

# Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

## Session Five – Mark Chapter 2:1-12

### Q and A

This section of Mark is characterised by Q and A – the crowd or the opponents of Jesus ask a question based on an action of Jesus, and Jesus then gives the answer. This section has to do not just with the religious observation of fasting, but the distinct nature of the ministry of Jesus from that of John the Baptist and that of the Pharisees.

- “Why does this fellow talk like that?”
- “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”
- “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?”
- “Why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

### *Mark 2:1-4*

*A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.*

At the close of Chapter 1, Jesus is travelling throughout Galilee, going from town to town, synagogue to synagogue, preaching, teaching, healing. With Chapter 2, Jesus “had come home.” His home town was Nazareth (as Mark knows – see chapter 6) but his base of operations was now Capernaum. Tradition has it that he’s staying in Peter’s home – a multi-family compound, housing at the very least Peter, his wife, his mother-in-law, his brother Andrew (and his wife, if he’s married), any children (of which we are not told) and now Jesus.

Jesus’ fame continues to grow, and in Capernaum, the courtyard and house are packed with listeners as Jesus “preached the Word to them.” Once again, Mark frustrates us by not telling us what Jesus was saying! Mark will let the next astonishing event serve as the teaching.

Four men approach the house, carrying their paralysed friend. Unlike in other accounts of healing, we are not told the cause of his paralysis or its duration – only that it was completely incapacitating to the degree that he is entirely dependant upon his friends. We don’t even know if the man was able to speak on his own behalf.

The men, unable to approach Jesus because of the crowd, are undaunted. They ascent to the roof (by ladder or steps), and promptly open a hole in the roof to lower their friend through. The Greek text actually says, “they unroofed the roof, by digging or plucking it out.”

Houses like Peter’s had thatch roofs, a structure of wooden cross beams, overlaid with a matting of reeds, palm branches, and dried mud. You can see how specific and accurate Mark is in his description – first they “unroofed the roof” by moving aside the reeds and branches, then digging through the latticed mud to complete the hole. It was certainly repairable, but nobody wants a hole dug in their roof!

The friends lower the paralytic through the roof, either by reaching down, or perhaps by using ropes used to carry the man and his mat.

***Mark 2:5 - When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”***

There’s something very important here which is easily missed. We are not told that Jesus reacted to the faith of the paralysed man; we are told that he “saw ***their*** faith,” which the text makes clear is the faith not of the man, but the friends! The faith leading to the healing and forgiveness ***is that of the friends***. It is possible that the man himself was either unable to express his faith, or even that he himself was not optimistic.

If you are in a crisis, and you feel as though your faith is failing, or maybe not there at all, do not hesitate to call upon the support of faithful friends to pray on your behalf, and help you through. God hears their prayers too.

But what Jesus says to the paralytic is a surprise: “Son (or “child,”), your sins are forgiven.” This doubtless came as a surprise, but not in the way we immediately think. The separation of spiritual sickness and physical sickness is a modern one, while in Jesus’ day, they were regarded as one problem.

Sometimes what is interpreted as demonic activity in one gospel is expressed in terms of physical illness in another.

For instance, ***Matthew 17:15-16 - When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”***

Compared to ***Mark 9:17 -18 - A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it***

*throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”*

Most people assumed that forgiveness and right standing with God must occur before healing could come. In the Talmud (the traditional Jewish commentary on the Scriptures) we find a tradition that “a sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, ‘Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases’ (Ps. 103:3).’ Redemption and healing come after forgiveness.”

The surprising part of this passage for Jesus’ audience is that Jesus himself forgives the man his sin. He does not declare that God forgives the man’s sin, or pray that God will do so. He forgives the man directly. In technical language, this “assumes the divine prerogative.” In other words, Jesus is acting like he himself is God. This is confirmed by the reaction:

**Mark 2:6-7 - Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”**

Note that these fellows are “sitting there,” despite the big crowd. They are people of respect, and are given seats of honour, as they carefully watch Jesus. They’re not necessarily there to “catch Jesus” doing something wrong, as much as to make sure he doesn’t. The spiritual condition of the Capernaum people is their responsibility.

Note also that they are not jumping to their feet to condemn Jesus, but are, for the moment, keeping their objections to themselves. Perhaps they are simply too surprised and stunned to speak. And what they are thinking is in fact quite correct: It is one thing for a priest to declare forgiveness, on the basis of repentance, restitution and sacrifice. But no one other than God has the power to forgive sins! Who does Jesus think he is?

Jesus quite clearly thinks he is the fulfillment of the promise of God written in *Isaiah 33:22, 24*: “**For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us. ... No one living in Zion will say, ‘I am ill’; and the sins of those who dwell there will be forgiven.**” Jesus is the embodiment of this promise. And he completes the picture in the next verses:

**Mark 2:8-9 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?”**

Jesus changes the discussion from “what do I have the authority to do,” to, “what is more easily proven to have taken effect?” Obviously, physical healing is easier to demonstrate, and

would, to the onlookers, prove the authority of the claim to forgive sins. It's a package unique to Jesus!

***Mark 2:10-12 - But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”***

“Son of Man” – In the Book of Daniel, Daniel has what appears to be a vision of heaven. It culminates with this (Daniel 7:13-14): ***“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”*** In using this term for himself, Jesus is clearly indicating that he is the long-awaited Messiah.

Jesus has demonstrated authority in teaching, over evil spirits, and over illnesses of various kinds. He is now demonstrating divine authority, through the forgiving of sins “on earth,” not simply ascribing forgiveness to the Father in Heaven. Why does this require authority? Can't we forgive someone?

### **Tom, Dick, and Harry – Timothy Keller**

Tom and Dick are having a discussion. Suddenly, Tom punches Dick in the nose. Harry steps in, and says, “Tom, I forgive you for punching Dick in the nose.” Dick says, “What are you forgiving him for? It's me he punched.” You can only forgive a sin if it is against you! Jesus is effectively saying, “Your sins have been against me.” And only God can make that claim.

### **The Faith of the Paralysed Man**

Jesus has acknowledged the faith of the friends. Now for the faith of the paralysed man: Will someone who has to be carried in on a pallet by others believe Jesus' word about the forgiveness of his sins to act on his directive to get up and carry it out? Or, will he accept the judgment of the teachers of the law and say to himself: “This man cannot forgive my sins?” Will he convince himself that this is a hopeless command: “I cannot get up and carry anything because I am paralyzed?”

### **“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”**

The man passes the test! He is not only healed, he is enabled to immediately function fully and well, and be returned to his community and family, all under his own steam, carrying with him the symbol of his previous incapacitation. His faith, and Jesus' authority, is confirmed.

**Next Week: Mark 2:13-3:12**

