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Jesus' Authority cont.: Over Sin, Religion, and Paralysis (Mark 2:1-12).

Our goal in these sermons has been to discover the real Jesus. Because Jesus has become a cultural phenomenon often unmoored from the portraits of Him in the New Testament, it is important to see where we have changed Him to suit ourselves, which is inevitable in some ways, but always needs to be guarded against.

Mark begins his description of Jesus' public ministry with five separate healing miracles, revealing His authority over bad spirits, leprosy, and all kinds of diseases. Mark then follows these five miracles with five controversies, in which Jesus primarily engages the religious leaders of the day. Our text for this morning includes both a healing and a controversy and forms a transition between these two clusters of events. Once again, Jesus' authority and the way He uses authority are explicitly mentioned (10). In this passage, Mark reveals Jesus' authority over sin, over religious leaders and over paralysis.

The Setting: After traveling around Galilee preaching and doing miracles, Jesus came back to Capernaum, which became something of a home base for His ministry in Galilee. Hearing that Jesus had returned home, people rushed to Peter's house pushing and shoving until it was packed wall-to-wall with people. Mark says that Jesus was preaching the word to them. A paralyzed man and his friends also came to the house, but they couldn't find a way to push their friend through the crowd. Now, there are three major characters in the story: Jesus, the paralytic, and the religious leaders. And, Mark tells the story in three movements. In the first movement, Jesus responds to the faith of the paralytic and his friends (1-4). In the second, Jesus claims authority to forgive sins and over the religious leaders (5-9). Finally, Jesus demonstrates His authority over paralysis (10-12). Let's take each movement and see what we can learn about Jesus this morning.

The First Movement: First, notice that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords responds to the love and faith of ordinary people (1-3).

After Jesus returned home and began teaching in this crowded home, Mark directs our attention to the extraordinary determination, the love, and faith of a paralytic and his four friends.

Some men came, bringing to Jesus a paralytic 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 and after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralytic was lying on. vv 3-4.

Like others around Capernaum, when these men hear about Jesus' return, they rush to get their paralyzed friend to Him. However, they're at a significant disadvantage. They have to carry him on a cot. By the time they get to the house, those with strong legs and swift feet have already filled the room. So, when they finally arrive, there's no room to get their friend into the house. I envision them standing at the doorway probably able to hear Jesus teaching, but unable to get close enough to get Jesus to notice their friend.

What happens next is really extraordinary. They pick their friend up, in his cot, and they climb up the outside stairs and onto the roof of the home. In those days, roofs were made of cross beams laid over the adobe walls and covered with tiles, which were covered again with ten to twelve inches of earth. On top of that, a foot of dirt, a layer of reeds, and branches were added. Typically a roof like that was about two feet thick. After hauling their friend up to the roof, they then start digging a hole through the roof big enough to lower their friend down to Jesus into the crowded room below.

Now, try to imagine that you are one of those are inside the house below. First, you hear the sound of footsteps above. Then, you hear digging, pounding, and voices coming from above. Then, dirt, grass, twigs

start falling on your head. Dust fills the air. The roof is literally caving in. And it's not just a small crack; it's big enough for a man to be lowered through it on a cot! Then it starts to get difficult to breathe. You wonder if the whole roof is going to cave in, or if something malevolent is going on up there. At the very least, I think I would try to step out of the way. But, then, as the air clears, Jesus and the others look up and through the dust, they see four round heads with the smiles of success written on their faces—peeking through the hole at everyone down below. Did the intruders say, “Sorry about that”? Then they tie their paralyzed friend to his cot and lower him into the middle of that room close to Jesus, watching to see what Jesus will do. What were Peter and Andrew thinking? If this were your home, how would you react? Without asking, four neighbors just vandalized your house! Digging a hole in your neighbor's house without his permission could be construed as a rude thing to do.

Why is this significant? Clearly the extent to which these men went to express their love for their friend and their faith in Jesus is extraordinary. They loved their friend so much and they believed in Jesus' power to heal so much that they would not let anyone or anything stop them from getting him to Jesus.

Now, how did Jesus respond? What is He interested in? Does He care who they are? Does He care what their background is? Does He care about their socio-economic status? Does He care about their racial pedigree? Does He care about their level of education? No. None of these seem significant to Jesus. What He does notice is their faith. Mark says, “Seeing their faith,” He spoke to the paralytic.

I remember a ministry strategy articulated by a campus ministry I joined while attending college. They said that their ministry focus was to influence “strategic” people. Their rationale was that strategic people carry more influence and that influence would bring along ordinary people. Is this what Jesus did? Based on socio-economic, religious, and political status, how strategic were these five men who lived in this obscure fishing village in Galilee? Clearly they have no strategic influence at all; that's why they're digging a hole in their neighbor's roof. Like the Samaritan woman at the well, they are from a human social perspective the least strategic people possible. Yet what do they have? They have love and faith. What does Jesus do? Seeing *their* faith. Faith was not restricted to the paralytic. He needs the faith of others to help him get to Jesus. The extraordinary effort they made to get their friend to Jesus makes us ask about the measure of love we have for others. What will we do to bring them into the presence of Jesus? I can't help but to see a smile on Jesus' face as He looked up through that dusty room and saw the love and faith that filled the hearts of these men. God is especially pleased to work where there is so much love and faith.

Now, clearly their faith in Jesus is inadequate, fragmentary, and imperfect. They think they know what their friend's greatest need is. But they don't. They think that if Jesus heals his paralysis that will meet the greatest need of his life. Think of how his life would change if he could walk. Think of what it would do for him and his family. However, Jesus seems to be the only one in the room who doesn't know what this man needs. His friends have lowered the paralytic down in front of Jesus for Jesus to heal him of his physical paralysis. However, Jesus makes him go deeper. They love him, but Jesus loves him more deeply.

The man thinks his greatest problem is his physical condition. Things have not changed much over the years. If you offer a prayer ministry today the number one request will be for physical healing. That's why I love the Scriptures Bobby puts at the beginning of his prayer lists. Bobby receives all kinds of requests, yet at the beginning of the requests he reminds people that our greatest needs are not physical. Jesus will make you go deeper. By not immediately healing the man He was saying to him and to us “*You have not understood the depths of your problem and the deep needs of the human heart. You are not going deep enough.*” You think your greatest need is to get a better job, be healed of an addiction, get a younger wife, or a more successful and faithful husband or to have children who don't misbehave or have Jesus take away a debilitating physical condition. We all have something that we think if God would just do this one thing for us then we would be really happy, safe, confident, and secure. Jesus says, “*Look, I care about these things, but you must go deeper—all the way to the heart, if you are to be free to run and dance with God and be liberated in this world.*”

Instead of healing the man of his obvious physical need, Jesus says, “*My child, your sins are forgiven.*” In doing so, Jesus claimed authority—now over sin itself. Although we’re not told explicitly, I think that Jesus’ words created in this man’s heart a disposition to repent and believe in Him as his Lord and Savior—even though his faith was imperfect and fragmentary. Remember, Mark says that Jesus knew what others were thinking. Jesus makes the man and his friends go deeper to eternal things instead of just his physical condition. He will do the same to us. Jesus declared that his sins were forgiven and that claim to have authority over sin infuriated the religious leaders, which brings us to the next movement in the story.

The Second Movement: The scene now shifts to Jesus’ claim to forgive sins and over the religious leaders who oppose him. (vv 5-9).

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming, who can forgive sins but God alone?’

Again Jesus reveals His authority/power to know what people are thinking. Imagine how you could use that power if you had it. Let’s say that you were playing poker in a million dollar poker match. How would you use that power or authority? Could you resist using such power to your own advantage? Power is a dangerous thing to have. However, Jesus is the only one who can handle such power perfectly. And He knows they are accusing him of blasphemy. Their question, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” is correct. Jesus’ claim to forgive all this man’s sins is a claim of divinity. Now, you can only forgive a sin if it’s against you. If I sinned against Rich and Stan says to me, “Jim, I forgive you.” Rich will turn to Stan and say, “Wait a minute. Jim sinned against *me*, not you. Why are you saying, ‘I forgive, Jim?’ I’m the offended party here not you.” Jesus is claiming that, “All the sins you’ve ever committed have been done against *me!*” The only person who could possibly say, “All your sins are against me!” is your Creator, the one who made you for a purpose. And when you challenge that purpose you’re violating the very thing for which God made you. Only your Creator could say that. So, the claim to forgive a person’s sins is a claim of divinity. The religious leaders know it and now they know Jesus is not only a miracle worker but much more; He is claiming to be the Lord of the universe. They then accuse Him of blasphemy.

Which is easier?

Then Jesus puts a fascinating question before them, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise and take up your pallet and walk?’”

There are two answers to this question. It’s clearly easier to say something than to do something. Today, we might put it this way, “Talk is cheap.” So, in one sense, it’s easier for a person to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” because there is no way to verify the claim. But if you tell a paralytic to rise up and walk, well, that claim will be immediately verified or not. So, it would be more demanding to tell a paralytic to walk than to tell him that his sins are forgiven.

However, from the perspective of the cost Jesus would pay to forgive our sins, it is infinitely harder for Jesus to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven.” Here’s why. The fact that He heals the man *puts into motion the hatred that will take Him to the cross*. By healing this man, Jesus, after claiming to forgive his sins, sets in motion an opposition that will end up taking Him to the cross. At this very spot, the shadow of the cross falls across Jesus’ path. Why? Because He knows their thoughts and if He heals this man with this claim, they’re going to conspire to kill Him. In this exchange with the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus reveals his authority over sin and over the religious leaders. And that leads us to the last movement of Mark’s story.

The Third Movement: Jesus now validates His authority to forgive sins and to heal paralysis.

“He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.’ And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed...”

Try to imagine what this man felt hearing and experiencing these things. I wish I could have seen the look on the faces of his family as he came through the door of his home walking and leaping and praising God. What do you think they talked about for the rest of their lives? That miracle was both a witness of love to those who believed as well as a witness of judgment to those who didn't. Jesus' authority does judge those who reject Him. The miracle made some happier and some even more embittered. Some went away singing and dancing in the streets others went away with hatred in their hearts. Let me ask you this. Who is really paralyzed in the story? And which paralysis is worse? Paralyzed legs or hearts paralyzed by jealousy and bitterness? By healing the man, Jesus validates His authority over sin (divinity) and His authority over paralysis. And, at that moment, a fragment of what will be in eternity for the children of God was made palpable.

Joni Eareckson, a paraplegic, was attending a service where the minister asked everyone to kneel down and worship. Tears came to her eyes because she couldn't do it. Then she bowed her head and remembered that when she sees Jesus, her body will be like His raised up and functioning with all its faculties. She writes this.

“Just before the wedding feast of the lamb, I will drop down on grateful knees and then I am going to be on my feet dancing. Can you imagine the hope that this gives someone with a spinal chord injury like me or the hope this gives to someone who is manic-depressive? No other religion promises new bodies, a new material universe. Only in the gospel of Christ can people hurting like me find such an enormous hope.”

Beloved, all of the physical pleasures and tangible joys of this world, all rolled up together, will amount only to a piece of lint compared to the tangible joys we will be given in the new heavens and the new earth. Serving the Lord with new bodies unaffected by sin will be joy unspeakable. Jesus demonstrated His authority over paralysis. But there are many kinds of paralysis and the worst is not physical. We can be paralyzed by *bitterness*, which keeps us cold and closed up, we can be paralyzed by *passion*, which keeps us from the liberty of righteousness. We can be paralyzed by *discouragement* or by *fear*, and we can be paralyzed by *sin*, which turns us into beasts instead of humans. The love of Jesus revealed here is an amazing love on so many levels. However, from that day on, many wanted to kill Jesus and the rest wanted to use Him. Instead of using His power to dismiss, abandon, and destroy, Jesus puts into motion that which will affect a love unequalled among men, which will mean His own death for them and for us.

Beloved, the only way the legs of the paralytic can become infinitely mobile is if Jesus' legs are made immobile and nailed to a cross. The only way this man's legs can dance for eternity is if Jesus' legs are fastened with nails to a cross. The only way this man can live running and leaping for eternity is if Jesus dies in his place. Jesus sees them all at their worst. Some hated and rejected Him while others wanted to use Him for their own advantage and JESUS LOVES THEM AND US ANYWAY! He sees you at your worst and yet He pours his love out for you anyway. C.S. Lewis said the hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men. Our wounds have been closed because His have been opened. By His stripes/wounds we have been healed. A 16.c. theologian wrote this. It is called the wonderful exchange.

“This is the wonderful exchange which, out of His measureless benevolence, Jesus Christ has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, He has made us sons of God with Him; that, by His descent to earth, He has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, He has conferred His immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, He has strengthened us by His power; that, receiving our poverty unto Himself, He has transferred His wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon Himself, He has clothed us with His righteousness.”¹

Because of such love we can say with Joni Eareckson, “Thank you Jesus for healing the paralysis of my heart. And for the promise that someday, whenever it pleases you, you will heal my body as well.”

¹John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed, Ford Lewis Battles, trans, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960 [1559]), IV.xvii.2.

