

“The Main Event”

[Mark 2:1-12](#)

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When I was a kid, Michael Jordan was the greatest athlete alive. I wasn't much of a basketball fan, but even I knew about Michael Jordan. He was leading the Chicago Bulls to championship after championship, he was the smiling face in every Nike and Gatorade and McDonalds commercial. He was even in a movie with Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck where they stop a team of evil aliens from taking over the world. Michael Jordan was everywhere, the greatest basketball player of all time, until one day, Michael Jordan decided he wasn't going to play basketball anymore. He was going to play baseball instead. Which is crazy. Right? When you can play basketball like Michael Jordan can, to stop playing basketball and do anything else, to go from being an unstoppable champion MVP to a minor-league plugger with the Birmingham Barons, that is crazy. I mean, if you went to a concert to hear The Tenors sing, and they come out on stage, and tell everyone sorry, we don't feel like singing tonight. Instead, we're going to show you some cool ping pong tricks we just learned, and then for the entire night, they just played ping pong, you would be pretty disappointed, right? Even if they turned out to be reasonably good at ping pong, it's not what you paid top dollar to see. You would probably ask for your money back. When you are really good at something, when everyone knows that this is your thing, the one thing that's made you famous, doing anything else just seems like a waste of your talent, a disappointment to all the fans who want to see what only you can do.

Keep that in mind when we read today's passage from the Gospel of Mark. We're only at the start of chapter two here, but already Jesus has built up quite the reputation for himself in the early days of his ministry. At first he was just preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God, but when he started casting out evil spirits and healing the sick, that's when things really took off. As soon as people heard that there was a healer around, someone who could do something about sickness and pain, who could fight back against the evil and oppression

that seemed to be all around them, suddenly Jesus was famous. People were flocking to him from everywhere, he couldn't sit down for a cup of coffee without getting swarmed by desperate people in need of healing and deliverance. Jesus tried to keep things quiet – he kept telling everyone he healed, “hey, don't tell anyone about this”, but no one listened. The news about his amazing powers just spread further and further, and soon people were coming who weren't even sick themselves – they just wanted to see the show, they wanted to watch the amazing Jesus of Nazareth do amazing things that only he could do.

And so when Jesus tries to head back to Capernaum for a few days of rest alone, it's no surprise that word gets out and the entire population of Galilee descends on the place where Jesus is staying, all wanting to see the one and only Jesus in action, healing and casting out evil. And when the crowds show up, Jesus starts teaching and preaching about God's kingdom – the kind of thing he did at the beginning of his ministry, before all the miracles took center stage – but everyone in the crowd knows it won't be long before the preaching is done and the main event starts. And sure enough, right in the middle of the sermon, a group of desperate men try to muscle their way through the crowd, and when they can't get to Jesus, they climb on top of the building and rip a hole in the roof and lower their paralyzed friend down through the hole, right in front of Jesus. And now finally everyone crowds a little closer, finally they're going to see what they came to see, Jesus is gonna wave his magic fingers and say the special words and bam, this guys getting healed. It's like someone just handed Michael Jordan a basketball, or the orchestra just started the first few notes so The Tenors can start singing. And Jesus looks down at this paralyzed man, and he looks up at the hole in his roof and the four guys who just made it, and he is filled with love for these five desperate friends, and so he says ... “My child, your sins are forgiven.”

What? That's not what's supposed to happen. That's not what Jesus is supposed to do. He's a healer. He's supposed to heal! That's what makes Jesus special, that's what makes him famous. That's what the crowds came to see. What is he doing, forgiving sins? That's not impressive! We want flash! We want fireworks! We want to see demons running for their lives, we want eyes opened and lepers cleansed. Everyone in Galilee showed up to watch

Michael Jordan dunk and instead they get the outfielder for the Birmingham Barons grounding out to first, they came to hear The Tenors hit the high notes and instead they're watching mediocre ping pong. This isn't what's supposed to happen.

But at least a few people in that crowd of onlookers have realized that what Jesus just said is actually a really big deal. One of the things to notice about the gospel of Mark is that all through this gospel, the so-called 'good guys' – the disciples who are supposed to be following Jesus – they never fully understand who Jesus is and what he's really doing. It's the 'bad guys' in the story who see Jesus for who he truly is, who understand all too well what Jesus is trying to accomplish. It's always the evil spirits and demons who recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, or the religious leaders who understand who he's claiming to be, and when Jesus is being crucified, it's the Roman Centurion in charge who says – this man truly is the son of God. So here in this crowd, it's the religious scribes and lawyers who recognize that what Jesus has said is truly astounding, because Only God can forgive sins. And they're right! I mean, obviously you can forgive other people for sins they've done against you, but you can't forgive sins done against someone else. If you punch me in the face, I can forgive you, but if you punch Michael Jordan in the face, and I say, it's okay, I forgive you, Michael is going to be rightfully upset at us both. The only one who can forgive all sins is God, because every sin is an act against God, an attack on one of his children, on his order and law and justice in the world. So for Jesus to tell this man that his sins are forgiven means he is claiming to be God – he is claiming that every sin this man has ever committed against anyone in his entire life was really committed against Jesus, and Jesus forgives it all.

And if that's true, it's a much bigger deal than anything else Jesus has done so far. It's bigger than the healings, the miracles, all the razzle-dazzle stuff Jesus has done, all of that pales in comparison with claiming the authority to forgive sins. All these people who have been following Jesus around Galilee all this time, crowding around him, seeking miracles and healing and works of wonder, they all think that those things are the main event, those things are what makes Jesus special, and all the rest is just a sideshow, a distraction. But these religious scholars have inadvertently hit on the truth that Jesus alone knows – forgiveness is the main

event. Forgiveness is the point, the purpose, the reason for everything Jesus is going to do. Yes, the healings are impressive, and awfully nice for the individual people who get healed, but the Creator of the Universe didn't enter into creation and build himself out of flesh and bone and blood, just to run a walk-in clinic for the few hundred people lucky enough to live near Capernaum during this one thirty year stretch of human history. God's not going to go to all this trouble just to fix a few broken bones and broken bodies and then call it a day. No, God entered into the world in Jesus Christ to solve the greatest problem at the very heart of human existence, to heal the broken divide between humanity and God, between creation and Creator, and that happens when God forgives. That happens when God looks at human beings who have broken his heart, broken his law, broken his roof, God looks on us and loves us anyway, loves us enough to declare that our sin is forgiven, that there is nothing in all creation that can ever again divide us from our Father's love. That's why Jesus came. That's the main event. Everything else is the sideshow, everything else is just minor league baseball and mediocre pingpong. Healing and miracles and preaching and all the rest, it's all great stuff, but it's just a bonus. Forgiving our sin, reconciling humanity to God, that's the main event.

And it's still easy for us to get distracted by all the razzle dazzle and miss the main event. There are so many other good things that Jesus can do for us, good projects we can put him to work on, good ideas that we come up with that we're sure would take off brilliantly if we put Jesus' name on it. Over the years the church has gotten up to a lot of surprising business – we've run schools and hospitals and orphanages, we've built amazing cathedrals filled with awe-inspiring architecture and works of art. We've done our best to feed the hungry and heal the sick, all in the name of Jesus Christ. And that's all great stuff, wonderful, worthwhile business. But it's not the main event. It's not the point. Our mission as the church is to represent Jesus Christ, to do what he did best, and what he did was forgive. What he did was give up his own life so that God and humanity could be reconciled, so the goofballs who just tore a hole in his ceiling could receive unlimited, unimaginable grace, be invited into the presence of their creator and experience infinite joy and peace and love for all eternity. That's what Jesus did best. And that's what we're called to do too. We are called to a ministry of reconciliation, of forgiveness, of amazing grace. We are called to look out this broken world

and all the broken people in it and proclaim the good news that their sins are forgiven, their guilt washed away, that everything that once separated them from the love and power of Almighty God has already been defeated, nailed to the cross, conquered once and for all, and they have been set free. And we can share that message because it's the same message we've heard ourselves, the same message we know to be true because we've experienced it firsthand. We know what it's like to be forgiven, and we want everyone around us to experience it too, to discover how wonderful it is to receive the grace and freedom that comes from Jesus Christ. As God's forgiven children, we are called to be ambassadors for the grace of Jesus Christ, to live reconciling lives, to make forgiveness the main event in our lives, in our church, and in the world around. We live in the light of God's unending grace, and our core purpose, our reason for living, is to let that light shine in us and through us, so the world will know that Jesus Christ is here, and Jesus Christ forgives. It's what he does best. It's what we're here for. In the name of Jesus Christ - Amen.