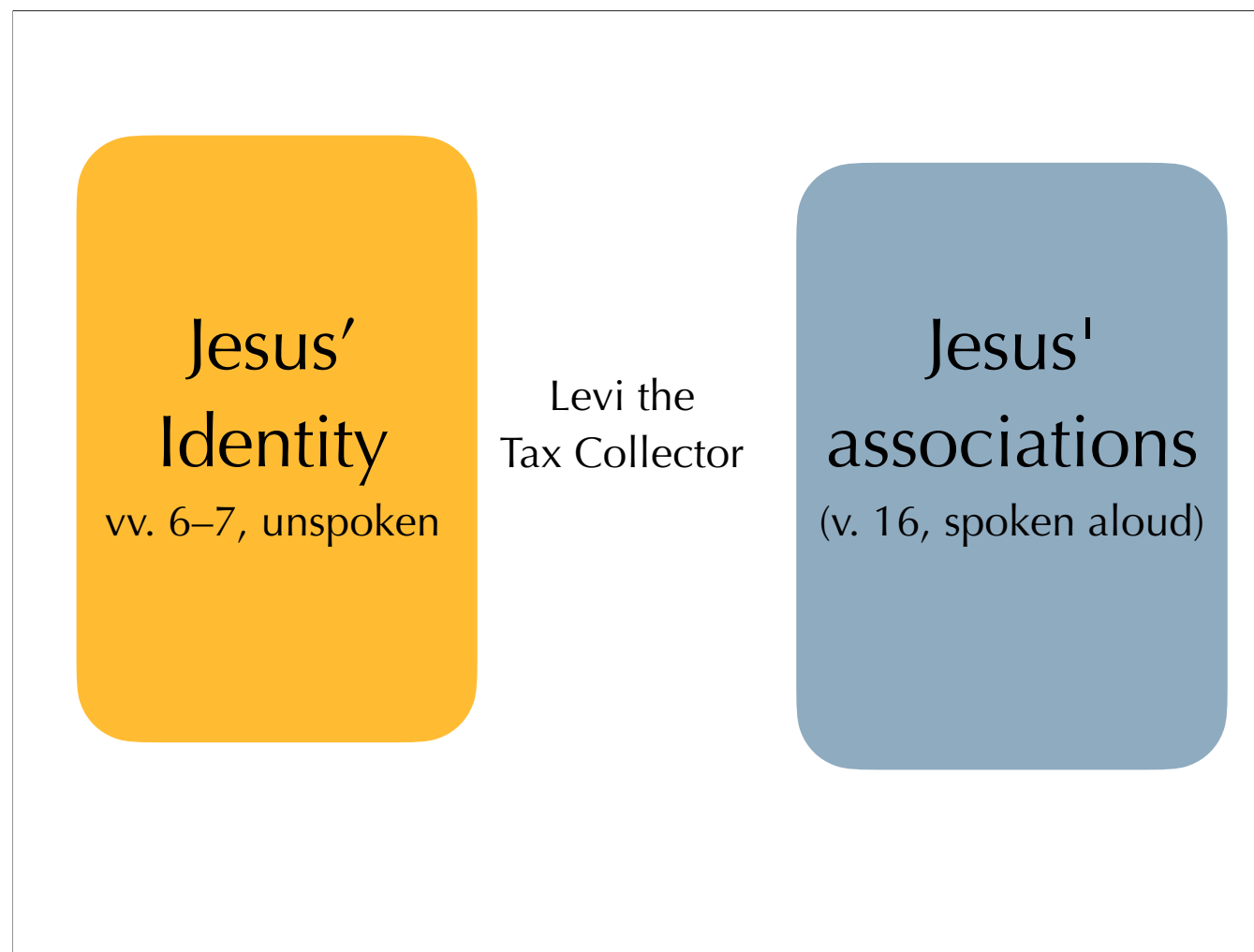
A Pointed Answer

“On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”” (Mark 2:17, NIV)

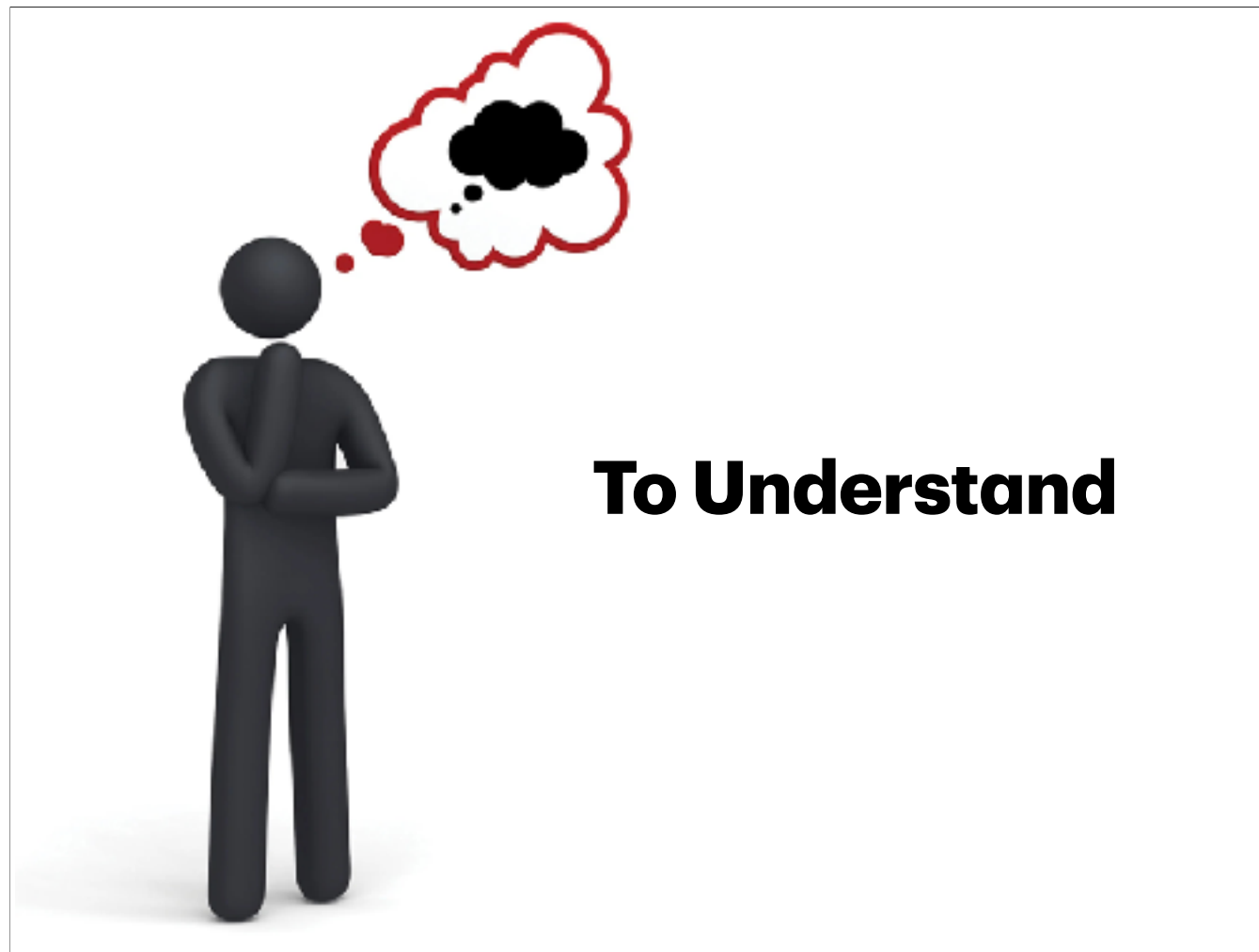
But now, the problem was not held inside. The rabbis and the “super spiritual” would not hold their tongues. They turned to his disciples with a scathing question that acted as an accusation.

Why does he eat with these “kind” of people?

Jesus heard the question and responded. Sick people need doctors and I have come to the sick, not the well.



So as we look at the whole picture, there are two pillars. One is the identity of Jesus...does he have authority to forgive sins and the other is his associations, does he tolerate sin. In the middle is the call of another disciple.



We covered that fast but let's slow down and see what Mark wants us to understand.

Forgiveness



A Cancelled Debt

Who has authority to forgive sins?

Not Ability But Jurisdiction.

Jesus claims it belongs to him

“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:6–7, NIV)

The key idea of this passage is forgiveness.

Forgiveness in the ancient world was used in the world of finance...it meant to cancel a debt. Today, if you get yourself in trouble, a credit card company can, if they chose to cancel a debt so you no longer owe it. That is what forgiveness is. The debt you owe God for your shortcomings is marked paid in full and you are treated differently.

But the true issue is does he have the authority to forgive sins.

It is not about his ability but the word authority means “Is this his jurisdiction?” A security guard cannot arrest someone because he doesn’t have jurisdiction. Local police do not investigate crimes involving other states. They are limited in what they do.

Is Jesus out of his lane when he tells the man his sins are forgiven since God is the one who does that?

An Incomplete Understanding

If God alone forgive sins, then a man cannot forgive sins.

If this man forgives sins, it must mean...

But to believe that, they would have to give up their position.

It reveals the incomplete understanding of the rabbis. It wasn't that they were wrong. Their reasoning went like this:

If God alone can forgive sins, a man cannot forgive sins. Isn't that true...you and I cannot go around and find a stranger and say, "Your sins are forgiven." That's not yours to give.

But, the implication that they did not want to face was "but if this man can forgive sins that must mean....he is God.

The problem is that to believe that, they have to surrender their position. None of us like to eat crow. Once we have a position established, we will ignore reality to hold on to it.

Jesus forgives before he heals.

“**Which is easier**: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’”
(Mark 2:9, NIV)

*Authority to speak, over unclean spirit, over disease...
and even over sin.*

Not just another healing story. That would be nice.

Jesus himself frames it as an easier/harder comparison. Saying "your sins are forgiven" costs nothing to say and can't be verified. Saying "get up and walk" can be checked in five seconds. He deliberately picks the verifiable miracle to authenticate the unverifiable claim.

He is establishing another point in his identity. So far in Mark he has shown his authority to speak, his authority over unclean spirits, over disease and now, over sin.

How Jesus Calls People

“As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.” (Mark 2:14, NIV)

He did not tell Levi to clean up his act, just follow him. In the following, he would change.

It is this authority over sin that is the residue when Levi is called. How Jesus forgives is shown.

Levi is called to follow him. It is just follow me, this tax collector who has been ostracized by the religious community as a turncoat and thief.

He did not tell Levi to clean up his act, just follow him. In the following, he would change.

The Dinner

“While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.”

(Mark 2:15, NIV)

The problem was the dinner and the attendees.

Jesu was there but so were tax collectors.

Tax collectors subcontracted their services to Rome. They were required to collect all taxes due to Rome (which included a tax that for better way of saying was tax on living). The taxes were exorbitant. The pay system was by “commission” meaning they determined how much they wanted to have. They robbed people blind and because they were authorized by Rome, they could have you arrested, take your home, and sell your family into slavery.

I imagine I would have a hard time with them as well.

“When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?””
(Mark 2:16, NIV)

Are they wrong?

Isn't it inadvisable to hang around bad influences?

“One bad apple ruins the whole bunch.”

Isn't this accepting the lifestyle of the people?

Watch who you hang around with!

That was the beef of the rabbis and Pharisees. He is creating a bad look

Are they wrong?

Now, before we get into the weeds, don't we feel like this. Don't we say, “don't hang around with bad influences?” We even have the adage that one bad apple ruins the whole bunch.

But don't we also believe that we are accepting the lifestyle of that person if we spend time with them? Isn't that the whole idea around disfellowshipping someone, to tell them that their behavior is not acceptable and they need to change.

So how would you and I see it?

After all, if you have a 15 year old and they are hanging around with guys that smoke and drink, doesn't that raise your eyebrows?” How can you maintain purity when you wallow in the mire?

Depends On What You are Doing

“On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”” (Mark 2:17, NIV)

If he is a physician to the sick, where does the physician go?

*Are the teachers sick
enough to need him?*

Jesus flips it. My mission is not to make you happy or to look good or to fit in with your political or social opinions. I’m a doctor to treat the sick.

And if he is a physician, where do physicians go? Are they exposed to all kinds of diseases and maladies every day? Aren’t

Do✓

What does the
passage ask of
us?

So what does this passage demand of us?



There are two audiences

The needy and the judges

Which seat do you sit in?

In this passage, we find two groups of people, two audiences if you will.

You find the needy...the man on the cot and the tax collectors eating. But there are also the judges who are finding fault with both Jesus and the people. They are looking askance at the sinners.

This text confronts us to answer...which seat do you sit in...the one where you have nothing but the need for forgiveness or the self-righteous judge feeling superior?



Who can forgive my sins?

But it asks, “who can forgive my sins?”

We know the intellectual answer but it is the emotional and spiritual answer we need to find.

The truth is the hardest person to forgive is us. We know what we did, why we did it, and the consequence of it. We are far too bad for that kind of forgiveness, that’s why I have to keep pushing for better performance because I can’t be forgiven.

The story of the man at the trailer..God can never forgive me?

Jesus can and will if you let him.



Are you sick enough to need a
doctor?

And then finally, are you sick enough to need a doctor?

I don't know if we ever come to grips with the idea that the only reason we can believe and obey Christ is we are so sick we are dying on our own. It is not a good idea but a necessary one. Are we sick enough to let the doctor heal us?

Other Resources for this Lesson

If you would like the audio of these classes, a transcription of the class or a PDF of the slides (with notes)...



Or email me at
rtaylor913@gmail.com and I
will send you a link.

<https://robertgtaylor.com/bible-study-series/following-in-the-way-a-study-of-marks-gospel/>