

SESSION THREE

The Miracles of Jesus: *The Answer to Life's Problems* (Mark 2:1-17)

"No child of God sins to that degree as to make himself incapable of forgiveness." ~John Bunyan

I. Overview

The opening scene of chapter two is the first direct confrontation between the religious rulers and Jesus in Mark's Gospel. The religious rulers accuse Jesus of blasphemy—a capital offense under Jewish Law. Indeed, this hostility towards Jesus' claim of divine prerogative will escalate into a plot to kill Jesus (cf. 3:6), and ultimately, it results in Jesus' death.

Ironically, in the midst of this rejection upon the part of the scribes, Mark highlights that Jesus truly is the Christ, the Son of God. So much so, that Stein aptly notes in his commentary on this particular passage: "The present account is one of the most important christological passages in all of Mark." (p. 122).

In what ways does Mark emphasize the greatness of Jesus of Nazareth in 2:1-17? In other words, how does our Gospel writer show that Jesus is the Son of God?

II. The Content

A. Jesus' Ability to Forgive (2:1-12)

1. Spiritual Restoration of the Paralytic (vv. 1-5)

vv. 1-2 - The reference to Capernaum recalls Jesus' previous visit in 1:21-45.

vv. 3-4 - A typical first-century Jewish home would have consisted of small rooms. It would have been impossible to bring a stretcher into a normal Capernaum house, especially in light of the crowd that had gathered (v. 2). These single-story homes had a flat roof accessible by an outside staircase. "Roofs . . . were normally made of wooden beams bearing rods placed across, side by side, then covered with clay and flattened with a roller." (Rousseau and Arav, *Jesus and His World*, 128). Often the Jewish residents would eat and sleep on the roof.

v. 5 - "Their faith" referred not only to the four men who assisted the paralytic, but it also referenced the faith of the paralytic.

Scripture often relates physical illness with sin (cf. Ps 41:4; Isa 38:16-17). However, the Bible also clearly indicates that physical ailments are not always associated with sin (e.g., Jn 9:2-3). In the immediate context of this miracle, the forgiveness of sin and healing is linked. This is unusual because forgiveness is not a prerequisite with many of Jesus'

miracles. Thus, why did Jesus deem it important to forgive the man's sins first? Two common interpretations are: (1) Jesus was aware that the man's illness was directly connected with sin; and/or (2) the paralytic desired more than mere physical restoration.

A declaration of forgiveness assumes divine authority. The scribes recognized *what* God could only do—forgive sins (2:7). However, they failed to recognize *who* God was and is—God incarnate, Jesus Christ! Jesus will make this divine connection explicit in verse 10 (also, cf. Jn 10:33). Jesus did not merely declare the man's sins were forgiven, Jesus forgave them!

2. Objection by the Religious Leaders (vv. 6-7)

Far from simple intrigue, the religious leaders were leveling an unspoken accusation. Blasphemy was a capital offense (cf. Lev 24:10-16). It will be the charge leveled against Jesus later in the narrative (cf. 14:64).

3. Physical Restoration of the Paralytic (vv. 8-12)

v. 9 - As in a typical rabbinic argument, Jesus argued that if the “difficult” could be achieved, then the claim to do the “easier” should be guaranteed. The crowd could not validate the forgiveness of sins, but they could clearly determine whether or not physical restoration occurred. If the paralytic failed to walk, it would invalidate Jesus' previous words.

v. 10 - This is the first of fourteen occurrences of the title “Son of Man” in Mark's Gospel (i.e., 2:28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 13:26; 14:21 [2x], 41, 62). Jesus used this title more than any other self-designator. This term recalls both the humanity of Jesus as well as His divine origin (cf. Daniel 7:13-14).

vv. 11-12 - One commentator aptly notes, “. . . the scribes took Jesus' words as a challenge to the prerogative of God, the crowd understood Jesus to be acting for God and with his approval.” (France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 129).

B. Jesus' Willingness to Associate with Those in Need (2:13-17)

Similar to the previous scene, the topics of forgiveness, healing, and individual responses to Jesus are observed.

v. 14 - Levi was a collector of “sales, customs, and road tolls” for Herod Antipas. A major Roman highway, the *Via Maris*, was a heavily traveled trade route running from Damascus to Caesarea through Capernaum.

vv. 15-16 - To eat with someone implied acceptance of them as friends (cf. Lk 15:1-2; Acts 11:2-18). Thus, Jesus eating with this group of tax collectors was not only socially unacceptable, this activity was also ritually offensive to the Jews. Tax collectors were

despised for their activity. Often the Jews viewed them collectively with robbers and prostitutes (cf. Matt 21:31-32). The reference to the Pharisees only accentuated this vast contrast between the moral and social elite versus the morally depraved and socially taboo group.

v. 17 - Eventually Mark will explain how this forgiveness can be ascertained (cf. 10:45; 14:24).

III. The Intersect

- A. Forgiveness serves as a prerequisite to fellowship with God. This is true for followers of Jesus as well as for those who have never made a claim to know Him.

1 John 2:3-6 -

- B. We must not forget what the Lord has done for us. Similar to the paralytic man and Levi, we were in a desperate state of need. Jesus revealed Himself to us, and we contributed nothing to our spiritual healing.

Revelation 2:4-5 -

- C. Spirituality/religion can quickly identify the deficiencies in others while eclipsing one's own spiritual needs.

Galatians 6:1-3 -

“When we look at the reality of Christ’s life and his mission in the world, we are overwhelmed by the central place that forgiveness takes.”

~ Max Lucado