

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

Authority To Forgive Sins

February 26th, 2017

Mark 2:1-12

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 2:1; that’s on page 837 in your pew Bibles. Now, as always in Mark’s Gospel we read these stories primarily to grow in our understanding of Jesus Christ. All of these episodes and incidents are presented as cumulative evidence that is intended to lead us in professing along with the centurion at the end of this Gospel:

“Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39 ESV)

So this story is just more evidence in support of that conclusion, but along the way we also learn some very important things about the nature of saving faith. So we will read this story and then discuss it with God’s help according to those two categories. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. 3 And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. 4 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. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— 11 “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” 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!” (Mark 2:1–12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

First and foremost this story is about Jesus. Mark is building his case that Jesus is the Son of God and this story is intended as further evidence towards that conclusion, therefore we want to begin by considering carefully what this story teaches us about the identity and majesty of Jesus.

What Does This Story Say About Jesus:

The first thing we see is that:

1. Jesus was a preacher of the Word

This connects logically to what we’ve been looking at over the last couple of weeks. Two weeks ago we looked at three stories that are presented in Mark’s Gospel as a package. First of all there is a healing that draws a crowd and that threatens to distract Jesus from his primary mission. So Jesus withdraws to a quiet place in order to pray and to commune with the Father. He comes out of that communion freshly determined to focus primarily on the preaching of the Gospel. Do you remember that? He says:

“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:38 ESV)

Jesus is focused on preaching. But then immediately there is another story about another healing – even more spectacular – and it too draws a great crowd such that Jesus can no longer enter a town openly in order to preach but he has to stay out in the desolate places.

But now, Mark says: “after some days” – so obviously meaning “after the enthusiasm had died down a bit” and “after the sick folks have stopped searching for Jesus” - he comes back into town and what does he do? He begins to preach. It is so important for us to see that! There is no question that Jesus is resolved to preach the Gospel – and yet there is equally no question that Jesus is constantly responding to human need – this quickly becomes a story about another healing. Jesus is resolved to preach and responding to human need - these are the twin heartbeats

of his life and ministry and this is therefore necessarily the shape and form of all subsequent Christian ministry – thanks be to God.

The second thing we see here is that:

2. Jesus knows the heart and thoughts of men and women

Twice we see that in this story. We see it in verse 5 where it says that Jesus saw their faith, but then we see it even more clearly in verses 6-8. The text says that the scribes were questioning Jesus IN THEIR HEARTS – they didn't say anything out loud – and yet Jesus knew what they were thinking. Mark says:

And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? (Mark 2:8 ESV)

This is something that all of the Gospel writers are eager to point out. In John's Gospel John says:

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. (John 2:23–25 ESV)

Do you hear that? John says that early on in Jesus' ministry it LOOKED LIKE things were going really well because many people claimed to be followers of Jesus because they saw the signs – they saw him heal people and cleanse lepers and do miracles. But Jesus PERCEIVED that their faith was fickle and that it was little more than fascination with signs and wonders. So he did not entrust himself to them – in Greek it says they believed in him but he did not believe in them – because he knew what was in their hearts. Isn't that interesting? Jesus can see into the human heart – Jesus KNOWS what is in a man. Now if you are a Bible reader you know that is a pretty significant thing because the Bible says:

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV)

Who CAN KNOW IT? That is a good question and actually, the Bible answers it in the very next verse:

I, the LORD, search the heart, *I* test the mind (Jeremiah 17:10 NKJV)

In Hebrew it says: I, Yahweh, search the heart and test the mind – so this is a pretty big claim. There is only ONE in the Bible who knows the heart and mind of men and women and it is Yahweh. So if Mark is saying that Jesus knows the heart and mind of men and women then Mark is saying that Jesus is Yahweh. This is just one more story on the way to that conclusion.

The third thing we see in this story is that:

3. Jesus has the authority to address the root and the fruit of human suffering

This is very interesting because this is the ONLY time in all the Gospels where Jesus makes a connection between a person's suffering and that person's sin. Look carefully at the text. The text says that 4 men brought a paralytic man – a paralyzed man - to Jesus on a bed. It says that they dug through the roof and presented their sick friend to Jesus – they CLEARLY came for a healing and yet look at what Jesus says to them – look at what he says to this paralyzed man.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, **your sins are forgiven.**” (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Jesus never said that to any other person who came to him for healing. Never. Despite that there are many Old Testament passages that connect healing to the forgiveness of sins. Consider for example Psalm 103:3:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
3 who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases (Psalms 103:2–3 ESV)

Those things go together an awful lot in the Bible – but they don't go together very often in the Gospels; in fact Jesus warns his disciples against assuming a connection between particular sin and particular suffering. In John 9 we read:

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. (John 9:1–3 ESV)

So again, Jesus says to the disciples: “You aren't capable of drawing lines between a person's sin

and suffering” but here in Mark 2, apparently, Jesus is capable. Jesus knows that this man’s suffering is connected to particular sin. Maybe he is a paralytic because he got drunk as a skunk and fell off the roof of his house. Maybe he is a paralytic because he was sleeping with another man’s wife and when the husband got home he had to jump out the window – maybe that’s how he broke his neck – running away from an angry husband – we don’t know, but Jesus knew. He knew the fruit and he knew the root. And he could fix it all.

Jesus is “one stop shopping”. You don’t have to go to Jesus for your sin root and then to your therapist for problem fruit. The grace of God in Jesus Christ is sufficient for it all. Jesus can save you and Jesus can restore you. He can obliterate your root and he can rehabilitate your fruit. He is exactly that wonderful – thanks be to God.

Finally, in terms of what we learn about Jesus in this story, we learn that:

4. Jesus is either God in the flesh or a very wicked sinner

There is no third option here. Jesus puts his cards face up on the table. He is not being sneaky. He tips his hand and he shows the religious leaders that he can see into the human heart, he can read their minds, he can heal their bodies and he can forgive their sins and they do not miss the implication. They begin to wonder: “Who is this man?” They begin to say in their hearts:

“Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7 ESV)

The scribes understand that only God can do the things Jesus is doing in this story so either Jesus is God or he is a horrible blasphemer – he is a fake! He is a fraud who is trying to pass himself off as God. Those are the only options and they have decided upon the latter. They say in their hearts:

“He is blaspheming!” (Mark 2:7 ESV)

They decide right then and there: he is NOT God. He is a blasphemer. He is a wicked man and he deserves to die.

Now, we are not supposed to approve of their decision but we are supposed to approve of their reasoning. They are right in so far as they have identified the only two rational options. Either Jesus is God or he is a very wicked man. There are no other rational options. You can't just say that Jesus is a good teacher like the Christian liberals do – a good teacher doesn't pretend to be God! A good teacher doesn't fake healings! A good teacher doesn't pretend to read minds – who does that? Fake preachers and TV charlatans do that – and we don't think well of those people even in our day, so that just isn't an option. And you can't say that Jesus is a good prophet – like the Muslims do. That isn't what this story is saying. Elijah was a good prophet, Ezekiel was a good prophet, Isaiah was a good prophet – but none of those prophets EVER CLAIMED to be able to forgive sins. In fact it is in the Book of Isaiah where God says:

“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25 ESV)

I, I AM HE – forgiving sins is DEFINITIONAL TO BEING GOD.

So who is this who even forgives sins? He is either God or a horrible, wicked man. There is no other option.

Now, as I said this is the main point of every story in the Gospel of Mark. Mark is building his case that Jesus is the Son of God but along the way we learn a lot of other really important things and in this story we gain some critical insight into the nature of saving faith. This is a story about a man whose faith is commended by Jesus and whose faith meets with more grace and more help than he could ever have hoped for, asked for or imagined so obviously we want to know a little more about this type of faith.

What Does This Story Teach Us About Faith?

The first thing this story teaches us about faith – in fact the first thing the Gospel of Mark teaches us about faith is that:

1. Faith is active

Mark 1:5 is the first mention of the word “faith” in the entire Gospel of Mark so we are very interested in how faith is here portrayed. NT commentator James Edwards remarks that:

“The first mention of faith (2:5) in Mark significantly **links it with acting rather than with knowing or feeling**. ... Faith is first and foremost **not knowledge about Jesus but active trust** that Jesus is sufficient for one’s deepest and most heartfelt needs.”¹

Are you hearing that? That is so important because so many of us think that mere “knowing” about Jesus or mere “fond feeling for Jesus” is sufficient for receiving grace from Jesus. We very often assume that if we know the basic facts about Jesus – that he was born of a Virgin, died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven – and if we FEEL fondly FOR Jesus then we must be saved but the Gospels go to great lengths to convince us that this is NOT what is meant by saving faith. The demons have accurate knowledge of Jesus – but they are not saved. The crowds have FOND FEELINGS FOR Jesus – but they are not saved. Faith is more than knowledge and feeling. Faith is ACTIVE TRUST in the identity, sufficiency and authority of Jesus.

By the way, this is the point that James is trying so hard to make in his Epistle. James is not contradicting the Apostle Paul – he is trying to clarify the Apostle Paul. Paul has been saying that people are saved by faith alone – meaning that we don’t add anything to the work of Jesus we just RECEIVE the work of Jesus through faith. Amen. Paul was so clear about that. He said:

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. (Romans 3:28 ESV)

So we are saved by FAITH not by FAITH PLUS KEEPING the 10 commandments. No. We are saved by faith alone – alone meaning ‘apart from works of the law’. He even quotes the story of Abraham as proof. He says:

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3 ESV)

Now James quotes the same verse of the OT in James 2. He says:

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (James 2:23 ESV)

¹James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 76.

So James is ON SIDE with the Apostle Paul here – they are literally ON THE SAME PAGE – but James wants it to be clear that while we are saved by faith alone, the faith that saves us is never alone. It always manifests in ACTIVE WORKS – just like in our story. These 4 guys were not sitting in the crowd BELIEVING IN JESUS – no they are ACTIVE in getting this brother TO JESUS. Their faith MANIFESTS in ACTION – that is what James wants to remind us of. He goes back behind the agreed upon quotation and he says:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (James 2:21–23 ESV)

Do you see that? How did God know that Abraham was a person of faith? He SAW Abraham put his son on the altar. That’s not a guess, that’s in the story. At the critical moment when Abraham is holding the knife above his son’s breast God says:

“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, **for now I know** that you fear God, **seeing you have not withheld your son**, your only son, from me.” (Genesis 22:12 ESV)

Now I know – SEEING you have not withheld your only son. Seeing God declared.

And **when Jesus saw their faith**, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Are you putting this together? This is a game changing revelation when you see it. According to the Bible – Old Testament and New – God does not seem to take us at our WORD. Rather he TESTS our hearts and minds TO SEE what is truly inside of us. God READS our responses to various difficulties and trials to see whether we are people of faith or not. He tests us. He watches us and at and then at the end of it all he says – or he doesn’t: Ata yadati – for now I know.

Real faith – saving faith – is more than words and sentiment. It is ACTIVE and EVIDENTIAL – Old Testament and New.

The second thing we learn about faith in this story is that:

2. Faith presses through

You see they couldn't get to Jesus. There was a crowd of people standing around listening to Jesus and they could not get through.

Now this is one of the few religious sites that almost all scholars agree can be located with some certainty. The city of Capernaum has been well excavated and it is a small city and there is a house there that has a very long history of identification with the house of Peter and so we can say with almost total certainty that this is the spot where Jesus was teaching and these are the narrow streets that were clogged with people and I can tell you having been there that it would have been VERY DIFFICULT to get a paralyzed man on a bed to Jesus through those narrow streets. It would have been nearly impossible and yet these men would not be denied. They PRESSED through. They climbed up onto the roof and they literally DUG THROUGH in order to get to Jesus.

Houses in those days had flat roofs and folks used them like porches or decks and they were usually finished with mud so these men literally got out their picks and shovels and they went ahead and dug a hole in Peter's roof. That's probably why Peter remembers this story, because he had to heal the roof after Jesus healed this brother – he was probably not rejoicing as much as he should have been, but the point is that Jesus saw their persistence and he called it faith. The Bible says:

Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Faith presses through OBSTACLES. Faith does not fall back as soon as things get difficult.

Do you remember in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian was in the House of Interpreter? He saw a bunch of images and scenes that meant to depict the Christian faith. In one of them a he saw a long narrow passageway leading to the entrance of a beautiful palace. The passageway was guarded by several armed soldiers but on the other side of that door there were treasures beyond imagining. Christian saw a valiant man take up a sword and begin hacking his way through those soldiers in order to PRESS INTO the kingdom of God – and not without a little bloodshed, he said. Christian didn't even need that scene interpreted for him – he knew exactly what it meant. It meant that FAITH was a FIGHT and that the kingdom was seized by FORCE. Jesus said that by the way – he said the kingdom is taken by violence – by strenuous, faith-ful, forceful,

STRIVING. One doesn't fall backwards into the kingdom of God – one enters through many toils and snares.

There is a desert to be crossed before one enters the Promised Land; the Bible talks about that. Hebrews 3 says:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:7–8 ESV)

The desert was a test! And not everybody passed. Many saw the difficulties and turned back to Egypt in their hearts. And the Bible says that their faith was not real. Real faith presses through.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (Hebrews 3:14 ESV)

Faith is a fight and real faith fights to the finish.

Challenge And Response:

Now, at the end of the day I think the challenge of this text is pretty straightforward. Like the Gospel of Mark as a whole this text is forcing you to decide who Jesus is. This text is coming at you like a sword and it is demanding that you go one way or the other. Is Jesus God or a very wicked man? That's your choice – you can't equivocate or moderate what this text is saying. Who is this who EVEN forgives sins? Who is this? Is Jesus a self-deceived crazy person? Does Jesus have a Messiah complex or is Jesus actually the Messiah – you have to come down on one side or the other. So which is it? Is Jesus God in the flesh? Because if he is then you had better move heaven and earth to get near him. Don't sit in the crowd enjoying the show – CUT YOUR WAY THROUGH, INSIST ON AN AUDIENCE WITH JESUS – CLOSE WITH HIM IN DESPERATE FAITH and you will receive – more than you could ever ask, think, or imagine.

And don't let your suffering push you to the margins. That's the other challenge in this text isn't it? This brother was suffering – whether justly or not – doesn't matter. How would you like to be a paralytic in a pre-welfare society? How would you like to have your mother or your father drag you to the city gate every day so that you could beg for food from the able bodied men going to and fro – how would you like that? This brother was suffering but he was not going to let his

suffering force him to the margins. He was going to press in. He was going to do whatever it took to close with Jesus in order to receive grace and mercy.

And that is the challenge in this text. This text is asking you a question. In your suffering – whether innocent or deserved – in your suffering are you pulling back or are you pressing in? Because that’s the test. Suffering comes for everybody sooner or later. Jesus said that:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

That’s a guarantee. Its going to come and when it comes, are you going to lean in or lean out? Are you going to press in or pull back – Jesus says that you ought to press in. He says:

“**Strive** to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:24 ESV)

DIG YOUR WAY THROUGH TO JESUS! Don’t turn back when it gets hard – **AGONIZE** your way through! Lean in! Don’t settle for the margins of the crowd. And don’t be a seeker! Being a seeker doesn’t mean anything – there was a whole crowd of seekers watching Jesus that day and none of them heard the words “Your sins are forgiven” – but this man did! Don’t be a seeker be a **STRIVER!** Lean in! Press through! Close with Jesus and receive.

That is the challenge in this text; those are the stakes. And this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let’s pray together.