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THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC, THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST, AND THE
KINGDOM OF GOD

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Introduction

After Jesus is baptized and commissioned by God and tempted by Satan in the wilderness, he begins his earthly ministry, preaching publicly and healing the sick. As his popularity begins to grow, large crowds begin following him. The healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 is his first open conflict with the Jewish leaders, and the first of a set of four controversy stories in which Jesus encounters the scribes and Pharisees (2:1-3:6). Up until this point, Jesus has demonstrated his authority by healing disease and driving out evil spirits. However, when Jesus surprises the crowds by forgiving the sins of a paralyzed man, the scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy and question his authority.

The authority of Jesus to forgive sins is a main theme presented in Mark 2:1-12, which he proves by miraculously healing the man of his paralysis. However, the narrative has much broader eschatological implications. The healing of the paralytic presented for the crowd witnessing the miracle and for readers of Mark's gospel a microcosm of Jesus' redemptive mission on earth, and a taste of what is to come in Christ's renewed Kingdom.

In the following pages, I will explore the narrative of Mark 2:1-12 from several angles, all the while moving from thorough exegesis toward personal application, ending with a suggested sermon outline and application.

Context Analysis

Historical-Cultural Context

An interpretation of Mark 2:1-12 may be informed by a brief analysis of the historical-cultural environment of the time period in which it was written (ca. AD 60s)¹ with a particular focus on relevant details included in the story itself.

Houses

Palestinian homes varied both in size and sophistication during the New Testament period, from small, humble dwellings to upper class mansions consisting of multiple stories, courtyards, and architectural embellishments. Often a home would feature an upper room on the roof, accessed by an outside ladder or staircase, where meals would be eaten or guests would be lodged.² The roof of the home, constructed of wooden beams, dried grass, and compacted dirt, would have also served as a place for storage. In Mark 2, a group of men, unable to get to Jesus due to the massive crowd outside the home, brought a paralytic to Jesus by digging through the roof and lowering the man to the floor. They would have likely accessed the roof by way of the external staircase and broken through to the lower floor by digging a hole through the thatch and dirt ceiling. Jesus recognized the desperation, resourcefulness, and resolve of these men as evidence of their faith.³

¹ Evans, Craig A. "Mark." Pages 1064-1103 in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, edited by Dunn, James D. G., and J. W. Rogerson. 2003. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 1065-66.

² "Homes", page 995 of *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel, eds. Mich: Baker Book House, 1988. 995.

³ Longman, Tremper, and David E. Garland, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2006. 724-25

Disability and Disease

The definition of “disability” in 1st century Palestine was broad, referring to any individual that was considered powerless, weak, or marginalized. This included the sick, poor, demon-possessed, or physically crippled. This is reflected in the Gospels, as the writers do not appear to make much of a distinction between these individuals. When they are mentioned, they are often mentioned together as a category (Mt. 8:16; Mk. 3:10; Lk. 6:18, 7:21).⁴ This was likely due to the reality that those who were sick, lame, blind, deaf, or had any sort of disabling physical affliction shared the same socioeconomic status. These were individuals who were unable to work and made their living by begging. Only slaves were lower in status.⁵ Their destitute way of life was compounded by the public’s regard of wealth as an indicator of an individual’s virtuousness; physical affliction in Jewish tradition was often linked to individual sins. The social value of honor and shame also played a role. Honor was the “social currency” of the ancient world. Simply put, honor was an individual’s value of himself, and the value placed on him by others. Honor was ascribed to an individual through birth or bestowment, or earned through valiant actions such as being a virtuous person, a generous benefactor, a courageous soldier, or a Law-abiding Jew. Those who had honor were seen as more valuable in society.⁶ Accordingly, people had little or no money, could not do anything to obtain honor, and could not gain a public reputation – people such as the sick, the lame, the blind, and the deaf – were social

⁴ Bruce, Patricia. “Constructions of Disability (Ancient and Modern): The Impact of Religious Beliefs on the Experience of Disability.” *Neotestamentica* 44.2 (2010): 253–81.

⁵ Stambaugh, John E., and David L. Balch. *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*. 1st ed. Library of Early Christianity 2. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986. 112.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

outcasts looked upon with disgust.⁷ In Mark 2, Jesus shows favor to one of these social outcasts: a paralyzed man. This would have been outrageous to the crowds who witnessed the miracle.

Scribes

In the Synoptic Gospels scribes are depicted as teachers and scholars of the Law and upholders of Jewish traditions.⁸ Scribes were members of the Sanhedrin, a class of local Judean officials who observed and enforced Mosaic Law as it was recorded in the Torah.⁹ Scribes were expert interpreters and teachers of the Torah. Their expertise in the study of the Law and Scriptures gave scribes great political and legislative power.¹⁰ They were responsible for advising the Sanhedrin on judicial matters relating to interpretation and application of the Law.¹¹ Jesus' many run-ins with the Sanhedrin involved conflict with the scribes, who rebuked Jesus' teaching based on their traditional (and ultimately faulty) interpretation of the Torah. When Jesus healed the paralytic, it was the scribes who took exception to Jesus' claim to have the authority to forgive sins, and they accused him of blasphemy (Mark 2:6-8).

Literary and Redemptive Context

The story of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12) takes place at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. In the opening chapter, Jesus is baptized and commissioned by God, is tempted in the wilderness, and begins his teaching and healing ministry. In chapter 2, Mark

⁷ Ibid., 272

⁸ Twelfree, G.H. "Scribes". Pages 732-35 in *Dictionary of Jesus in the Gospels*. Edited by Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

⁹ Staumbaugh, *New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 33.

¹⁰ Paffenroth, Kim. "Scribes", page 1173 in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.

¹¹ Staumbaugh, John and David L. Belch. *New Testament in Its Social Environment.*, 99.

introduces the reader to the primary source of Jesus' opposition throughout his ministry: the scribes and the Pharisees. Mark 2:1-12 is included in a set of four stories in which the Pharisees and scribes question Jesus' actions and teachings. Chapter 2 of Mark begins with the scribes accusing Jesus of blasphemy for claiming the authority to forgive the sins of the paralytic, followed by the Pharisees questioning Jesus for sharing a table with tax collectors and sinners (v. 13-17), the Pharisees accusing Jesus for not fasting or requiring his disciples to do so (v. 18-22), and the Pharisees challenging Jesus for allowing his disciples to do work on the Sabbath (v. 23-28). Immediately following these four controversies is a fifth point of conflict: Jesus' healing of a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. After the fifth incident, the Pharisees have seen enough and begin to conspire against Jesus (Mark 3:1-6). Jesus' popularity begins to grow exponentially as Mark's narrative continues, recounting Jesus' miracles, teachings, and his growing crowd of followers. All the while, the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes continues to well up under the surface. This conflict arises periodically throughout the Gospel of Mark (3:22-30; 7:1-13; 8:11-15; 11:12-12:40) before finally coming to a head when Jesus' hour comes, and he is arrested and crucified. In the larger context of Scripture and salvation history, the narrative of the healing of the paralytic recounts Jesus' first confrontation with the scribes and the beginning of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish officials, who were the vehicle through which God would ordain Jesus' atoning death and resurrection and usher in the New Covenant.

Translation

Καὶ εἰσελθὼν πάλιν εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ δι' ἡμερῶν ἠκούσθη ὅτι ἐν οἴκῳ ἐστίν. καὶ συνήχθησαν πολλοὶ ὥστε μηκέτι χωρεῖν μηδὲ τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν, καὶ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον. Καὶ ἔρχονται φέροντες πρὸς αὐτὸν παραλυτικὸν αἰρόμενον ὑπὸ τεσσάρων. καὶ μὴ δυνάμενοι προσενέγκαι αὐτῷ διὰ τὸν ὄχλον ἀπεστέγασαν τὴν στέγην ὅπου ἦν, καὶ ἐξορύξαντες χαλῶσιν τὸν κράβαττον ὅπου ὁ παραλυτικὸς κατέκειτο. καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι. Ἦσαν δὲ τινες τῶν γραμματέων ἐκεῖ καθήμενοι καὶ διαλογιζόμενοι ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν· τί οὗτος οὕτως λαλεῖ; βλασφημεῖ· τίς δύναται ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός; καὶ εὐθὺς ἐπιγινούς ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως διαλογίζονται ἐν ἑαυτοῖς λέγει αὐτοῖς· τί ταῦτα διαλογίζεσθε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν; τί ἐστιν εὐκοπώτερον, εἰπεῖν τῷ παραλυτικῷ· ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι, ἢ εἰπεῖν· ἔγειρε καὶ ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει; ἵνα δὲ εἰδῇτε ὅτι ἐξουσίαν ἔχει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· λέγει τῷ παραλυτικῷ· σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε ἄρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου. καὶ ἠγέρθη καὶ εὐθὺς ἄρας τὸν κράβαττον ἐξῆλθεν ἔμπροσθεν πάντων, ὥστε ἐξίστασθαι πάντας καὶ δοξάζειν τὸν θεὸν λέγοντας ὅτι οὕτως οὐδέποτε εἶδομεν.

¹ And when he entered again into Capernaum, after some days it was heard that he was at home. ² And many gathered together so that there was no longer room, not even at the door, and he was speaking the word to them.

³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic, being carried by four of them. ⁴ And not able to bring him on account of the crowd, they broke through the roof where Jesus was, and after digging it out, they let down a mattress on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵ And seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, “child, your sins are forgiven.”

⁶ But there were some of the scribes sitting there and considering in their hearts,

⁷ “Why does he speak this way? He is blaspheming. Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?”

⁸ And immediately recognizing in his spirit that they were reasoning in this way within themselves, Jesus said to them,

“Why do you consider these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic,

‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and take up your mattress and walk?’ ¹⁰ But in order

that you may know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins,” he said to the paralytic: ¹¹“I say to you, get up, take your mattress, and go to your house.”

¹² And he rose immediately, took up the mattress and went out in front of all of them, so that all were amazed and glorifying God saying, “We have never seen anything like this!

Structural Layout

Mark 2:1-12 is a historical narrative. The narrative structure of the passage may be understood in this way:

- 1.) **Setting** – As Jesus is preaching in a home in Capernaum, a very large crowd has gathered in and around the house (2:1-2).
- 2.) **Rising Conflict** – Four men carrying a paralytic are unable to get to Jesus due to the crowd, so they resort to climbing onto the roof, digging a hole through the roof, and lowering the paralytic to the floor in front of Jesus. Jesus surprises everyone by forgiving the man’s sins (2:3-5).
- 3.) **Climax** – The scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy for claiming to have authority to forgive sins. Perceiving the accusations of the scribes, Jesus confirms his power and authority to heal sins by healing the paralytic (2:6-12a).
- 4.) **Concluding Action** – The crowd is astounded and praises God (2:12b).

Exploring the Passage

The healing of the paralytic provides an early glimpse of the overall purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry and instigates the first of many controversial encounters between Jesus and the Jewish scribes and Pharisees. The miracle testifies to both Jesus' healing power and authority to forgive sins, as well as the inextricable tie between the forgiveness of sins and God's overall plan for the restoration of creation.¹²

Setting – v. 1-2

This episode occurs following Jesus' inaugural preaching tour throughout Galilee (1:39) as Jesus returns to Capernaum. The story is a reintroduction and continuation of the narrative of Jesus' teaching ministry in Mark 1:21-39.¹³ In verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, Mark introduces the reader to the setting and location of the action to follow. The text suggests Jesus did not enter openly into Capernaum, instead electing to make a quiet entrance, likely due to his growing popularity and the massive crowds that would surely follow him (cf. 1:45). However, his presence did not go unnoticed for long. The aorist passive indicative ἠκούσθη ("it was heard) is a Greek idiom indicating "the news quickly spread," that Jesus was at home, suggesting that it did not take long for the whole community to become aware of Jesus' presence.¹⁴ The home being referred to may have been the home of Peter and Andrew, where Jesus stayed during his ministry in the region.¹⁵ The phrase ἐν οἴκῳ (trans. "at home") suggests a familiar location.¹⁶

¹² Strauss, Mark L. *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014. 117.

¹³ Broadhead, Edwin K. *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 74. Sheffield: Sheffield Acad. Press, 1992. 76.

¹⁴ Mark L. Strauss. *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 120.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Jesus' growing popularity is a common theme in the book of Mark, and even at the very beginning of his ministry he drew large crowds. Doubtless the crowd has gathered in and around the home to witness Jesus perform more miracles and healings, but instead, Jesus is preaching (cf. 1:38). Mark writes that Jesus was "speaking the word to them" (ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον). The phrase "the word" (ὁ λόγος) in the New Testament generally refers to a divine message, command, or instruction sent forth from God.¹⁷ Jesus is continuing his ministry work and proclaiming the message of the Kingdom of God to the crowd.

Rising Action – v. 3-5

At this point in the narrative arc, tension begins to build as Jesus' preaching is interrupted by a group of four men who bring him a paralytic. The Greek word translated "paralytic" is an adjective, παραλυτικὸν, being used substantivally and functioning as a noun. This word is always used substantivally in the New Testament, often taking an article.¹⁸ These men likely heard that Jesus was a healer and sought him out, determined to do anything to reverse their friend's desperate circumstances. The text notes that the four men carrying the paralytic are unable to get to Jesus "because of the crowd" (διὰ τὸν ὄχλον; the Greek preposition διὰ plus the accusative indicates "on account of"). The crowd presented a physical challenge that needed to be overcome in order for the paralytic to be healed. Though the mass of people surrounding the house prevent

¹⁶ Martin, Martina E. "It's My Prerogative: Jesus' Authority to Grant Forgiveness and Healing on Earth." *The Journal of Religious Thought* 59.1 (2006): 67–74.

¹⁷ Ellens, J. Harold. "Word", pages 1386-1387 in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by David Noel Freedman, David Noel, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.

¹⁸ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), BibleWorks, v.9.

them from entering through the door, the four men are undeterred. They resort to carrying their friend up to the roof, pulling apart the dirt and thatch, and lowering the paralyzed man to Jesus' feet. Jesus sees the ingenuity and unconventional actions of the four friends as evidence of their faith. The narrative tension rises even further as Jesus responds in a way nobody in the crowd, including the paralytic and his four friends, expects: he declares, "Son, your sins are forgiven!" The paralytic was brought to Jesus expecting to be made well physically. However, in a shocking reversal, he receives forgiveness of his sins, rather than physical healing. The irony of the situation is thick, as the paralytic's circumstances have been dramatically and eternally altered, yet he is still lying on the mat, unable to walk.¹⁹

Persistence in the midst of physical or social opposition is a key theme that is repeated often in Mark's gospel (e.g. 5:21-24, 25-29; 7:24-29).²⁰ Jesus' healing miracles often begin with the afflicted individual having to overcome some sort of obstacle in order to receive healing, and it is their willingness to overcome these obstacles and place their faith in Jesus that ultimately heals them. This outward display of trust in Jesus is evidence of their faith (πίστις). Πίστις has the sense of "trust", both in the promises of God and in his miraculous power.²¹ In Mark, faith and healing are often tied to one another. Jairus, a synagogue leader, falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to heal his daughter (Mark 5:21-24); a bleeding woman is healed by reaching out and touching Jesus' clothes, (v.25-29); a blind man is healed after he said to Jesus, "*Rabboni* . . . I want to see" (10:51b). In each of these cases, faith was a prerequisite for healing. By contrast,

¹⁹ Vannorsdall, John W. "Mark 2:1-12." *Interpretation* 36.1 (1982): 58–63.

²⁰ Mark L. Strauss. *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 120.

²¹ *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. v. 6. Repr. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1968. 206.

when Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (Mark 6:1-5), he is not able to do any miracles there because of the crowds' *unbelief* (v.6; ἄπιστία).²²

However, in the narrative of the paralytic, it is important to note a few key differences: Faith is still an important theme in the narrative – Jesus responds to the faith of the four friends, as well as the paralytic's, but Jesus responds by forgiving the paralytic's sins, of which he did not repent, not by immediately healing his paralysis. The order is important in this narrative. 1.) Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins, and then 2.) the paralytic is physically healed. While disease and death are linked to individual sins in Scripture (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:30) these differences shed doubt on the possible implication that the paralytic's condition was caused by some individual sin of which he was guilty.²³ This story has much broader implications. In forgiving the paralytic, Jesus reveals sin as the root cause of *all* sickness and disease and demonstrates his power and authority to abolish it.²⁴

Climax – 2:6-12a

As the climax of the story will attest, the healing of the paralytic's sins demonstrates the link between spiritual and physical renewal and provides a glimpse of the future reality of a restored creation in God's Kingdom.

The narrator of Mark's Gospel is omniscient, not being bound by time or space. The narrator knows the whole story being told. He can relate information that has happened previously, and information that will happen in the future. Further, the narrator is able to divulge

²² Bultmann, Rudolph. “πιστεύω.” Pages 174-208 in *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 6: Pe - r. Repr. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1968. 207.

²³ Mark L. Strauss. *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 121.

²⁴ Simson, Pierre. “Reconciliation in the Making: A Reading of Mark 1,14-3,6.” *AFER* 17.4 (1975): 198.

details of public incidents where Jesus teaches to crowds, intimate, private moments that Jesus shares with only a few people, and incidents and conversations that happen when Jesus is not present. The omniscient narrator is able to be a silent observer to all of the action in the story without interfering with it. One unique feature of the omniscient narrator is the narrator's ability to "narrate the words, actions, thoughts, or states of mind of the characters"²⁵ This literary style in which the reader is provided privileged information allows the storyteller to build irony, tension, and suspense as the audience is able to know details that other characters may not. This is noteworthy for exegeting the narrative of the paralytic. The scribes, experts in the Law, are present in the crowd and hear Jesus forgive the sins of the paralyzed man. There is one sense in which Jesus could have been speaking on behalf of God to the paralytic, as in, "God has forgiven your sins." This would not have been unheard of, as it was common practice for priests to pronounce God's forgiveness on people who brought offerings to the temple.²⁶ However, the reaction of the scribes makes it clear that this is not the case. Although the scribes do not openly accuse Jesus, the narrator gives the reader an inside look at their inner condition. The scribes consider (Gk. διαλογίζομαι – to think or reason carefully, especially about the implications of something)²⁷ what they have just seen and heard in their hearts: "But there were some of the scribes sitting there and considering in their hearts, 'Why does he speak this way? He is blaspheming. Who is able to forgive sins but God alone?'" (v.6-7). Their accusation makes it clear that Jesus is claiming his *own* authority to forgive sins.

²⁵ Rhoads, David M., Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie. *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*. Third edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. 41.

²⁶ Mark L. Strauss. *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 121.

²⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BibleWorks. v.9.

The scribes' accusation of blasphemy is not one they would have taken lightly; the Law experts would have been well familiar with the charge and its implications. The Greek word βλασφημέω (and its close Hebrew equivalents) is used numerous times throughout the Bible, with God or other people as the object of the verb. Blasphemy is used to define taunting, disrespecting, reviling, or insulting God or others. The scribes heard Jesus' forgiveness of the man's sins as an arrogant attempt to usurp the authority of God to forgive sins and claim divine status.²⁸ Collins writes, "The implication is that Jesus is inappropriately acting as God's agent or even arrogating divine power to himself. If such activity were unauthorized, as the scribes assume, it would be highly offensive to God."²⁹ In the understanding of the scribes, Jesus' claim certainly would qualify as blasphemy and would be punishable by death.

Immediately, Mark's omniscient narrator divulges for the reader another piece of privileged information: at once, Jesus knows "in his spirit" (v.8) (dative of sphere, τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ) that the scribes are questioning and accusing him in their hearts. Mark, known for his heavy use of irony, reveals to the reader the inner doubt and accusations of the scribes, but even as they are thinking these things, Jesus is able to supernaturally perceive their thoughts: "Why do you question these things in your hearts?" (v.9). Just as he draws out the problem of sin in the heart of the paralytic, he then turns to the scribes and exposes the sinful doubt residing in their own hearts. Mark's narrative reaches a point of heightened dramatic tension with Jesus' response: "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and take up your mattress and walk?'" In other words, healing the paralytic would require physical proof, while it would have been easier simply to say he was forgiven of his sins. If Jesus could heal the

²⁸ Collins, Adela Yarbro. "The Charge of Blasphemy in Mark 14.64." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26.4 (2004): 379–398

²⁹ Ibid., 397.

man of his paralysis, then he could certainly forgive his sins. The implication here is that physical healing, when compared to the cosmic reality of forgiveness and redemption in God's Kingdom which Jesus had come to inaugurate, is simply a drop in the bucket. Even so, Jesus demonstrates his authority to do both: “‘But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins,’ he said to the paralytic: ‘I say to you, get up, take your mattress, and go to your house.’ And he rose immediately, took up the mattress and went out in front of all of them”

In the Old Testament, Daniel dreams of an “exalted messianic figure who comes with the clouds of heaven and receives authority, glory, and sovereign power” from God.³⁰ This messiah comes in glory “like a son of man” (Da. 7:13a), receiving authority from Yahweh to reign over his kingdom which he has seized from the hand of evil:

I continued watching in the night visions,
and suddenly one like a son of man
was coming with the clouds of heaven.
He approached the Ancient of Days
and was escorted before him.
He was given dominion,
and glory, and a kingdom;
so that those of every people,
nation, and language
should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that will not pass away,
and his kingdom is one
that will not be destroyed (Da. 7:13-14)

The phrase “Son of Man” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) can mean “son of *a* man” (i.e. a human being), however, context suggests Jesus is referring to himself as the messianic figure of Daniel 7, whose authority and dominion has been given to him by God himself for the forgiveness of sins.

³⁰ Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2006).

After Jesus opens the eyes of the paralytic to see beyond his physical affliction to the greater, cosmic problem of his sin, he offers a glimpse of the reality of the Kingdom that he came to proclaim (1:45; 2:2). Just as Jesus' parables are revelations of the mysteries of God's Kingdom, his healing miracles provide a taste of the reality of the Kingdom at work in the world. They portray the eschatological reality of what Jesus will ultimately bring to fulfillment when he returns to reign over his Kingdom.³¹ Jesus' healing of the paralytic demonstrates both Jesus' authority to forgive sins, and the purpose for which he came: to reclaim the world from the spiritual and physical effects of sin. Having survived Satan's temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:12-13), Jesus was now ready to take up the offensive and usher in God's restoration.³² Through the healing of the paralytic, Jesus demonstrates the future fulfillment of his mission and the greater reality of God's Kingdom, in which the curse of sin is removed, the guilt of humanity is forgiven, and all of creation is restored to its former order. The relationship between sin and physical affliction is in view here.

The sin of Adam and Eve which affects all of humanity is not only a moral, spiritual problem; it is very much a physical one as well. Sin's perversion of the human race brought about a series of curses which were pronounced upon Adam and Eve and resulted in the very earth they walked upon turning against them (Gn. 2:14-19). With the entrance of sin into the world, the order with which God created the universe was thrown into chaos, bringing with it disease, physical affliction, and death. Scripture discusses sin and physical sickness in a fundamental relationship, to where the guilt of sin is wrapped up in the physical misery it causes.

³¹ Lee, Dorothy A. "'Signs and Works': The Miracles in the Gospels of Mark and John." *Colloquium* 47.1 (2015): 97.

³² LaGrand, James. "The First of the Miracle Stories According to Mark (1:21-28)." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 20.6 (1993): 480.

The prophet Isaiah looked forward to a day when God's Suffering Servant would come into the world to atone for Israel's iniquities, *along* with their sickness and physical suffering.

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of suffering who knew what sickness was.
He was like someone people turned away from;^[b]
he was despised, and we didn't value him.

Yet he himself bore our sicknesses,
and he carried our pains;
but we in turn regarded him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted (Isa. 53:3-4).

The Servant's atonement would not only be to restore humanity in right relationship with God, but also to counter the effect of the Fall on the physical body and restore the order of creation.³³ For the paralytic, the spiritual reality of his guilt in sin was manifested in the physical misery of his paralysis. As Jesus had already made claim to his authority to forgive sins, his healing of the paralytic was Jesus' declaration of his messiahship and his rank as the fulfillment of God's promises. Jesus is the Suffering Servant, the Son of Man, who came with all authority from God to forgive the iniquities of the world, reclaim all of creation from the curse of sin to restore it to its former perfection, and instate a new kingdom "that shall not be destroyed" (Da. 14).

It is important to keep the purpose and scope of Jesus' ministry in sight. Jesus' first recorded acts in Mark's gospel, after his baptism and temptation, are preaching in the synagogue and exorcising a demon. Jesus' healing of the paralytic follows a similar pattern: Jesus preaches the word, and then heals a diseased man. These stories present for the reader a microcosm of Jesus' twofold mission on earth: 1.) To proclaim through his word and through his works the

³³ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1998. 853.

reality and the mystery of the Kingdom of God, and 2.) To counteract the effects of sin, enter into Satan's domain (Mk. 3:27), and fire the opening volley of a battle by which God will eventually drive out the forces of evil in the world and establish a new Kingdom of which Christ will be the head.³⁴ Was Jesus' healing also an act of loving grace extended toward a man in a desperate situation, borne out of the compassionate heart of a gracious Savior? Absolutely. The image of Christ is one of compassion and burden for the weak and marginalized. However, to understand and apply the miracle apart from its greater eschatological implications would be to miss the true purpose of Jesus' miracle and the greater reality to which the healing is pointing.

Concluding Action – 2:12b

Through the healing of the paralytic, Jesus affirms his authority to forgive sins. On a larger scale, Jesus makes claim to his messiahship, declaring the inauguration of the restoration of the world in God's Kingdom. Immediately after Jesus commands him to rise, the paralytic walks out in front of everybody. The crowd responds in amazement by worshiping God. It is highly unlikely this included the scribes, who continue to have challenging encounters with Jesus throughout the remainder of the Gospel of Mark. Notably the crowd responds to the healing miracle by glorifying God, not by affirming the deity or authority of Jesus. Some have posed that Mark includes this detail to suggest the crowd, though they witness Jesus' power and authority firsthand, do not recognize Jesus for who he was.³⁵ More likely, the author included the reaction

³⁴ Hedrick, Charles W. "Miracles in Mark: A Study in Markan Theology and Its Implications for Modern Religious Thought." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34.3 (2007): 306.

³⁵ Guelich, Robert A., David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Bruce Manning Metzger, and Robert A. Guelich. *Mark 1 - 8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 34,A. Waco, Tex: Word Books, Publ, 1989. 95.

of the crowd to indicate the excitement building over the unique and unprecedented ministry of Jesus,³⁶ and to illustrate further the reality of the Kingdom, wherein God is worshipped and glorified.

Author's Big Idea

Jesus responds to the faith of a paralytic's friends by forgiving the sins of the paralytic. After the scribes question Jesus' authority to forgive sins, he confirms his authority by healing the man of his paralysis, to the astonishment of the crowd who respond by worshiping and glorifying God.

Mark 2:1-12: Discontinuities

It is important for readers of this passage to take into account several key discontinuities, including cultural differences, personal differences, and their place within the history of redemption.

Cultural Differences

Setting

The historical-cultural context of Mark 2:1-12 reveals a number of cultural differences between the passage's original audience and modern readers. The setting of the narrative is noteworthy, as some aspects of the location of the story play a role in how the events unfold. Jesus is in Capernaum, a small village community near the Sea of Galilee at the home of Peter. An ancient Israelite home was quite different from that of a modern home in terms of material, structure, and layout. An understanding of these cultural differences related to the setting may aid modern readers' understanding of the unfolding of events.

³⁶ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. 124.

Sick and Disabled

Another key cultural difference modern readers must take notice of is the difference in societal attitudes toward the sick and disabled. In 21st century Western society, individuals who are sick or disabled are generally cared for and have relatively similar access to opportunities for treatment, employment, and independence. In the 1st century Middle East, the story for the sick and disabled was much different. Sick or disabled individuals were outcasts by which the rest of society could not bother to be burdened. The paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 was on the bottom rungs of society and likely would have been treated with disdain by the crowds.

Blasphemy

A modern reader may not fully understand the implications of the scribes' accusation of blasphemy (v. 7), as the term does not hold as much weight in 21st century Christianity.

Personal Differences

Modern readers must separate themselves personally from the characters and the original audience of the narrative. As 21st century Christians we as readers of the passage are not, in fact, 1st century Jewish residents of the small fishing village of Capernaum, lining up by the hundreds to witness the rabbi Jesus perform miracles and preach the word. We are not a paralyzed man being lowered through the roof by his four friends to the foot of Jesus, expecting healing but receiving something far more lasting. Finally, (this probably goes without saying) we are **not** Jesus the incarnate God, forgiving sins, rebuking the Pharisees, healing a man's paralysis, and proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God to which we will one day return to reign over in glory for eternity.

Redemptive Discontinuities

The events in the narrative take place before the death and resurrection of Jesus. Modern readers live after Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, atonement for sin, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Though Jesus points forward to the full establishment of his Kingdom in which creation will be fully restored, modern readers live before the consummation of the Kingdom of God, "which lies at the end of history."³⁷

Mark 2:1-12: Continuities

An important step in understanding a passage is discerning continuities –the larger, theological realities present in the passage which remain true today.

God's Character

Compassion

Perhaps the aspect of God's character that stands out first in the narrative of the paralytic is God's compassion, love, and care for the poor and the marginalized. Though perhaps not the main thrust of the narrative, this quality should not be looked over. In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to care for those who were poor and in need (Deut. 15:11) and harshly rebuked them when they claimed piety but took advantage of the marginalized (Isa. 1:15-17). Care and compassion are integral to the Divine Image; Scripture attests that sickness, pain, and injustice are not in God's will. Thus, throughout the history of God's people, compassion and care for individuals in need has been an essential aspect of holiness, of which Christ was and is the ultimate exemplar.

³⁷ Caragounis, C.C. "Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven". Pages 417-30 in *Dictionary of Jesus in the Gospels*. Edited by Green, McKnight, and Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*.

Authority

God as the Creator has dominion and authority over the laws of nature (Gn. 1; Ps. 107:29; Job 38; Mk. 4:41) and has the prerogative to circumvent them for his purposes. God, as the true Judge, has all authority to uphold his decrees, seek justice, and offer forgiveness for transgression. Jesus demonstrates this divine authority in his knowledge of the hearts of the scribes, his forgiveness of sins, and his miraculous healing of the paralytic.

Faithfulness

God is a faithful upholder of his promises. The Suffering Servant and redeeming Messiah promised to Israel in the Old Testament was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, and his promise for the redemption of creation will be fulfilled on the Day of Christ.

Worship

Revelation of the goodness and authority of Jesus Christ removes doubt and demands recognition and worship.

Humanity

Fallen Condition

Humanity is still affected by the curse of the Fall. Though atoned for by the death and resurrection of Christ, the sin of Adam and Eve continues to affect the order of creation, the human body, and the human heart. It causes physical destruction in the world, sickness in the body, and broken relationships between God and humanity. The grip of sin on creation will not be fully dealt with until the return of Christ and the full inception of God's Kingdom on earth. (Rev. 21:6-8).

Doubt and Unbelief

As it was with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the crowds throughout the ministry of Jesus, the fallen condition continues to harden the human heart against full recognition of Jesus Christ for who he is and what he has done.

Christ's Redemptive Work

The fallen state of humanity is redeemed and resurrected in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the promised Redeemer-King; the perfect image of God, fully human and fully God, who lived a life free of unholiness and sin. Jesus, in his perfection, took upon himself the sin of humanity and became the ultimate sacrifice of atonement for the sin that had separated God and man since the sin of Adam and Eve. Jesus bore the pain and suffering of sin on the cross, and through his innocent suffering and death, God laid upon Him the punishment for the iniquity of the world. Through Christ's resurrection, sin's consequence, eternal separation from God in death, was negated. The risen Jesus sits in the very presence of God in all of his glory, offering his life and his Spirit in exchange for the sinful life of anyone who chooses it. It is by the Spirit that God opens the eyes of the doubter and the unbeliever to the beauty of Christ and testifies to the salvation of those who believe in him (Ro. 8:16). Creation will be fully liberated from the pain, suffering, sickness, brokenness, unbelief, and injustice caused by human sinfulness on the day of Jesus' return. Christ the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins, and through his redemptive work, his creation will be freed from its consequences.

Mark 2:1-12: The Theological Big Idea

Jesus Christ has been given all authority on earth to forgive and to heal so that, in his Kingdom, creation will be restored and humanity will enjoy wholeness of body and a right relationship with God.

Personal Application

This passage has offered me a deeper, fuller perspective on the good news of the gospel and how it applies to my calling as a follower of Jesus. Just as the crowd and the scribes gathered around Jesus to witness his miracles but failed to recognize Jesus' ultimate authority to forgive sins, I too have often fallen short of fully recognizing the holistic nature of the gospel. Part of the good news of Christ is healing for the sick and justice for the poor and oppressed. As a believer, I have received forgiveness of my sins, but Christ has also invited me to share in his burden for the poor, sick, and oppressed and to work toward the physical restoration of the world around me. Righteous, unselfish social justice is the work of Christ. Mark 2:1-12 has led me to ask myself, how am I as a follower of Jesus participating in Christ's ongoing work toward the forgiveness and restoration of the world around me? How am I working alongside Jesus to herald the coming of the Kingdom of God through my words and my actions?

Message Outline Suggestion

Message Big Idea (MBI): The good news of Christ's Kingdom is forgiveness, healing, and worship

Introduction: Offer a brief overview of the passage, establish a need for the audience, and state clearly the MBI.

Main Point 1: The good news of Christ's Kingdom is forgiveness (2:1-5).

- Jesus offers forgiveness for all who have faith and recognize him for who he is.

Transition – review Main Point 1, restate the MBI

Main Point 2: The good news of Christ's Kingdom is physical healing (2:5-12a).

- Jesus has the authority to forgive sins
- The forgiveness of sins will bring about justice, physical healing and restored creation

Transition – review Points 1 and 2, restate the MBI.

Main Point 3: The good news of Christ's Kingdom leads us to worship

- We worship in response to witnessing the forgiveness, healing and person of Christ

Transition – review Points 1, 2, and 3, restate the MBI.

Application: Jesus is inviting us as his followers to participate with him in his ongoing redemptive work.

- How are you proclaiming the good news of Christ's Kingdom through forgiveness?
- How are you proclaiming the good news of Christ's Kingdom through participating in his work of healing, seeking justice, and restoring creation?

Conclusion

Mark 2:1-12 provides a glimpse of the future reality of God's Kingdom come to fruition. After a paralytic is brought to Jesus' feet, Jesus does something unprecedented: he forgives the man's sins. After being accused of blasphemy by the Jewish leaders, Jesus confirms his authority to forgive sins by healing the paralytic, and, in doing so, he exposes sin as the root cause of physical affliction and disease. The healing miracle is a symbolic, physical depiction of Jesus' earthly mission to forgive and heal and a small-scale version of the cosmic future reality of his eternal reign, wherein sin no longer has a grip on the order of creation and the human heart.

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