

## **Sunday School Lesson for January 17, 2021**

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for January 17, 2021, "Called To Heal"

Background Scripture Mark 2:1-12

From the text section, Stepping into the word. We do see clearly that our love for others plays a role in their ability to meet Jesus. We may not have the opportunity to physically carry someone to Jesus, but this lesson gives us the opportunity to consider the ways we might bring people into Jesus' presence. Jesus still heals. Jesus still forgives. We have friends and family members who need Jesus' touch. Our concern for them, and the actions we take in response to our concern, make a difference in God's eyes.

Mark 2:1-12 is the first in a series of five controversy stories that show, in these very early chapters of Mark, how Jesus' authority is superior to that of the Jewish authorities, and how they reject Jesus' authority. It is unlikely that these five stories happened in exactly the sequence that Mark reports them. It is more likely that he gathered these stories from various places and grouped them together at the beginning of his account of Jesus' ministry. The five stories are arranged as follows:

- The healing of the paralytic (2:1-12)
- The call of a the tax collector and eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:13-17)
- The question about fasting (2:18-22)
- Jesus' defense of the disciples for a Sabbath harvest (2:23-28)
- The healing of the man with a withered hand (3:1-6)

The healing of the paralytic is parallel to the healing of the man with a withered hand. The other three stories have to do with food, or abstinence from food. The story of the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), our Gospel lesson this week is the story of Jesus in healing and teaching opposition vindication.

Capernaum, rather than Jesus' hometown of Nazareth or the capital city of Jerusalem, served as headquarters for Jesus' early ministry. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus opens his ministry by calling four disciples (1:16-20) and performing a number of healing miracles in the city (1:21-34). Then he goes on a preaching tour of Galilee (1:35). Later he returns to Capernaum, where

this story finds him at home. It is not clear whether he has his own house or lives with Peter, Andrew, and their families (1:29), but the latter seems likely.

A crowd of people gathers in front of the house, blocking the door. In this Gospel, crowds often gather around Jesus but, while they might respond with wonder to his miracles, they do not respond by becoming disciples. They are passive and fickle.

Speaking the word is central to Jesus' ministry. He began his public ministry by teaching the word with authority in the Capernaum synagogue, where he then exorcised a demon (1:21-28), and left Capernaum so that he might "proclaim the message" elsewhere (1:38).

"Four people came, carrying a paralytic to him" (verse 3). "When they could not come near to him for the crowd, they removed the roof where he was." They chop a hole in the roof to lower their friend into Jesus' presence. In the typical house of that day, the roof would be flat, supported by beams laid across the walls, and composed of a mud/thatch mixture. People would sometimes sleep on the roof during hot nights, and the roof would provide a private retreat from a busy household. There would usually be a ladder standing outside to permit access to the roof. Getting a paralyzed man up the ladder would be no small task, and would require courage on the part of the paralyzed man. Chopping a hole in the roof would be a bold means of solving the problem of access to Jesus. Some scholars say that it is easy to repair a mud/thatch roof, but it is difficult to patch any roof so that it doesn't leak.

When they had broken it up, they let down the mat that the paralytic was lying on. Just imagine the paralyzed man's feelings. He would not be securely strapped to a rigid litter, his mat would be a very makeshift carrying device. The friends probably didn't chop a hole large enough for him to be lowered while perfectly horizontal. Nor would his friends be trained to handle litter patients. It is likely that the paralyzed man experienced a bit of rough handling as his friends lowered him through the roof. This man was probably accustomed to sick-room quiet and solitude. To be the center of attention in a crowd was probably as uncomfortable for him as his bumpy ride.

He was a man without hope, except that in this moment he has hope that the healer will do for him what the healer has done for others. This would be a moment of almost unimaginable anticipation, and quite a lot of anxiety.

Some scholars suggest that it is the litter-bearers who have faith rather than the paralyzed man, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that. Nobody has to take him forcibly to Jesus. Nevertheless, he is the beneficiary of the faith of his litter-bearers. It is their faith as much as his own, that makes his healing possible. Without their rock-solid confidence that Jesus could help, the man would never have seen Jesus.

Jesus said to the paralytic, "Sons your sins are forgiven." Note that he does not say that he forgives the man's sins. The passive voice ("are forgiven") admits to two possibilities. One is that Jesus is forgiving the man's sins. The other is that God has forgiven the man's sins, and Jesus is simply acting as God's agent in announcing the fact of God's forgiveness. Note that the forgiveness of sins does not cure this man's paralysis. He is forgiven, but is not yet able to walk. He has received one blessed word from Jesus, but he needs yet another.

The story of Jesus healing the paralytic who was carried by his friends is found in three of the gospels (Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, and Luke 5:17-26). In all three accounts, Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven before he healed him.

Jesus chose to put something ahead of the man's physical healing, and all three gospel writers thought it was important enough to mention, "Your sins are forgiven."

We might wonder why Jesus dealt with the man's sin first. Remember how people viewed sin in Jesus' day. Do you remember what happened when Jesus saw a man who had been blind from birth? "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (John 9:2)

Consider this passage from Luke 13:1-5: "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!'"

Look at what Jesus knows about people, human nature, the paralytic, and you and me: "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (Matthew 9:4), "Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25), "Jesus, knowing their thoughts said to them, "Whoever welcomes

this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (Luke 9:47)

Jesus didn't always tell people their sins were forgiven before he healed them, but he said it to this paralytic. Jesus knew his heart.

What if the paralytic felt that his condition was the result of some sin? What if he felt it was his fault, even if it wasn't? ("Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?")

Consider have you ever felt that some misfortune in your life was a punishment from God for a sin, or a way of life, in your past? Then you understand the paralytic. Even if Jesus healed him, he would still believe he was worthless.

Jesus speaks to us and tells you what you need to hear first. Your sins are forgiven. Yes. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus takes care of things in the proper order, at the proper time. He knows. He knows if you condemn yourself, and he knows if you think God condemns you. We should be listening to Jesus, as he speaks love and life and forgiveness to us, and be healed.

The scribes silently judge Jesus for usurping God's prerogative of forgiving sins. While it is possible for a person to forgive a sin committed against him/herself, every sin is, in the end, a sin against God. Even the priests, responsible for the sacrificial system, would claim to serve only as intermediaries for God, because only God can forgive sins. The priests would argue, however, that God has ordained them to perform the rituals of atonement, so it is through their ministrations that God effects forgiveness of sins.

The scribes judge Jesus guilty of blasphemy for assuming God's prerogative. Blasphemy is the most serious of all sins, and Torah law specifies that the blasphemer be put to death by stoning (Leviticus 24:10-23). The Sanhedrin will bring formal charges of blasphemy against Jesus, and that becomes the basis for his crucifixion (14:61-64).

The scribes have not voiced their displeasure but, like God, Jesus knows their hearts. Jesus answers their unspoken questions with one of his own. He does not ask which is easier to do, but which is easier to say. Is it easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Arise, and take up your bed, and walk"?

It is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" than to say "Arise, and take up your bed, and walk." Observers have no way to verify whether the man's

sins have been forgiven, but they can easily verify whether he can stand up and take his mat and walk. When Jesus says, "Arise, and take up your bed, and walk," he is stepping out on the high wire without a net. If the man succeeds in standing and walking, it will become obvious that Jesus is working by Godly power and was therefore within his rights to say "Your sins are forgiven."

If the man fails to stand, Jesus' will be revealed publicly to be a failure and a blasphemer. If convicted of blasphemy, he could be put to death by stoning (Leviticus 24:16). With his question, Jesus is proposing a verifiable test of his authority (healing) to authenticate that which cannot otherwise be verified (forgiveness).

Jesus frequently refers to himself as Son of Man. Only four times in the New Testament (John 12:34; Acts 7:56; Revelation 1:13; 14:14) does anyone other than Jesus use the phrase, and then they use it to refer to Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus refers to himself fourteen times as the Son of Man. Twelve of these take place after Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah (Mark 8:27-30), and nine have to do with Jesus' suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21 twice, 41).

Only twice (Mark 2:10, 28) does Jesus use the phrase prior to Peter's confession, both times in connection with challenges to his authority. Jesus usually uses the phrase to disclose his passion to the disciples, it seems unlikely that he would use it at this early stage of his ministry in the presence of his enemies.

The result is that all are amazed and glorify God. If Jesus were truly a blasphemer, as the scribes have charged (verse 7), the end result of his efforts would not be the glorification of God.

When Mark says that they were all amazed and glorified God, he does not include the scribes. No doubt, the scribes are amazed, but Jesus' success comes at their expense. Their continuing opposition (2:13-17) makes it clear that they do not accept Jesus' authority and cannot be expected to glorify God for Jesus' miracles.

"And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"(verse 12). The previous day, the whole city gathered to see Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons (1:32-34), "but this time the declaration of the forgiveness of sins, and Jesus' bold defense of his right to do so, has added a new dimension."

From the text section, Stepping into the World. Prayer is a major way that we can bring our friends and family members to Jesus. Sometimes we pray for people we love in their presence and other times when they are not present. We can write prayers in a journal or pray with the words to a praise song or hymn. All prayer is good, even when it's a bit routine, but creativity in prayer can help us persist in praying. We also bring people into Jesus' presence with our actions and words. We can also bring people into God's presence and participate in Jesus call to join him in the ministry of healing by listening deeply. The challenge is to listen without giving advice. If you ask people with chronic illnesses what are some of the challenges they face, you will hear in many cases that unsolicited advice is deeply painful.

Prayer, acts of kindness, words of love, and careful listening are some of the ways we can bring people in the presence of Jesus, the Healer, the Compassionate One. We should be finding ways and time to do these things and then doing them. Jesus gives us the command to love one another, then gives us the power to do just that.

**Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.**

Next week's lesson January 24, 2021, "Called As the Intercessor"

Background Scripture John 17:14-24.

*Sources for this lesson: The Bible, Lectionary Bible Studies, by John W. Arthur, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Gospel of Mark by William Barclay, The New American Commentary of Mark, by James A. Brooks, and The Present Word.*