

Mark 2:1-12

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 November 2015

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] It's a Sunday school classic up there with Noah's Ark and David and Goliath.

The friends of the paralytic digging through a roof and lowering their friend right down in front of Jesus.

It's a memorable story and we can visualize what happened, at least in a measure, probably influenced by pictures we've seen in Bible storybooks over the years.

It's not the kind of story that you forget, and that's good. I'm sure Mark doesn't want us to forget, as he includes here at the beginning, really pretty much at the beginning still, of his account of the life and ministry of Jesus, this miracle that took place in Capernaum.

Of course, the principal character in the account is Jesus. I guess then, well, you could argue the case, whether it's the paralytic or his friends that occupy a more important place.

[1 : 27] But certainly the principal character is Jesus himself. And Mark's great concern is to employ the story as a means of communicating important truth concerning the identity of Jesus.

A few weeks ago, when we began considering this gospel, we noticed how Mark begins his gospel account by identifying Jesus as the Son of God.

There at the beginning of the account in verse 1 of chapter 1, we read the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark sets out his stall.

This is who I am talking about. But what does that mean? What does it mean to describe or to identify Jesus as the Son of God?

I think Mark answers that question as he continues through his gospel, as he introduces us to Jesus in action.

[2 : 37] Mark writes his gospel in a way where he includes very little commentary. I think if any of us had been given the task of writing a gospel, it may seem bizarre to even imagine that.

But I think for most of us it would have been very difficult to limit ourselves to describing the events. I think there would always have been the temptation for us to add our little comments, if only in brackets.

In brackets we would have said, of course, this means blah, blah, blah. And of course, this signifies blah, blah, blah. We would have found it difficult not to throw in our own commentary.

But Mark is very disciplined in not doing that. He describes what happened. It's almost as if he's saying to his readers, and that includes all of us here this morning, it's almost as if he's saying, well, here are the facts.

This is what happened. This is what Jesus did. This is what he said. You decide who he is. One recurring aspect of Mark's presentation of Jesus is the manner in which Jesus exercises authority in any number of ways.

[3 : 53] And how this exercise of authority points to his identity and explains why he is given the title, the Son of God. And as we are confronted with Jesus in action, we are drawn to the conclusion that the Son of God is God the Son.

Now, before we begin to consider the passage that's before us this morning, it's worth reminding ourselves of what are the principal plants of biblical evidence establishing the divinity of Jesus, that he is God.

Which is what we as Christians believe. On what grounds is that claim made? The case is not built on one or two convenient proof texts that state that explicitly.

Though we could identify texts that very much make that claim. But rather the case for the divinity of Jesus, that he is God, recognizes that the divinity of Jesus pervades the whole of the New Testament.

And I think we could say that the case is built on four principal cornerstones. If you think of it as an edifice, then there are four principal cornerstones upon which the case is built.

[5 : 19] First of all, it's built on New Testament passages that describe divine titles to Jesus, that speak of Jesus as God, as Lord, as the Son of God.

Perhaps the most striking of these passages that comes to mind is when Thomas is confronted with the risen Jesus and he exclaims, my Lord and my God.

Very explicit on that occasion. So that's one of the cornerstones of the case. But then secondly, we have New Testament passages that describe to Jesus divine functions.

He does things that God does. He's described as and spoken of as creator, as Lord of history and providence, as upholding all things, as judge of the universe.

These are divine functions. These correspond to God, but they're attributed to Jesus. The third cornerstone of the case that is made are those New Testament passages that describe to Jesus divine attributes.

[6 : 35] For example, eternity and omnipotence and omniscience, knowing all things. When we think of his eternity, one passage that comes to mind are the words of Jesus himself when he said to a stunned audience before Abraham was, Jesus, I am.

I am. Then the fourth plank or the fourth cornerstone of this case that can be built establishing that Jesus is God, that he is divine, are New Testament passages that ascribe to Jesus divine prerogatives.

And very particularly, the prerogative to receive worship. He is one worthy of being worshiped. That is a divine prerogative.

God does not share his worthiness to be worshiped with another. With this in mind, almost as a background, with this in mind, we turn to our passage this morning.

And this passage is particularly striking in the manner in which it presents Jesus as God. Of the four cornerstones that we have just briefly identified, three are clearly present.

[7 : 58] And this is probably at a bit of a push. We might even identify the fourth cornerstone. But certainly three we can identify very clearly.

Let's just notice how we can do so in this passage. First of all, a divine title ascribed to Jesus, or in this case, used by Jesus as he speaks concerning himself.

If we look in verse 10 of the passage. So Mark chapter 2 and verse 10. This is in the context of this dialogue with the religious leaders.

Jesus expresses himself in this way. But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home.

Jesus here in the midst of this dialogue speaks of himself in a somewhat cryptic way. But clearly he is speaking about himself. And he speaks about himself as the Son of Man.

[9 : 05] Now this is the title that Jesus most employs to describe himself. It's a title that is used almost exclusively by Jesus.

Perhaps the one exception would be Stephen as he is about to die being stoned. We remember the occasion. And at that point he speaks of what he sees.

And he speaks of the Son of Man. But the title is largely, almost exclusively, used by Jesus of himself. Now why did Jesus use this title?

I think we can identify two reasons. We don't need to choose between them. It may well be that both are in mind. Or both explain Jesus' use of the title.

First of all, I think he uses this title because it was conveniently cryptic. And certainly less explicit than other titles he could have employed to describe himself.

[10 : 10] For example, the Son of God. Of course, we've discovered even in the short time that we've been going through Mark's gospel. We've discovered how Jesus is often concerned to hide, at least in a measure, his identity.

He doesn't want it to be clear at this point in full measure who he is. Of course, little by little, his identity is being revealed. But there is a sense in which he holds back.

He's conscious that if people come to a conclusion as to who he is, possibly a false conclusion, it could be an obstacle to his ministry.

And so using a title that is somewhat cryptic, that wouldn't immediately allow those who are hearing it to come to some conclusion as to who he is, serves his purposes.

That might be one of the reasons why he chose to use this title. But perhaps more importantly is the content of it. What does it reveal?

[11:17] What does it say about who Jesus is? Well, this title, Son of Man, combines two important truths concerning the person of Jesus.

Namely, that he was fully man and that at the same time he was fully God. Now, the term clearly portrays the first truth, the very language, the son of man.

The idea of somebody being the son of, it was a common Hebrew idiom. So, for example, you could speak of somebody as the son of wealth. And really what you're saying is that he was very wealthy. So, if you speak of somebody as being the son of man, there is a sense in which it identifies this person as a man, wholly and fully human. But Jesus didn't refer himself, or refer to himself as a son of man, but as the son of man.

There in verse 10, But you may know that the son of man has authority on earth. And in describing himself in that way, he is pointing us in the direction of the book of Daniel and the passage that we read a few moments ago.

[12:34] And this character, this mysterious character, presented to us as a son of man there in Daniel. So, we can maybe just remind ourselves, there are not many verses.

Read the verses again, but in the light of where we've reached in the sermon this morning. So, Daniel chapter 7 and verse 9. This is Daniel's vision. As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat.

Clearly, they are a reference to God himself. His clothing was as white as snow. The hair of his head was white like wool. And it goes on. And then if we jump to verse 13.

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. So, he's distinct from the Ancient of Days. He approaches him. And yet then, what are we told? In verse 14, He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him.

[13:36] His dominion is an everlasting dominion. That will not pass away. And his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Perhaps nowhere else in the Old Testament is there one presented so clearly as both distinct from God, and yet described as God.

The Ancient of Days is God. And yet the one like a son of man is also God. He is the God-man. And as such, he enjoys, as Daniel discovered, all authority, glory, and sovereign power, and all peoples, nations, and men of every language worship him.

Now, that Jesus was himself conscious of the implications of the title that he uses, is seen very clearly at his trial.

When asked by the high priest Caiaphas whether he was the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus replied, Yes, it is as you say. But I say to all of you, in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.

For there, in a very clear and unambiguous way, Jesus makes reference to Daniel's vision that we've just read.

[14:57] Before moving on, we need to be aware of one solemn truth concerning the Son of Man that Jesus identifies himself as.

Daniel assures us in the passage that we've read. Paul, as he writes to the believers in Philippi, echoes the same truth. And it is this, that before the Son of Man, before the Son of Man, all will worship.

Before him, every knee will bow. And that means that you will bow. You will bow before the Son of Man.

You will bow before Jesus. The question for you this morning is to ask, will you bow willingly to adore the one who loved you and gave himself for you?

Or will you bow reluctantly as you are forced to your knees by the sheer weight of his glorious presence as you await being judged by him and found wanting?

[16:07] A divine title, the Son of Man. But moving on, we also find in this passage, Jesus ascribed or exercising a divine function. The forgiveness of sins.

When the paralytic is laid before him, we read in verse 5 that Jesus says to him, Son, your sins are forgiven. In verse 7, we have the protest of the religious leaders by means of this question that they're pondering in their hearts.

Who can forgive sins but God alone? And then in verse 10, Jesus confirms this pretension that he has as being one who enjoys the authority to forgive sins.

This is the second way in which Jesus is presented or presents himself as divine. It's so clear, it's explicit, that maybe it doesn't require much more than simply pointing out.

Notice the language that Jesus uses there in verse 5, Son, your sins are forgiven. He doesn't say, Son, I forgive you. He doesn't limit himself to any particular sin that the man may have been guilty of.

[17 : 20] He doesn't restrict himself to offering the man the opportunity of forgiveness. Rather, there is in his words an authoritative, absolute, and exhaustive declaration of forgiveness.

Indeed, Jesus does more than simply declare. The language that he uses implies the actual act of forgiving is implicit in the declaration of forgiveness.

And the teachers of the law were in no doubt, and they rightly pointed out that such authority belongs only to God. And in this they were right.

Forgiveness of sins is a divine function. To claim such authority and to presume to exercise such authority was blasphemy.

Now, the argument that Jesus uses to demonstrate his authority to forgive sins is in some ways a curious one, as he argues from the lesser to the greater.

[18 : 26] It makes sense to argue from the greater to the lesser. I can do this that is very difficult, so obviously I can do something that is less difficult. But here Jesus seems to go in the other direction.

The argument that he seems to be making to the men who are doubting him is, well, I can heal a paralytic, and therefore I can forgive sins. And you could argue that the premise doesn't merit the conclusion.

But I think the point is that Jesus is conscious that the pretension, or his pretension to forgive sins is not visibly falsifiable. You can't see if what he claims to have done has actually happened.

In that sense, it's easy. It's easy for him to say your sins are forgiven. Nobody can look at the man and say, well, that hasn't happened. You can't visibly falsify what he claims to have done.

In that sense, it's easy to say. Words are cheap. You can just say it. Who knows if it's actually happened. But of course, to say to a man who's a paralytic, get up and walk, that is visibly falsifiable.

[19 : 36] If the man doesn't get up and walk, then clearly you're not able to do what you claim to do. So in that sense, that popular level of persuasion, the argument is being made by Jesus.

He's not actually saying that forgiving sins is easier than healing a paralytic or as a matter of greater significance, because clearly it is not. But what he is saying, he is warning his critics and his doubters.

He's saying that they ought not to dismiss too lightly his pretensions, however scandalous, given that he can demonstrate that he is one who can deliver what he offers.

A divine name, a divine function. It's also just noteworthy in the passing that even in exercising this divine function, Jesus seems to do so in a way that leaves some questions unanswered.

He states that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. Perhaps some would have gone away that day musing, well, is he actually claiming to be God, or is he claiming that he has been granted some kind of delegated authority by God?

[20 : 52] But leaving that to one side, there can be no doubt that to forgive sins is a divine function requiring divine authority.

But let's bring this to ourselves this morning. Jesus is still in the business of forgiving sins. And the question for you to ask yourself this morning is, has he forgiven your sins?

Have you come to the point in your life where you recognize that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness and that the only one who is able to forgive you is the very man who forgave the sins of this paralytic so long ago?

A divine name, a divine function, but thirdly, a divine attribute. In verse 8 we read, Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this is what they were thinking in their hearts.

That is the teachers of the law. And he said to them, and the account goes on. Of course, Jesus didn't only know what was in the heart of the teachers of the law, he also knew what was in the heart of the paralytic.

[22 : 05] Hence, his words addressed to him, your sins are forgiven. But if we focus on his knowledge of what was in the hearts of the teachers of the law, verse 8 makes it clear that Jesus was able to perceive what they were thinking in their hearts.

And it is important to stress here that the language used does not allow for the suggestion that maybe they were muttering among themselves and Jesus might have overheard what they were saying.

Nor does the language allow for the suggestion that Jesus perceived their discomfort and indignation. He, of course, knew what they believed and where they were coming from.

It's not surprising that they would have objected in the way that they did in their hearts. And so, Jesus had a hunch that that's probably what they were thinking.

That is not what the language indicates. Rather, he knew what was in their hearts. He knew their hearts. He knew what each of them was thinking and he knew in precise detail what each of them was thinking.

[23 : 15] Indeed, he could distinguish between them. How one was thinking in one particular way and one was indignant to a certain degree and another to a lesser degree. He could make those distinctions between each of those whose hearts he could see.

And this knowledge is the knowledge of one who is omniscient, of one who is all-knowing. It is the knowledge of God. It is a divine attribute.

Remember when Samuel had to choose a successor to King Saul and God had to teach him that in the words that we find in the passage that records that occasion.

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. And, of course, the Lord looks at the heart because the Lord alone is able to look at the heart.

And this divine attribute is owned and demonstrated and claimed by Jesus as he is the Lord. And as he saw the hearts of these men, so he sees your heart.

[24 : 29] He sees your heart this morning. He sees everything in it. That which is hidden to your nearest and dearest. Indeed, that which is hidden even to yourself.

He sees it all. And what is it that he sees in your heart? So, in this passage, we find a divine name used by Jesus, attributed to Jesus, the Son of Man, a divine function exercised by Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, a divine attribute demonstrated by Jesus, his knowledge of what was in the hearts of these men.

What about, more fleetingly, the fourth cornerstone or plank of evidence for the divinity of Jesus, what we call the divine prerogative, and particularly the prerogative of receiving worship.

In the passage, the final words that we read are in verse 12 at the end of the verse, or the second sentence in the verse, this amazed everyone.

And they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. Now, it would be quite wrong on the basis of this verse to suggest that the crowd directed their worship to Jesus.

[25 : 57] Rather, the picture that seems to be painted is that they are worshipping God because of what Jesus has done. Indeed, in Mark's account of this incident, Mark is explicit in explaining the praise of the crowd in that way.

In Matthew chapter 9 and in verse 8, we read, when the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe, and they praised God who had given such authority to men.

So there, Matthew makes clear what Mark would seem to be suggesting, but isn't so explicit in explaining. And so we'd have to say, well, actually you don't have in this passage any suggestion that Jesus is being worshipped or receiving worship.

And yet it is interesting that when we turn to Luke's account, when he presents the reaction of the crowd, of those present, to what they saw.

This man declaring forgiveness of sins for the paralytic, this man commanding the paralytic to get up and to walk, and that is what he does.

[27 : 08] We're told that the people, Mark tells us, that the people were filled with awe. The reaction that would correspond in the presence of God.

Indeed, Luke also presents the paralytic himself, praising God. Very explicitly he speaks of the man who was healed, praising God. And we're left with the question in our minds that we can't definitively give an answer to.

Did the man who was healed, did he worship Jesus? Did he become a worshipper of Jesus? We don't know the answer to that question. But what we do know is that the passage before us

presents us with a portrayal of Jesus as God.

The bearer of the divine name. The one who exercises divine functions. The one who displays divine attributes. And Mark presents this Jesus to you today.

And he presents this Jesus to you today that you would respond to him. How will you respond? Will you respond by concluding that Jesus is God?

[28 : 26] That would be good. Do you respond by recognizing that the Son of God is God the Son? That would be a right conclusion for you to come to.

But what I would say is don't leave it there. Don't leave it with some intellectual conclusion concerning the identity of Jesus. But having so concluded, bow down and worship him.

For he is indeed worthy of that divine prerogative of receiving your worship, of receiving my worship. He is worthy of having you bow down before him.

And with Thomas of old exclaiming, my Lord and my God. May that be the way in which we all relate to him and respond to him.

Well, let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Son. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for what we discover concerning his identity.

[29 : 30] Even in this one incident, this one occasion, when these men brought their friend to be healed by Jesus. we pray that we would be able to respond to Jesus as we ought.

That we would know what it is to bow down before him in grateful and joyful praise as we discover him to be who he is. The Son of God.

God the Son. The one worthy of all worship and praise and adoration. And all of these things we pray in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.