

The Priority of Jesus (Part 2)

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 2:1-12

Introduction:

This morning, we are continuing to consider the priority of Jesus as we look at a well-known story in Mark's gospel. Last week, we looked at a series of snapshots Mark strings together, in verses 29-45 of chapter 1, that announced and illustrated Jesus' priority of preaching the forgiveness of sins and cleansing work He provides through the gospel. Today, we will see that priority confirmed through the specific teaching Jesus gives while healing a paralyzed man. Some of you may know that I have a passion for helping people learn how to study the Bible. I want to help you see the Word of God is accessible to you and have the tools you need to rightly read and study this Word. One of the main aspects of effective Bible study is searching for the main point of a passage, and then seeing how everything connects to that main point. Today, I want to share a study method I have found helpful to use when studying narrative, or story passages like we see in the gospels to find their main point. The study method uses what is called the "narrative arc." The narrative arc is a form of story telling introduced by a German novelist and playwright named Gustav Freytag, after he analyzed ancient Greek writing, that moves the plot of a story through a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. It is called the narrative arc because of how its shape looks like a hill or pyramid. People have broken it down in different ways, and I like to consider it in 5 stages. Stage 1 is setting the scene. Stages 2-4 are the rising tension of the problem, climax of the problem, and resolution to the problem. The final stage is the trailing action that follows the resolution. The main point is found where the climax and resolution meet. Stories within the gospels often appear to follow this structure, so one helpful way to find their main point is by identifying each stage and focusing in on the climax and resolution. I believe the story in our passage today, in Mark 2:1-12, is a good example of this. So, let's examine this story through that method together, beginning with stages 1-2 where the scene is set and the rising tension of the problem revealed, showing us,

JESUS FOCUSING ON THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Notice how verses 1-2 connect this story to what we have been looking at up to this point, "And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them." Mark sets the scene by pointing to Jesus returning to Capernaum following His preaching tour throughout Galilee. Note some connections here to what we have studied so far. It appears He is back at Simon and Andrews house, as "it was reported that He was at home." A large crowd has once again gathered at the house, but there is no more room, "not even at the door." Yet, this time, Jesus' isn't healing, but "preaching the word to them." This connects this scene to the healings in Mark 1:32-34 and priority of preaching in Mark 1:38. The "word" being preached is the gospel that has saturated Jesus' preaching since Mark 1:14-15. Jesus is proclaiming the kingdom of God to the crowd, calling people to repent and believe. After setting the stage through these connections to what he has been showing us, Mark begins to build the tension by introducing the problem of this story in verses 3-4, "And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay." Now, Mark heightens the original readers attention by using a particular tense in the Greek language to make it seem as though the scene is presently happening. Picture this with me, as though you were there. Four men are walking toward the house carrying a paralytic man on a bed. We don't know the nature of the paralysis, only that he needed to be carried to get to Jesus. When they arrive, there is a great crowd blocking the door, so they start to climb on the roof bringing the paralyzed man on the bed up with them. Now, roofs around this time were flat and accessible. They were made by laying beams down and then smaller sticks and poles in a cross-hatched pattern.

This was then covered with mixture of straw and leaves, and that was covered with mud on the surface. So, once these men get to the top, they begin digging through the roof to make an opening. There is no concern for the damage done to the house, and dirt is possibly falling from the ceiling on the guest inside. Once the opening is big enough, they lower the man inside the house. You can feel the tension when you picture it, right? How will Jesus respond? Verse 5, “And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” Note two important things here. First, that Jesus responds to the active faith He sees in these men. These men, show their faith in the healing power of Jesus by going to great lengths to get this man before Jesus. I love how James Edwards sums this up in his commentary, saying, “That is a description of faith: it will remove any obstacle—even a roof, if necessary—to get to Jesus.” (James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 75.) The second thing to note, and most important aspect of this verse, is what Jesus says. Look again at the end of Verse 5, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Jesus addresses the paralyzed man with a term that expresses endearment, authority, and benevolence. And He addresses his greatest need. He looks past the external need to see his internal need. He moves beyond the temporal need to meet his eternal need, “Your sins are forgiven.” We don’t know whether Jesus was addressing a common understanding of sins relationship to affliction, or knew a specific sin caused this man’s paralysis. And we don’t need to speculate. What we can know for certain is all sickness, disease, and paralysis is not part of God’s original act of creation. Every affliction we face in this life is a product of the fall of mankind. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, the creation of God was marred by that sin and everything that leads to death was introduced. Jesus knows the devastation of sin on our lives and came to address that devastation. This is what Mark is continuing to reveal to us, and these words by Jesus confirm His priority of proclaiming the forgiveness of sin in the gospel. It also opens the door to something we must understand about His authority. An authority that we find to be the primary focus of this story, as we consider the climax of the problem, found in verses 6-7 showing us,

THE SCRIBES QUESTIONING HOW JESUS CAN FORGIVE SIN

Look at the response of the scribes to the statement by Jesus, starting in verse 6, “Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’” The scribes are consistently portrayed by Mark in opposition to the person and work of Jesus all throughout this gospel, and this confrontation is just the beginning of a series of confrontations that runs from Mark 2:1-3:6. However, we need to recognize that their question here isn’t entirely wrong to ask at this point. Jesus is making a blasphemous claim if He isn’t God. The Old Testament consistently tells us that only God can forgive sins. In fact, the Messiah was understood to be able to overcome demons, bring perfect judgement and government, and be sinless and righteous. However, the Messiah was never understood to have the ability to forgive sins, because all sin is ultimately an offense against God Himself. Listen to what David says to God, while confessing his sins against Bathsheba and her husband, in Psalm 51:4. He says, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.” Because all sin is ultimately against God, He alone can forgive sin. Don’t miss how Mark records this question. He says, “Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts.” These questions aren’t verbalized, they are merely thought. Do you see how the climax of this problem is this questioning by the scribes, not the state of the paralyzed man? Nor the actions of his friends. At this point, the focus is not even on either of them, but squarely on Jesus and this question of His authority. This is meant to have us ask the question, “Who is this Jesus, that He can claim to forgive sins?” Then push us to pay close attention to the resolution and trailing action of this problem, in verses 8-12, that show us.

JESUS PROVING HIS AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SIN

Pay careful attention to what Mark records in verse 8, “And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them.” Pause there for a moment. Did you see the important detail Mark relays? Jesus immediately knows the questions of their hearts. How? This is not a magician’s trick, like the ones where they know the card you have chosen by sleight of hand tricks. Or the number you are thinking of because they led you to that number. He perceives the questions of their hearts. Who can this be that even knows the questions of our hearts? The clear answer we are being led to see by Mark through this gospel is, He is God the Son in the flesh. Then, Jesus asks the scribes a couple of questions in verses 8-9, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk?’” He moves them to think deeply on their questions and whether it is easier to pronounce that this man’s sins are forgiven or perform the miracle that would cause him to suddenly walk in full strength. Clearly, the answer is it is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” because that statement would be impossible to verify. But if Jesus tells him to rise, and he walks you have proof that he was healed. These questions are designed to help them, and us, see the truth of His statement when the miracle follows. Jesus is essentially saying, “if I were to say rise and walk, and this man walked, would you believe my statement that his sins are forgiven?” Everyone is hanging on the edge of their seat to see what happens next. Verses 10-11, “‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic— ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’” There are a couple things we need to address at the beginning of verse 10. First, is whether it is a statement by Jesus or a commentary by Mark. Much of this question centers around how the title “Son of Man” would have been understood at the time. This title is one of Jesus’ favorites to use of himself and, outside of the possibility of Mark using it here, Jesus is always the one who uses it to speak of himself. The gospel writers never use it for Jesus, other than possibility of this use here. The use of this title could simply be Jesus pointing to His humanity, or it could be an intentional connection to Daniel 7 which speaks of “one like a son of man” coming, pointing to divine authority. Some scholars, like William Lane, point to the language Mark uses, and the way Jesus has kept his identity a secret up to this point, as reasons to see it as a commentary by Mark and not a statement made by Jesus. You can see an odd linguistic shift at the end of verse 10, “he said to the paralytic.” It reads more smoothly if you remove the first part of verse 10. And, as Lane suggests, if Jesus said this, it would be odd to use a title connected to His divinity at this point in His ministry when He has been keeping that a secret. There are warrants to this view. Other scholars suggest the title “Son of Man” was not commonly connected to Daniel 7 until later in history, and therefore Jesus was pointing to that connection without disclosing His divinity in this moment, merely His God-given authority to forgive sins. I lean towards this understanding because all gospel writers only record Jesus speaking of Himself with this title, so it seems odd for Mark to break that practice here, and only here. Either way, our understanding remains the same. Jesus is the divine Son of Man who came to earth and has the authority to forgive sins. The second thing we need to address is how Jesus’ statement in verse 5 did not specifically say He had authority to forgive the sins of the paralytic, he simply pronounces that forgiveness. However, the scribe’s question, and this statement clearly shows He has the authority to forgive all sins. And this authority is the same authority we have seen in His teaching and exorcisms. Look at what happens then in verse 12, “And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” The immediate full healing of the paralyzed man is the proof of Jesus’ authority to forgive sins. He pronounces the forgiveness of sins, then heals to show his pronouncement is true. And the comment by everyone who saw it, “We never saw anything like this,” reveals they at least had an understanding of the uniqueness in this event and the claim by Jesus.

Conclusion:

The design of this passage is to help us see Jesus as God the Son, with the authority and priority to forgive the sins of all who come to Him in faith. Do you believe He is God the Son?

To both acknowledge who He is and come to Him with our own need of forgiveness. As H. van der Loos suggests, "In His announcement and granting the remission of sins, Jesus indicates what man's essential distress is. This does not consist in his transient lot in life... but in his alienation from the living God, in his life in sin and guilt. It is from this that man must be redeemed, and it is from this that Jesus does in fact redeem him!" (H. van der Loos, op. cit., p. 262). Everyone who saw this, and all of us who hear it now, are called to recognize we are in the same kind of dependence on Jesus, as the paralyzed man was. The scribes and the crowds consistently miss this in Mark's gospel and fail to respond in faith to Jesus as a warning for us not to do the same. Jesus can and does forgive the sins of all who call on Him in faith. As Pastor David and the worship team are coming to lead us in a time of response, think for a minute on what this paralyzed man received. Yes, he received a miraculous healing. He rose to his feet, picked up his bed and walked away. But, more than that, he received the forgiveness of his sin. Because of the work Jesus would do on the cross, the pronouncement of forgiveness, and Jesus' authority to forgive sin, we can know this man was forgiven and washed clean. He didn't just walk away with his temporal need healed, he walked away with his greatest and eternal need met. Has Jesus met you in your greatest need? As Danny Akin rightfully concludes, "Often we think we know what our greatest need is, but really we are only focusing on our circumstances. In reality the problem you are facing today is not your spouse, children, or parents. It is not your job, boss, or coworkers. It is not your lack of resources, shortage of time, or insufficient income. Just like this young man, your greatest need is for the Messiah Himself." (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 43.) When you hear Jesus say He has the authority to forgive your sin, how do you respond? That forgiveness was secured through His suffering on the cross in your place. That sacrifice was declared sufficient when He rose from the grave. And Jesus Christ, in His authority to forgive sins on earth, calls all who would hear to trust in His death and resurrection. Does that prick your heart? Have you responded in faith? If not, cry out to Him today and ask Him for that forgiveness, declaring your trust in Him. Church, think also on the faith of the men who carried this man to Jesus. They didn't know what we now know. Their faith in Jesus' power to heal compelled them to go to great lengths to get him to Jesus. We know His power to do far more, His power to forgive sins and reconcile people to their God. Are we desiring to bring all those in need around us to the only one who can satisfy their souls? How is the Lord leading you to respond today? Maybe you need to come down and kneel before Him confessing your sin and seeking His forgiveness. Maybe you need to confess your lack of concern for the needs of those around you. You are invited to come if the Lord leads or confess those things to Him where you are at. We will also respond today through the act of communion, which is an act of remembering the body of Christ broken, and blood shed on the cross, for those who trust in Him. It is open to anyone who has confessed their sin and turned to Him for forgiveness. Before we take communion together, we encourage you to take time reflect on these things. Then I will come back up and lead us to take of the bread and cup together. If you are not trusting in Christ, but God is leading you to do so today, I would love to have you come speak with me during this time and find salvation in Christ today. We do ask you to refrain from taking of communion if you do not yet believe. As always, we have a team of people ready to pray for you and with you if that is needed. You can find them in the front corners or at the bottom of the stairs in the back with lanyards on. Let's ask God to meet us in His abundant grace during this time. Would you pray with me as we lean into God's grace together?