Mark 2: Authority Over All Memory Verse: Mark 2:17

Jan. 19th, 2025 Scripture Reading: Mark 2

**[SLIDE 1]**

Last week we flew through the first chapter of Mark.  This is partly due to the fact that we are moving quickly and trying to get a bit of a bird’s eye view of Mark’s story.  The speed of our journey here is also due to Mark himself.  He writes with urgency.  He states the facts and jumps right into the next event.  As a reporter, Mark is moving quickly and we as readers are chasing along behind him trying to keep up.

We also mentioned that Mark was recording the words and teachings of the apostle Peter, his mentor and father in the faith. He knew the stories well.  He had heard them repeatedly from Peter and lived them as they ministered the gospel together.

There is another important aspect to Mark’s gospel that we glossed over last week. We mentioned that Peter was martyred in 64AD. This level of persecution came from the hand of the Roman Emperor Nero who was by all accounts a madman. **[SLIDE 2]** He ruled from 54AD to 68AD and during that time he instigated a great and deadly persecution against the church. Nero was obsessed with building and restructuring the footprint of his kingdom.  In his madness he started a fire that burned down two thirds of Rome and used the fledgling movement called Christianity as a scapegoat.  Nero carried out brutal and heinous punishments against believers in Christ. He also was the first Emperor to claim that he personally was god and should be worshipped as such.   It was a harrowing time.  Christians were stuck between living as faithful servants of King Jesus or as faithful servants of King Nero.  So, Mark writes to a persecuted community who lived in ever-present danger.  His own mentor fell victim to this regime, and no one knew when their time would come.

This is why the theme of authority is so crucial for Mark. **[SLIDE 3]**  As I said, his readers are stuck between two kings, and Mark wants to make sure that people are not confused or under any allusions.  Jesus is King.  No matter what claims Nero might make, there is a truth that needs to be proclaimed, a story that needs to be told.  The proof is in the pudding…whatever authority Nero might lay claim to, no matter what consequences he has the power to enact, Jesus’ authority is greater.  Jesus’ authority exceeds the bounds of this world.  Jesus is King.

In chapter 2 we are going to see four different questions **[SLIDE 4]** posed to Jesus that describe the nature of his authority, the extent to which he is in control. Chapter one included many examples of Jesus’ unconventional teaching as well as his power over sickness and demons.  Mark now gives greater dimension to the authority of Jesus as we turn to chapter 2.

We begin where we left off…with the crowds. **[SLIDE 5]** At the end of chapter 1 Jesus tries to get some time alone to pray but he is interrupted, and people find him anyway.  Now Jesus is back in Capernaum, and once again, news has spread like wildfire and the house in which he is staying is packed with people.  So, Jesus does what he always does; he starts teaching and preaching.  In the middle of his lesson, the roof begins to cave in and drop dirt and dust.

**[SLIDE 6]** There is a group of friends on top desperate to get to Jesus.  They could not get through the crowd, so they opt to go over it. A paralyzed man on a stretcher is lowered through the roof and placed before Jesus.  Mark does not record any reaction here from the crowd or whether or not these roofers were apologetic.  What he does record is what Jesus sees….not an act of vandalism, not an inconvenient interruption, not a dusty mess…he sees faith. **[SLIDE 7]** This faith drove these people to pursue an audience with Jesus, through thick or thin, through a crowd or a roof, they believed that Jesus could administer healing. Now, we have seen Jesus heal people before, but this is the first Mark has mentioned *faith*.  In light of that faith, Jesus proclaims an unexpected decree: He said to the man**, [SLIDE 8]** “My child, your sins are forgiven.”

Now, we must understand that, in the Jewish mindset, sickness and sin were intertwined.  We see this line of thinking in the book of Job.  Job was afflicted with all kinds of heartache and physical suffering.  His friends know exactly what has happened; Job has committed some sort of sin and is dealing with the consequences. This paralyzed man is seen through the same lens.  Whatever he has done, God is doling out judgment against him.  To be sick is to be a sinner.  The opposite was also true.  To be healed was to be forgiven.  Well, it’s the easiest thing in the world to forgive sins.  Anyone can say that someone else is forgiven.  It’s an unverifiable statement.  It cannot be proven one way or another.

The Pharisees were there that day listening to Jesus. **[SLIDE 9]**  They were strict adherents to God’s law.  They were concerned that all Jews followed God’s word, and they were very protective against the possibility of any infractions. Jesus sees this lame man, and he proclaims forgiveness of sins.  This is something only God can do!  This is something that can only be done in conjunction with an animal sacrifice!  Jesus is way out of line here!  He is speaking blasphemy and blasphemy was a capital offense.  Jesus could be stoned for speaking in such a way! This is our first question: **[SLIDE 10]** What is he saying? How can this man forgive sins?

Jesus is willing to take on the challenge. He poses a bit of a riddle: **[SLIDE 11]** “What is easier to say, your sins are forgiven or get up and walk?”  Remember, the two are the same.  To be forgiven is to be healed.  Jesus makes his intentions clear, **[SLIDE 12]** “But I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”  He commands the man to rise and take up his mat.  At his word, the man does so.  As you could imagine, everyone was stunned and amazed and praised God. This was something new, the inbreaking of a new kind of kingdom with a new kind of King.  A king with authority to forgive and not in word only but in action, with real verifiable proof. This afflicted man is healed and forgiven.

In verse 13, Jesus heads out to the lake, again teaching and again with a following crowd.  As he proceeds, he comes across a tax collector by the name of Levi. **[SLIDE 13]** Just like he did with the fishermen in the last chapter, Jesus asks Levi to follow him.  Levi drops everything.  He leaves a very lucrative position and decides to follow Jesus. There is some question as to the identity of this Levi.  Some say, though he answered Jesus’ call, he was not considered one of the twelve disciples.  Most would say that Levi is in fact Matthew, the well-known disciple who penned his own gospel. The name Matthew means “gift of God” and God had set a precedent of changing the names of people. That is likely what is going on here, though for Mark’s story, this detail does not need to be mentioned. It is important to know that at the time, students were the ones who sought out a rabbi to follow.  And rabbi’s who were sought out were able to garner a certain prestige and renown.  They would want only the finest Jewish men to be their students.  A rabbi seeking out his students…well, it just wasn’t done. It just did not work that way. But Jesus goes out and asks fishermen to follow him and, of all people, a tax collector as well.

**[SLIDE 14]** The next scene shows Jesus eating at Levi’s house with many other sinners or unclean people.  This also was forbidden by the Law and it was an event that was certainly noticed by the Pharisees.  And we come to the second faceoff. **[SLIDE 15]**  The question posed here is, why does this Jesus eat with unclean sinners?

Again, Jesus’ answer demonstrates, not only his authority, but also the connection between health and sin. **[SLIDE 16]** “It’s the sick who need a doctor. I didn’t come to call the righteous but sinners.” Sinners are the ones who need healing, they are the ones who need help.  Jesus is speaking about a disease that lurks in each of us…a pernicious sinful nature that corrupts and disfigures.  It’s our natural bent to exalt ourselves, to tell a little fib, to satisfy our lusts.  Our sin nature calls us to worship the one we see in the mirror.  It is a disease that we cannot cure on our own.  But, in our sickness, we are blessed to be able to come to Jesus and find the healing that is forgiveness.  1 John 1:10 states, “If anyone says they are without sin, they are a liar and the truth is not in them.”  If we pretend that we are not sick, then Jesus can do nothing for us.  Why would I seek out a doctor if I perceive myself to be healthy?  As Jesus says here, he came for sinners.  Those who declare themselves to be good will have to keep walking.   So, the question turns on us…where do we fall on that continuum of righteous to sinner?  To what degree do we need the healing hand of Jesus in our lives? I pray that I would never scorn my need for a Savior.

Well, some people approach Jesus with yet another question, the third, in verse 18.  Why is it that other faithful Jews fast, that is refrain from eating, but Jesus’ disciples do not? **[SLIDE 17]** They seem to eat openly and heartily.  Jesus answers by talking about a wedding feast, which would have denoted the grandest of all parties in this first century culture. **[SLIDE 18]** For us, we make a day of it, but a good wedding in Jesus’ day was a least a week long and such an important occasion that fasting was expressly forbidden!  Eat, drink and be merry!  Joy was at the center of a wedding and Jesus is the groom who is here to enable his disciples to be joyful.  Jesus also offers up two parables that apply to the same meaning. **[SLIDE 19]** One about a new patch on an old cloth and one about new wine in old wineskins.  The point again is that something brand new has come. With the patch, Jeus illustrates that this new kingdom cannot be emmeshed with the old way of doing things. With the wineskins he points out that this new kingdom cannot be contained in the old way of operating.  The wedding Jesus ushers in cannot be contained in this world. Jesus brings the party, and it will last into eternity.

But Mark refuses to linger, and he takes us on to the next episode in verse 23. **[SLIDE 20]** Here Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field picking grain, and presumably eating the heads, as they go.  The day happens to be the Sabbath and some pharisees happen to be observing this behavior.  All types of work were forbidden on the Sabbath and it sure looks like some harvesting was going on under Jesus’ watch.  The fourth and final question of the chapter comes from the Pharisees: “Why are your disciples breaking Sabbath law?” **[SLIDE 21]**

Jesus refers to an Old Testament story in which King David and his men were starving.  The only food available to them was the holy bread that sat before God in the tabernacle.  Only priests could handle this bread.  Only priests could eat it and yet David and his men are given this bread in their time of need.  Jesus’ point? **[SLIDE 22]** Verses 27: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”  This point is fair enough.  It makes good sense especially given that humans were created by God well before the Sabbath was even instituted.  A Sabbath rest is meant to bless our lives.  Because this is true, Jesus says in verse 28: **[SLIDE 23]** “Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Yet another bald-faced declaration of authority.

There is more to this story, but this is where chapter 2 ends, so we will as well.  But before we wrap up, let us review these four encounters that Jesus answered to in this chapter. **[SLIDE 24]**

One, the question of forgiveness. Only God can forgive sins, but Jesus claims that authority for himself.  Two, the question of eating.  Why would a Jewish teacher eat with “sinners”?  Because the sick need a doctor and Jesus came to call sinners. With this remark, Jesus claims to have the authority to heal.  The third question is about fasting.  Why do Jesus’ disciples seem to eat freely?  Jesus claims to be the groom and being in his presence is a veritable wedding feast. Jesus is ushering in something new. And finally, the fourth question is about working on the Sabbath.  How could Jesus condone what is unlawful?  Jesus basically says in no uncertain terms, I am the law.  “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Four different questions on four different occasions that all amount to the same answer: **[SLIDE 25]** Jesus holds the authority.  In forgiving, in healing, in eating, in matters of the law, Jesus reigns over everything. Twice in this chapter Jesus has called himself the Son of Man.  It is a term we will see over a dozen times in Mark.  It is a strange term.  On the one hand it literally means, the son of a human a.k.a. an ordinary person.  But the book of Daniel gives the term divine meaning, or at least speaks of a Son of Man who is endowed with authority from God. In Daniel 7 the prophet is shown a very strange vision of four beasts but in that vision, Daniel also sees, **[SLIDE 26]** “One like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (which is another very loaded title) and was escorted before Him. He was given authority to rule and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation and language should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.”  As readers, we should have no doubt that as Mark reports about Jesus, he is purposefully tying Jesus, a human Son of Man to this glorious vision of a son of man who is also the eternal King. Jesus is both.  We both bow before him in reverence, and we relate to him as a fellow man.  He is one of us and yet completely different from us.  But no matter what else we might think of Jesus, Mark has very purposefully highlighted for us, not once, not twice but four times, the nature of the authority this Jesus the Son of Man wields. He has authority to rule and his kingdom will never pass away. Jesus rules over the rules. Let us join with Simon and Andrew, with James and John, and now with Levi, in bowing before this King of kings and following after Him. Amen.