

Mark 2:1-12

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Let's turn together to the passage that we read in Mark's gospel and chapter 2.

Now, as we discovered this morning, Mark begins his gospel with a quite astonishing and fulsome description of Jesus. He is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He is the anointed one. He is the Son of God. And we attempted this morning, I think very superficially and certainly inadequately, to develop the significance of the title Son of God, stressing that by this title we can understand Jesus to be uniquely and eternally the Son of God, and indeed can rightly be considered as God the Son. Mark states this boldly and clearly in his introduction or executive summary, but then he quickly takes the opportunity to flesh out and to ground this remarkable claim in the body of the gospel itself. And this evening we want to consider one of the first miracles that Mark records for us, and to do so from this perspective, from the perspective of what it reveals to us concerning the divinity of Jesus. How the presentation that Mark gives us of this particular miracle demonstrates to us that the Son of God is indeed God the Son.

Now, before we turn to consider the passage itself and from that very specific perspective, it is worth reminding ourselves what are the principal planks of biblical evidence establishing the divinity of Jesus. And as we do that, we should avoid the mistake or the temptation of trying to establish the divinity of Jesus on the basis of one or two proof texts. Now, that's not to say that such proof texts do not exist, for they do. But it is to recognize that the evidence, the case for the divinity of Jesus is so much more than simply one or two proof texts. It pervades the whole of the New Testament.

Now, having recognized that we should avoid simply hanging our convictions on one or two texts, it is certainly true that if we were to identify one that speaks so eloquently concerning Jesus as God, then perhaps we could do no better than the words of Thomas, as he comes face to face with the risen Lord, whose resurrection he had doubted. And yet, as he is confronted by him, he cries out, my Lord and my God. And Jesus receives that designation with no complaint or objection.

But as we consider what are or what we could consider to be the principal planks that establish the Christian claim that Jesus is indeed God. There are four elements to it, or four planks that together make the case so powerfully. First of all, we would be able to notice passages in the New Testament that ascribe divine titles to Jesus. For example, passages that speak of him as God, like the one just mentioned.

[3 : 59] Others that speak of him as Lord, as we understand the full significance of that title. Passages that speak of him as the Son of God, as we were noticing this morning. So that is a very important element of the case that can be made, divine titles ascribed to Jesus. But then also we have in the New Testament passages that ascribe to Jesus divine functions, that describe him as the Creator, as the Lord of Providence, as the one who upholds all things, as the Judge of the world. All of these we could catalog as divine functions, and they are ascribed to Jesus. Now we're not going to, at the moment, look at all these things and give text for them, because what we want to do is proceed to the passage and see what we find in this passage. But just to set the scene. So divine titles that are ascribed to Jesus, divine functions that are also ascribed to Jesus, but also we have many passages in the New Testament that ascribe to Jesus divine attributes. For example, eternity. Again this morning we made mention of one of those passages where Jesus himself declared before Abraham was, I am. Jesus is also ascribed with omnipotent, another divine attribute. And then fourthly, the fourth plank, if you wish, of a case that could be made that establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus is indeed God, as

Christians claim and profess. We have passages in the New Testament that ascribe to Jesus divine prerogatives, and particularly the prerogative to receive worship. And again the verse that was just mentioned concerning Thomas would fall into that category. Thomas worships the risen Lord.

With this in mind as a backdrop, as a context if you wish, let's now turn to the passage that we have read in Mark's gospel. And this passage is particularly eloquent and helpful in serving to present to us Jesus as God. Of the four planks mentioned, there are three in this passage that are very clearly present.

And perhaps at a push we might even attempt to identify a fourth, but certainly three are present. First of all, I'll notice what they are, and then we'll consider them in turn. First of all, we have in this passage a divine title ascribed to Jesus. And it is Jesus who ascribes the title to himself. He describes himself as the Son of Man. Now that's a title that at first sight would not appear to be a divine title, but we'll consider just in a moment why it should indeed be considered in that way. Also we have in this passage in Mark chapter 2 a divine function attributed to Jesus.

The words of his enemies speak eloquently, who can forgive sins but God alone? Here we have Jesus doing that which is a divine function, doing that which only God can do. But we also have in this passage Jesus ascribed with a divine attribute, that of omniscience. The men who are there in front of him, the teachers of the law, are giving mental thought to what is being done. And we read in the passage that immediately Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts. So we have a divine attribute ascribed to Jesus here. As I say, we will now, having identified what they are, turn to consider them. A divine prerogative, and this would be stretching things somewhat.

[8 : 03] But there is something that's at least worth considering in the passage when at the end of the passage those present who have been witnesses to the events, to the healing of this man, to this declaration of his sins having been forgiven. They are described as amazed and as praising God.

And we'll notice that in a moment or towards the end. Now before we do consider then each of these elements in turn, it is worth just very briefly reminding ourselves of the story itself in which we find Jesus is so described. The story is a remarkable story. And the unsung heroes, if you wish, that would merit a sermon in and of themselves are these friends of the paralytic. Luke tells us that there were four of them. In Mark's account, we're simply told, some men came bringing to him a paralytic.

Well, in fact, Mark also gives us that information carried by four of them. It is these men whose compassion towards their friend, whose love for their friend, whose persistence in seeking help for their friend, whose creativity in ensuring that their friend receives the help he needs. They are the ones who bring this man to the feet of Jesus. And they are the ones of whom Jesus remarkably says, when Jesus saw their faith, he said, your son, your sins are forgiven.

And those words of Jesus are profoundly challenging and would merit consideration for us. How the faith of the friends is instrumental in the healing and forgiving of the paralytic. However, that will have to be for another occasion. Our concern this evening is with Jesus and the manner in which he is presented to us as divine. First of all, then, the divine title that we find in this passage. There in verse 10, Jesus is addressing the teachers of the law who are scandalized and shocked by the manner in which he has this pretension has this pretension to forgive sins. And Jesus says to them, 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 speaks of himself and describes himself with this name, with this title, the Son of Man. Now, as I'm sure many of us are aware, this was his favorite self-designation. It is almost the self-designation he uses almost to the exclusion of all others. And indeed, it is only Jesus that uses that title of himself, with the one exception of Stephen, as he is about to enter heaven and makes use of this title also to describe Jesus whom he sees.

This, then, is a title that Jesus uses so very often. And the question that maybe we can pose to help us discover more about its significance is to ask why did Jesus choose to use this particular title? He could have used others, no doubt. Others used titles that were accurate to describe him, but he chose this one. Why did he do so? There are probably two reasons, and the second of which is of more interest to us for our purposes, but we'll mention the first as well, just briefly. Firstly, for the reason that it was, if you wish, conveniently cryptic or certainly less explicit than other titles he could have chosen for himself. For example, the one that Mark uses in verse one that we were considering this morning, the Son of God. The title Son of Man is, as I say, more cryptic, less obviously or immediately revealing as to his identity. And we know, as we study through the Gospels, how Jesus did have that purpose of, in a sense, obscuring or hiding his identity as he begins his ministry. There was a deliberate effort on his part that he would not be identifying at the beginning. Indeed, Mark describes to us very eloquently how even his disciples had great difficulty in establishing his true identity, never mind others. And this title helped in that purpose of maintaining until it was right and fitting, until the time he had determined maintaining his identity in a measure hidden. That perhaps was one of the practical reasons, if you wish. But the second reason, which is the one I want to more focus on, is that the title that he chooses to use of himself was an ideal title for combining the two chief truths that needed to be said about his person, even if those would not be identified at the time at which he was using the title. And namely, the two truths in question, namely, that he was indeed fully and truly man, but that he was at the same time fully and truly God. The term itself clearly portrays the first truth, that he was truly man. The use of this idiom, son of man, was, we are assured by those who know about these things, a common Hebrew idiom. So, for example, if somebody was described as a son of wealth, it would be an idiomatic way of saying that he was a very wealthy man. Consequently, somebody who is described as, or who describes himself as the son of man, was at that level simply stating that he was indeed a man. He was human. That was his nature. And so, this title does serve to present to us the humanity of Jesus. There are those who would be very quick to stress, rather, the fact that this title serves to identify him as divine, and it does, as we'll note in a moment. But it would be wrong to leave aside the fact that it also serves to present him as truly human, as indeed we believe he was.

[14 : 51] But it also has another significance. It also reveals another truth concerning the identity of Jesus. Jesus did not refer to himself as a son of man, but as the son of man, which means the son of man referred to in Daniel. And in a moment we'll give greater reasons for coming to that conclusion.

But for the moment, let's simply read the passage in Daniel where this character is identified, who is given this title, a title that Jesus then takes for himself. So, if we read there in Daniel chapter 7 and verses 9 to 14. Daniel chapter 7 and verses 9 to 14. Daniel chapter 7 and verse 9 and following.

This is Daniel's dream that is being presented to us, and we read, as I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow. The hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.

Then I continued to watch. Because of the boastful words, the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time. And then particularly what we read in what follows. 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 and was led into his presence.

He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. In these words that describe the vision, the dream that Daniel had, we find perhaps as nowhere else in the Old Testament, one presented so clearly who is both distinct from God and yet described as God. The Ancient of Days, of whom we read there in Daniel, is clearly God. And yet there is also one identified who is one like a son of man.

[17 : 32] And He is also God. He is the God-man, and as such He enjoys, as we have read, all authority, glory, and sovereign power. And as we also discover, all peoples, nations, and men of every language worship Him. And that Jesus was conscious of the implications of the title that He was taking upon Himself, and indeed that He was conscious that it was a title that knows its origins in that passage that we've read in Daniel is very clearly presented to us at His trial when Caiaphas was interrogating Him.

And particularly, he poses the question to Jesus, if He was indeed Christ, the Son of God. How did Jesus reply, as it's recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 26? Jesus replies, Yes, it is as you say. And then He goes on to say, But I say to all of you, in the future you will see the Son of Man, again using this title of Himself, sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One, and coming on the clouds of heaven, where we see a very clear and explicit reference to the passage that we've read there in Daniel. Now, before we move on, having identified this divine title ascribed to Jesus that Jesus takes upon Himself in this passage, before we do move on to look at the second element, there is a solemn truth that we must note concerning the Son of Man. Daniel assures us in what we have read, and Paul in his letter to the Philippians echoes the same truth, and it is this, that before this Son of Man, all will bow, all will worship Him. Daniel speaks of all the peoples and all the nations worshipping this character, and then we find, as I say, the same truth echoed by Paul as he writes to the Philippians. Every tongue will confess, and every knee will bow before Him. And I say that it's worth just noting that, because we want to go beyond simply a theological discovery, or presenting a theological truth. We want to be very clear, that it would be clear for all of us gathered here this evening, that we are among those who will bow. We are of those who will worship this Savior, this

God-man. You will bow before Him. And the solemn question for us is, will it be willingly? Will you willingly worship Him as you kneel and adore the One who gave His life to purchase your salvation?

Or will you bow and worship reluctantly as you are forced to your knees, perhaps by one of the glorious angels, or indeed by the sheer weight of His glory as it is before you? And you can do no other than kneel and bow before Him. But will you do so just moments before you are judged for your sin, and banished forever from His holy and blessed presence? That is the solemn question that we must all address and have an answer to. We have then in this passage a divine name for Jesus, but we also have, as we introduced a few moments ago, a divine function. The words of the elders of the law in response to what Jesus says to the paralytic, who can forgive sins but God alone? This begins when Jesus there in verse 5 addresses this poor man in this way, son, your sins are forgiven. We then have the protest of the elders of the law. It is a mental protest that Jesus is able to perceive, but a protest nonetheless. And then, of course, we have Jesus Himself arguing with them and persuading them, or in any case, making a case for the authority that He does indeed enjoy to forgive sins. But as we think of how Jesus exercises this divine function, it is worthwhile to just pause for a moment and notice the language that He uses there in verse 5 where He is actually doing the forgiving. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. He doesn't say, I forgive you.

He doesn't forgive some specific sin that is brought to His attention, nor does He limit Himself to offering to this man the opportunity of enjoying forgiveness. But there is rather, in the words of Jesus, they are simple words, but there is an authoritative, absolute, and exhaustive declaration of forgiveness. Son, your sins are forgiven. There could be no more clear nor authoritative manner in which to express this idea. Son, your sins are forgiven. It's a done deal. They are forgiven.

[23 : 04] Now, the teachers of the law knew their theology. They certainly knew sufficient theology to recognize that this was an outrageous pretension on the part of Jesus. And they rightly point out that such authority belongs only to God. Or in any case, they make that protest in their minds and Jesus perceives it.

Forgiveness of sins is indeed a divine function. Only God can forgive sins. And to claim such authority and power was, they concluded, a blasphemy on the part of Jesus. Now, the argument that Jesus uses to demonstrate His power to forgive sins is actually quite a curious one, as He would appear to argue from a lesser power to a lesser power to a greater power. His argument basically to the teachers of the law is, well, I can heal this paralytic, and therefore I can forgive sins. That's maybe a rather simplistic way of putting the argument, but in essence that is what He is saying. And I say it's a curious argument because you might wonder that the premise doesn't in fact merit the conclusion. That the fact that one can heal a paralytic wouldn't in and of itself be sufficient argument or a sufficient basis for saying, therefore I can also forgive sins. How do we respond to, as I say, what appears to be a rather weak case being made by Jesus? And I suppose the point that we could make in response to that is that

Jesus here is not, I think, engaging in robust theological debate with the teachers of the law, but rather what He is doing is challenging them to think again. He is warning them against quickly dismissing the pretensions of one who can demonstrate that he can deliver what he offers.

He says at the very least, think carefully before you dismiss one who is able to tell a paralytic, get up and walk away and he can do that. One who is able to do that is one who at the very least you should consider more carefully his other pretensions before so quickly dismissing them.

It is also interesting as we consider this divine function of forgiving sins, it's also interesting that even in exercising this divine function, Jesus seems to do so in a way that leaves some questions unanswered as to his pretensions, as to his identity. The manner in which he expresses himself in the passage where he states that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. There in verse 10, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. I say that even that manner of expressing himself perhaps had as his intention this idea of not so explicitly revealing his character. And I say that because I imagine some could have gone away, some who were witnesses to that event and who were theologically thinking about the implications. Perhaps some could have gone away and said, well, was he actually claiming to be God? Or was he claiming that he had been granted some kind of authority from God to act in the manner that he did? That would have been, I think, a reasonable question a witness could have gone away with. But though those who went away as witnesses of that event, perhaps with that and many other questions buzzing in their heads, let there be no doubt that to forgive sins that to forgive sins is indeed a divine function requiring this divine authority.

[27 : 04] And Jesus clearly enjoyed that authority. But let's also be very clear, as we bring this matter of Jesus as one who can forgive sins into our own experience and our own needs, let us be very clear that this Jesus is still in the business of forgiving sins. This Jesus is still the one who can and will forgive your sins if you would but come and ask that he would do so. A divine function then that is ascribed to or portrayed here in Jesus. But also we have in this passage a divine attribute. We've already made reference to it and we focus in briefly on it now. We're told that when the teachers of the law heard Jesus expressing himself in this way, son, your sins are forgiven, we read there in verse 6, now some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves, and it's important to stress that, thinking to themselves, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And then in verse 8 we're told, immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts. And he said to them. So we're told very clearly and very carefully that Jesus was able to perceive, Jesus was able to know what they were thinking in their hearts.

And we have to stress that the language used here by Mark does not allow for any other conclusion than that these were thoughts. This was not the teachers of the law maybe chattering among themselves. You could maybe imagine the scene. Jesus says to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. And the teachers of the law, they're shocked, they think this is a scandalous thing to say, and so they start muttering among themselves. Who does he think he is? This is blasphemy. And maybe Jesus, well he overheard some of the things that they were saying and so he responds. But no, Mark is very careful in the language he uses to stress that these are thoughts that they were thinking. And very careful to stress that Jesus is able to know what they were thinking. And not only in general terms.

These are very specific questions that are posed in verse 7. These are questions that these men, several of them were thinking. No doubt among them, some were thinking the first question, others were thinking the second, and so on. There was a, they were all connected of course, but there was a variety of thoughts being thought by these teachers of the law. And what Mark is saying is that Jesus is able to perceive what all of them were thinking in their hearts.

He knew. He knew their hearts. He knew what each one of them was thinking and in precise detail. And this knowledge portrayed for us here in this passage, this knowledge is the knowledge of one who is omniscient of one who knows all things. It is the knowledge of God. It is God who knows the heart in this way. And it is only God who knows the heart in this way. This is a divine attribute ascribed to Jesus. Remember when Samuel had to choose a successor for King Saul, God gave him this task that he would choose this successor from among the sons of Jesse. And as he examined the possible candidates, God had to teach him something important. And in summary, the words that God directed to Samuel were these, Man, you, other men, look at the outward appearance. They can do no other, but the Lord looks at the heart.

And the Lord looks at the heart because the Lord alone can look at the heart. The Lord alone can know the heart of man. And this divine attribute is, we are clearly told and presented here, as shared by Jesus as he is the Lord. Now, this is, of course, theologically very important as we would make the case for Jesus as indeed very God, God the Son. But it also has, as we've noticed, I hope, if only in passing with the other points that have already been mentioned. It also has huge personal significance for all of us gathered here this evening. Because what we must conclude from what we're saying is that he sees your heart. He knows what you're thinking at this very moment.

[31 : 59] He knows your thoughts, whether they be unworthy or doubting or critical. Whatever your thoughts are, are gathered here this evening. And as you leave this place, and as you go about your business day by day, your thoughts are known to God. He knows your heart. You can hide them from your nearest and dearest. In a measure, you can maybe even hide them from yourself, but you can't hide them from God.

He knows your heart. What does he see? What does he see when he looks into your heart?

So, in this passage in Mark's Gospel, we find a divine name attributed to Jesus, a divine function exercised by Jesus, a divine attribute enjoyed by Jesus. What about the final plank of evidence that we've suggested establishes, beyond any reasonable doubt, Jesus as God, as divine? We mentioned that this fourth plank is the divine prerogative of receiving worship. Now, clearly, what we're saying is that these planks and the material in each of them is found across the New Testament. It would be unreasonable to expect in one passage to find all of them. And in actual fact, we don't find them all in this passage, though I do just want to hint at or think about the possibility of this fourth one also being present, this prerogative of receiving worship. And at the end of the passage there in verse 12, when the paralytic, his sins have been forgiven, he's been declared forgiven, he has been healed by Jesus, he has been told to get up and go home. And there we read as the whole course of events reaches its conclusion. We read there in verse 12, he got up, the paralytic got up, he took his mat and walked out in full view of them all.

And this amazed everyone. And they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. Now, it would be unreasonable to stretch what we have here and suggest that the crowd were directing their worship to Jesus. Rather, what seems an entirely reasonable conclusion, in fact, in Matthew's account of this incident, and we're not going to turn to it now, but if you wish, you can do so for yourself, Matthew makes it clear that this praising of God was praising God in heaven on account of what Jesus had done. Indeed, the language Matthew uses on account of this authority being given by God to act in this way. And yet, as we would turn to Luke's account of this same miracle, Luke does present the reaction of those who are witnesses to the miracle, and witnesses also to the manner in which Jesus declares this man's forgiven. He describes them in a way that corresponds to those who are in the presence of God. Luke speaks of them as being filled with awe.

And again, we're not going to turn to the passage if you wish to do so. Subsequently, by all means, do so. But take it on trust that that is the way in which Luke describes this gathering of witnesses.

[35 : 35] They are filled with awe. Language that, as I say, corresponds to those who are in the very presence of God, even if that is not something they themselves were conscious of. It's also interesting that Luke, unlike Mark, presents the paralytic himself as engaging in this worship. Mark says nothing of the man who has been healed. But Luke does describe him as going on his way praising God, worshiping God as a result in response to the miracle that he has been the object of. And we could ask the question, and we don't know the answer to the question, but we could ask the question, did this man worship Jesus? Or we could maybe ask a subsequent question, did this man become a worshiper of Jesus? But we don't know the answer to that question. But what we do know, as we would draw things to a close and conclude this evening, what we do know is that for those of us who have been presented, even this evening, with a portrayal of Jesus as God, as the bearer of a divine name, as the one who exercises divine functions, as one who has ascribed divine attributes, for us, there is only one reasonable response. And that response is not simply to analyze the evidence and conclude that he is indeed God. But having been so persuaded, and if we are so persuaded, the response must also involve bowing down and worshiping him. It cannot be that we would conclude, well, yes, that's a reasonable case that has been made. Yes, indeed, the evidence that presents

Jesus as very God of very God, as God the Son. Yes, I am persuaded by it. If that is so, and yet you do not bow down, and yet you do not worship him, then there is something terribly awry. The response cannot simply be one of mental assent to what is being said, it can only be and must be of bowing down and worshiping him. And God grant that that would indeed be our response, as we are confronted with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that we would bow down and worship him. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we pray then, that you would indeed help us to bow down and to worship you and your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to cry out with Thomas of old, my Lord and my God. Help us to worship you with the testimony of our lips, but also with the lives that we render in your service. We thank you, our Father, for Jesus. We thank you for your Son. We thank you for who he is. We thank you for what he has done. And we pray that you would help us to know him more and more. And as we know him more and more, so that we might worship him aright. And these things we pray in his name. Amen.

Let's close our service this evening by singing in Psalm 110 and verses 1 to 4.

On page 149 of our Psalm books, Psalm 110, verses 1 to 4. The Lord said to my Lord, sit here at my right hand, until I make your foes a stool on which your feet may stand. Psalm 110, a psalm that also portrays to us the preexistent, the Son of God. Psalm 110, verses 1 to 4. The tune of Carlisle, and we'll stand to sing.

The Lord said to my Lord, sit here at my right hand, until I make your foes a stool on which your feet may stand.

[40 : 05] The Lord will make your reign, extend from Zion's hill, withdraw your power, you rule among those who oppose your will.

When you display your power, your people flock to you. At dawn, our reign in holiness, your youth will come like June.

The Lord, we'll stand to you. The Lord, we'll stand to you. Unchangedly, dear Lord, with solemn purpose, Lord, just like Mell-Pisic, you are a priest forevermore.

Now may the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.