

Mark 2:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

Analysis

Jesus poses a rhetorical question contrasting two statements: 'Thy sins be forgiven thee' versus 'Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk.' From a human perspective, pronouncing forgiveness seems 'easier' (εὐκοπώτερον, *eukopōteron*) because it's unverifiable—no visible evidence confirms whether sins are actually forgiven. Physical healing is 'harder' because failure is immediately obvious. Jesus' logic is profound: if He can perform the empirically verifiable miracle (healing), this authenticates His authority to perform the invisible miracle (forgiveness). The question exposes the scribes' inconsistency—they doubt His authority to forgive but will soon witness undeniable proof of His power. Reformed theology emphasizes that both forgiveness and healing require divine power; spiritual healing is actually harder than physical healing because sin's guilt before God's justice demands infinite satisfaction.

Historical Context

Jewish theology maintained that God alone forgives sins (Isaiah 43:25; 44:22). Priests administered ritual forgiveness for ceremonial uncleanness, but moral guilt required God's direct intervention. The scribes correctly understood Jesus' claim to forgive as a divine prerogative—their error was refusing to recognize His deity. In first-century thought, illness and disability were often attributed to sin (John 9:2 reflects this assumption, though Jesus corrects it). Jesus doesn't endorse this simplistic causation but uses it rhetorically.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Do you treat physical needs as more urgent than spiritual needs, and how does Jesus' priority on forgiveness challenge this perspective?
2. What evidence in your life demonstrates that Jesus' forgiveness is as real as physical healing, even though it's invisible?
3. How does understanding forgiveness as the greater miracle affect your evangelistic priorities?

Interlinear Text

τί	ἐστίν	εὐκοπώτερον	εἰπεῖν	τῷ	παραλυτικῷ		
Whether	is it	easier	to say	G3588	to the sick of the palsy		
G5101	G2076	G2123	G2036		G3885		
Ἀφένονται	σοί	αἱ	ἁμαρτίαι	ἢ	εἰπεῖν	Ἐγείραι	καὶ
be forgiven	thee	G3588	Thy sins	or	to say	Arise	and
G863	G4671		G266	G2228	G2036	G1453	G2532
ἄρον	σου	τὸν	κράββατον	καὶ	περιπάτει		
take up	thy	G3588	bed	and	walk		
G142	G4675		G2895	G2532	G4043		

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 9:5 (Resurrection): For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk?