
The Mission of the Servant King

The Gospel According to Mark

Mark 2:1-22

Pastor Dale Evans, *Clearcreek Chapel*

Sunday Morning, October 4, 2015

Introduction

I would guess many in the room love a good walk/hike/run. Some may stroll through their neighborhood, others run in organized races. Some love to walk in the woods; others trek with only a topographical map and compass. Some pass through the woods because the forest lies between the two ends of the trip. We can walk briskly to get our dose of aerobic activity while being shaded from the heat of the sun. We can wander, observing the colors, sounds and shapes of the flowers, birds and trees that the path exposes. Or, we might be walking into the woods to see some particular site: a waterfall, a particular bird or a group of three old, large trees. However we are walking it is very easy to quickly embody the old adage of “missing the forest for the trees.”

This saying’s original meaning is about not being able to see the full picture because of a hang up on some detail or another. That problem is particularly true when reading our Bibles. We often have been trained to memorize, analyze small stories, phrases, verses or even words that sometimes obscure the larger impact of the particular book or even the entire Bible at times. It is my hope that we don’t allow that to happen as we traverse through the forest of the *Gospel According to Mark*. Read through the entire gospel several times, if possible, once every week. This week is one of those sections of text that belongs to a larger unit that we won’t complete until Pastor Michael’s sermon next week. I will spoil somewhat the punch line of his sermon but he gets to bring the full conclusion of mine.

We have been introduced to the book as “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Jesus the Messiah), the Son of God.” Pastor Dan gave the setting of these words and the first of many Old Testament connections given throughout the Gospel storyline. Pastor Mark presented the first heavenly announcement of Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s purposes and his personhood as God’s beloved son. Pastor Tim was able to portray this Jesus as one who has authority over the ills of this world whether their source is demonic, physical illness or ceremonial uncleanness. Jesus has both the ability and the right to restore. Let’s walk into our text this morning and gaze at some trees and then step back and think about where we are in the forest.

We will be looking at three individual narrative units this morning. As we begin each narrative, I will read it first in the NLT. We will then proceed through each piece of each story reading from the ESV. The NLT is a great translation for narratives both Old Testament and New Testament.

Forgiving Sins?! (Mark 2:1-12)

When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. ² Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God's word to them, ³ four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. ⁴ They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. ⁵ Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ⁷ "What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!"

⁸ Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? ⁹ Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk'? ¹⁰ So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, ¹¹ "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!"*

¹² And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, "We've never seen anything like this before!" --NLT

When reading narrative, check for the "conflict", often the main point will be found in how the conflict is resolved. This is my favorite way to interpret a narrative. I find it keeps you focused on "main idea" (not that peripheral ideas are irrelevant). Following the main idea from each story helps see the flow of the collection and the implications.

Opening (vs 1):

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

The opening of this particular story is set in the first verse where we see that Jesus is back in town. If you're going to read the gospel along with us weekly, you will need to go back a few pages at times and remind yourselves where you have been. Capernaum was the setting for much of chapter one. There we met Peter and Andrew. It was there that Jesus began his public ministry with healing and teaching. It was from there that Jesus had intentionally left to share the gospel message with the surrounding towns and villages. But he is back. Many significant "new" things are announced in Capernaum. Mark is highlighting this fact and we should be sitting up and paying attention for what is about to happen.

Setting (vs 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.

Jesus is in someone's house, perhaps they are in Peter's house again and the crowd is going wild. Jesus is preaching, but you can't help but wonder if anyone is really listening. You know how it is, a celebrity is present and everyone is clamoring to get near, get autographs and take "selfies" but the real purpose of

the visit seems obscured. It is like Mark puts the preaching part on the end as an “oh, by the way” remark.

Conflict Begins (vs 3-4):

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.

Now we are not at the height of our “conflict” but we are perplexed by a quirky turn of events. The houses of the area were commonly mud and stone homes with either thatched roofs that were then covered in mud. The roof was frequently used as an additional space for gathering and storage and likely there were others assembled on the roof as well. But of note it took some effort to get him up and then down to get an audience with Jesus.

Conflict Intensifies (vs 5):

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

And now we see an even quirkier turn to perplex us even further. We have already been conditioned by chapter one to expect a particular response from Jesus, right? Would not all of us have expected him to touch the man on the mat and cause him to get up and walk? But Jesus had other plans for his return visit to Capernaum. He didn’t come back just to perform some medical acrobatics. He has a different agenda and Mark wants us to know this early in the unfolding of his story and not get lost in the overtly spectacular. Whether Jesus is taking note of the faith of his four friends alone or including the man on the mat, they demonstrated an understanding of Jesus as more than just a magician or “healer”. But I am sure that this fellow was just as surprised as those around him when he heard Jesus’ words.

Conflict Clarified (vs 6,7):

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?”

Now as readers, we should not be completely surprised at Jesus words, Mark has already introduced us to Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. But not all believe or understand what this truly means. In fact some got it very clearly. The issue is “who is here?” We began this text with a quote from Isaiah announcing the arrival of...yes, the LORD! Of course he can forgive sins!

Conflict Climax (vs 8,9):

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’?”

In these verses we are at the highest tension in the story. The gauntlet is thrown down. He acknowledges their conundrum. And in a phrase that no commentator

is completely clear what Jesus actually meant, it is perfectly clear that all understood it as an ultimatum. And then we see the resolution.

Conflict Resolved (vs 10,11):

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.”

Yes, this is the resolution. Jesus can forgive and this is a sign to let them know it. Whew the crowd I am sure went wild!

Concluding Comments (vs 12):

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!”

What happened in this event? Is it that Jesus healed a crippled, paralytic man? Is it that Jesus forgave the sins of a person who demonstrated faith in Jesus abilities? The most intense conflict describes Jesus stating that “so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then heals a crippled man and by implication forgives his sins, but in doing so, demonstrates his authority (over sin). This is not a “healing story” but a demonstration of what Jesus is truly present to accomplish.

Eating With Sinners?! (Mark 2:13-17)

¹³ Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus’ followers.) ¹⁶ But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, “Why does he eat with such scum?”

¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” --NLT

Verse 13 Opening/Setting:

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.

Two separate events that Mark puts together, likely accomplishes a preliminary purpose that is used to principally set up the main point of the story. Jesus now goes out to the seaside where we should note that the sea is symbol of man and sin, evil and confusion, conflict and chaos.

Action Begins (vs 14):

¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

So far so good, we seem to be involved in another “calling” story. Levi is brought into the small group of special followers. But...

Beginning of Conflict (vs 15):

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

In a story that began by the sea, we now see the sea gathered around Jesus himself. (We will find Jesus dealing with the sea several times and we move along in the Gospel). How do we “know” Mark intends us to read this as one unit? One hint is that he leaves that characters unnamed using pronouns for them. “He reclined at table” “in his house.” Who was at dinner at whose house? Well, Jesus was likely at Levi’s house.

Conflict Intensifies (vs 16):

¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

This sentence lets us know that Jesus’ presence at this particular dinner is the conflict. In fact the conflict intensifies because of the overt statement regarding the character of the additional guests.

Conflict Resolves (vs 17):

¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

And then simply the conflict resolves with Jesus’ presentation of his purpose. Simple and yet elegant, so softly stated we almost miss it. Jesus is here for sinners! What is going to do for them? In fact, now I have a question from the previous story, just how can he forgive sins? We can’t just leave them dangling and unaccounted for? This story tells of the calling of Levi, but indicates Jesus’ mission (note the connection to the previous story...healed but had authority to forgive sins). Again we have a related story regarding Jesus purpose and authority. We have two “sin” stories placed together. Jesus has the authority to encounter and forgive sin, and in fact dealing with sin his stated purpose for life. Lets go on to the next story in the unit.

Not Fasting?! (Mark 2:18-22)

¹⁸ Once when John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people came to Jesus and asked, “Why don’t your disciples fast like John’s disciples and the Pharisees do?”

¹⁹ Jesus replied, “Do wedding guests fast while celebrating with the groom? Of course not. They can’t fast while the groom is with them. ²⁰ But someday the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

²¹ “Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before.

²² “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the wine would burst the wineskins, and the wine and the skins would both be lost. New wine calls for new wineskins.” --NLT

This is the middle a five narrative sequence. This narrative alludes to the New Covenant. The New Covenant brings with it a promise of a new, secure and “forgiven” relationship with God himself. God himself promises the means and agent of this deliverance and forgiveness. Mark assures us this one is indeed Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God.

Setting (vs 18a):

¹⁸ Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

This is a simple setting, likely during some Jewish holiday but the particulars and not specified. In fact the whole “story” component of this vignette takes a back seat to the teaching.

Conflict (vs 18b):

And people came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”

Simple question. Fasting represented an awareness of one’s sins and unworthiness. It was required on the Day of Atonement and was done frequently otherwise. Pharisees typically fasted twice weekly. Religious, pious people fasted. That’s a fact...

Conflict Resolution (vs 19-22) in teaching:

¹⁹ And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. ²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. ²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.

Bring using the picture of a wedding and its attendant banquet, Jesus considers himself the groom. The image of groom/wedding dispels the need to fast, likely because Jesus as groom represents forgiveness and healing. We just read two encounters that emphasized those points. The fresh wineskins are those that have been forgiven and given the new covenant gift of the spirit. But notice that this talk of forgiveness and healing is now involved in the allusion to the bridegrooms being “taken away” soon. This is the first overt allusion to the direction that the gospel is going.

Reflect and Respond

I have hinted that these three narratives are the first of a five narrative unit that runs from 2:1 to 3:6. Pastor Michael gets to bring the full “punch line” to this section. Whenever you see an odd number of sections that seem to have cohesiveness you should look to see if the central unit bringing the section

together. The first and last sections are “healings” in Capernaum with statements regarding authority (forgive sins and Sabbath). The inside sections are “food stories” illustrating Jesus’ authority. The center is on the “newness” of Jesus mission. That is the new covenant authority to forgive and bring “new law” to sinful, rebellious hearts.

This fits well into presenting this Gospel’s varied purposes. It presents Jesus and the Servant-King/Messiah who fulfills the old covenant and brings the new. Jesus does so in light of the cross and Mark’s emphasis to show the intention and glory in the cross as the goal for Jesus mission, not an accident. Jews would be encouraged to embrace this one who is clearly the promised king, and gentile-Roman believers would be encouraged to embrace the scandal of the cross as well.

Our take is to embrace the newness that Jesus brings to understand and interpret the Scriptures in this light.

We should embrace the power of forgiveness that Jesus provides because of the cross.

We should be emboldened to share our faith and walk lives that are transformed by this gospel.