

AM Mark 2:1-12 Who has authority to forgive sins?

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[0 : 0 0] 12. You have no authority here, Jackie Weaver. No authority at all. Some of you may remember these words from a Zoom meeting of the Handforth Parish Council in Cheshire about a year ago that went viral on account of its entertainment value. This meeting, this parish council meeting, was very acrimonious with people shouting insults, laughing derisively, and some being thrown out of the virtual meeting because of their conduct. And the conflict centred around who had authority to call and conduct the meeting, with one member making the now famous charge against council official Jackie Weaver. You have no authority here, Jackie Weaver. No authority at all.

Now authority is the right to control, the right to determine, to command, to exercise leadership. It's the right to power. And this passage that we're looking at this morning is also about an argument over authority, an infinitely greater authority than holding a parish council meeting. It's about Jesus Christ's claimed authority to forgive sins and the challenge to that claim.

At the beginning of the passage, in chapter 2 of Mark, we read that Jesus is back in Capernaum after a preaching tour.

In Matthew chapter 4, we're told that Jesus actually went and lived in Capernaum for a while. And in verse 1, here we're told that word got around that Jesus was back at home.

So Capernaum was his home. And then we read that in verse 2, that so many people were gathered in the house where Jesus was, that there was no room, not even outside the door.

[2 : 1 9] And Jesus began preaching the word to them. Archaeological excavations of Capernaum show that the houses from that era were quite small.

The maximum size of a room would be about 5 metres, so about 16 feet across. It was limited by the length of tree trunks that could be used for beams.

So it wouldn't take that many people to fill a room. But here they were. They were filling the room and overflowing into the street outside.

I wonder how you regard your home. Maybe you regard it as a place of peace and quiet. A place to unwind after the busyness of work or whatever activity you're involved with.

A place to put your feet up. Well, it was not like that for the Lord Jesus. A crowd comes and fills the house. Overflowing outside the door, out into the street outside.

[3 : 2 5] But Jesus welcomes them. He shows hospitality. And seeing what they need, he begins preaching the word of God to them.

And while he is speaking, a group is making its way towards the house. With four of them carrying this stretcher with the paralysed man on it. And they want to take him to Jesus.

They arrive at the house, but they can't even get to the door. Never mind to where Jesus is inside. But these are determined folk. They're not about to give up.

And as we saw in the children's talk, Palestinian houses at that time had flat roofs. And with steps up the side. The construction of the house was usually wooden beams.

And the gaps filled in with brushwood and then daubed with mud. So with the right kind of tool, you could make a hole in it. And that's what they did. They make a hole until it's big enough to let down the stretcher with the man on it.

[4 : 36] And they must have found some rope, I guess. Or something to lower down the stretcher with the man on it. Until he arrives there in front of Jesus in the house.

I wonder what your reaction would be if this happened in your home. I think mine would be, you know, look at my house. What's happening to it?

It's being ruined. But Jesus' reaction is not about the house or the mess. He sees, in verse 5, he sees their faith.

He sees their trust. The trust of these people, this group. In his ability to heal their paralyzed friend. And we can learn from Jesus' response.

Sometimes in church, for example. New people arrive. Perhaps from very different backgrounds. From our own. Of course, at the moment, there are, in recent days, there have been, I don't know about Dumfries, but in different places around the country, there have been refugees from Hong Kong and Afghanistan.

[5 : 45] And there may well be refugees from Ukraine arriving in our neighborhoods. People from different cultures, different backgrounds. Or it may not be someone from a different country.

It might be just someone from our own country, but from just a really different background. And they come to our church. And it may be really difficult for us to relate to them, to find things in common with them.

Their ways may seem to us to be disruptive. And it would be easy for our response to be negative. Well, these folk were extremely disruptive.

I mean, they basically trashed the house. They were very disruptive guests. But Jesus sees beyond the disruption to their faith.

He sees their faith, their trust in him. And that challenges us, I think. Do we see beyond maybe difference and disruption, or what seems to us disruption, do we look for and do we see people's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

[6 : 50] Well, the Lord says to the paralyzed man, My son, your sins are forgiven. And as we saw, that may seem strange to us. Surely this man, he was paralyzed.

That was his biggest need, wasn't it? To be healed. To be made whole. To be made well. But Jesus talks about his sins. Now, some commentators make a connection, a direct connection, between some particular sin that this man had committed and his paralysis.

And that's possible. He could have got drunk one day and fallen off a building. But we don't know that, and the passage doesn't say that. And we need to be careful with that, because in other places in the Bible, for example, in John chapter 9, where Jesus and the disciples encounter a blind man, Jesus specifically says that it wasn't because of any sin that he or his parents committed that he is blind.

And of course, the book of Job in the Old Testament is in large part about that connection. There isn't necessarily a connection between suffering and particular sin in that person's life.

But whether there is a direct connection or not between this man's paralysis and some sin, there is some kind of connection, at least an indirect connection.

[8 : 18] You see, God's original creation was good. In fact, God himself pronounced it very good. It was a place of peace, of harmony, and of wholeness.

And today, in our world, there is still, of course, there is still much that is good, that is beautiful, and that is wonderful in this world. And we see it on this lovely morning. And yet, there is also disease.

There's deformity. There are horrific accidents. And as we know, there are pandemics. There are wars. There are natural disasters.

And ultimately, of course, there is death. And that comes to us all. We all die. This man may have been born paralyzed.

Or he may have had a serious accident or illness. But either way, it's a symptom of a world that has gone wrong. A world that is broken.

[9 : 24] And the reason for that is human sin, human rebellion against the rule of the creator God. And it goes back to our first parents, the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

God made them in his image and in his likeness. And gave them a rule over the rest of creation. That was part of what it means to be in the image of God.

That just as God is the supreme ruler, he delegates rule to us as human beings over the rest of creation. And that's a high honor.

It's a high privilege. But they, Adam and Eve, freely chose to reject God's authority over them. They revolted.

They rebelled. They sinned. And they had been warned of the consequence of that. The consequence was death. And so it happened that when they rebelled, they became subject to decay and to death.

[10 : 29] And every relationship they had, the relationship they had with each other, later on with their children, their relationship with their environment, their relationship ultimately with God himself, all those relationships became broken, damaged.

It was as if Adam and Eve were captains of a huge oil tanker. And when they steered it onto the rocks, it wasn't just Adam and Eve that went down. The whole tanker went down with them.

But of course, it's not just something way back then. Every one of us sins.

Every one of us adds to the enormous heap of human sin and evil. Sometimes we do it by deliberate choice.

Sometimes we're just on autopilot. It just comes so naturally to us. To put my desires, my wants, my interests, interests before everyone else's and before God's.

[11 : 36] And so there is a connection between sin and a world where people are paralysed. And Jesus goes to the root of this man's problem.

He says to him, Your sins are forgiven. His sins which alienate him from God are forgiven. I think we all have some understanding of forgiveness on a human level.

Perhaps you have forgiven someone who's done something against you. And you know that that can be hard. It can be costly. Perhaps someone has forgiven you for something you've done or said.

And you feel relief that your apology was accepted and the relationship has been put right. Perhaps you want to be forgiven by someone who is withholding it.

But sins, what Jesus describes here as sins. Sins are offenses against God, our maker. And for this man, there is, I'm sure, relief that his sins that put him in a wrong relationship with God, that put him under God's judgment and anger, anger and displeasure.

[12 : 55] Those sins are wiped out. They are forgiven. Many of us easily become numb to our sins.

We know we do things that are wrong, but we kind of almost excuse it by saying, Well, no one's perfect. But then occasionally we get a jolt when maybe our selfishness or our cowardice or our conceit or self-centeredness or our envy or malice or whatever it is, is revealed.

And it just, you know, we see it for what it is. And we feel disgusted with ourselves. And at those moments we get a small insight into what our sins are to God.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ announces good news to us, that all our sins can be forgiven. All our sins can be wiped out. And how is that?

Well, it's through faith in Jesus Christ. In verse 5 we read that Jesus saw their faith. And I think that includes the paralyzed man's faith.

[14 : 06] Jesus saw his faith too. And for us today, our sins can be forgiven. Through faith in Jesus Christ. He offers to each of us, he invites us, Come to me, trust in me, and be forgiven.

Well, in verse 6 we read that some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like that?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins? But God alone. So these scribes were teachers of Torah, the Jewish scriptures.

This was the Old Testament, what we call the Old Testament. These were the theologians. In Luke chapter 5, the same parallel account, Luke tells us that Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from all the villages of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

So these folk, some of them had come from far and wide, even from the capital from Jerusalem. That's 60 or 70 miles away. And these folk are inwardly objecting to Jesus' declaration of this man's forgiveness.

[15 : 31] They're horrified. This amounts to blasphemy, they think. Because only God can forgive sins. And in fact, their words, Who can forgive sins but God alone?

That could be translated, Who can forgive sins but the one God? Emphasizing the most basic Jewish statement of faith. Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one.

There is only one God. And he is the only one who has the right to forgive sins. Now, of course, they knew, as we know, that we can forgive somebody who offends against us personally.

Someone steals your wallet and then comes and hands it back. You can forgive them because it's against you personally. That's not what Jesus is doing here.

He's just declaring in totality that this man's sins, all his sins are forgiven. And we have to be clear here, Jesus is not speaking as a prophet, as a spokesperson for God.

[16 : 39] In the Old Testament, there's an account of when King David sinned, and the prophet Nathan went to him, and after some conversation, Nathan said to David that the Lord has taken away your sin.

So Nathan is God's spokesperson, saying that the Lord has taken away your sin. That's not what Jesus is doing here. And that's certainly not how the scribes understand what Jesus is saying.

They don't think he's just stating a fact, that his sins are forgiven. And they understand Jesus to be actually doing the forgiving of this man's sins. And that is something only God has the right to do.

And Jesus doesn't correct that. He doesn't say, no, you've got it wrong, you've misunderstood. He doesn't correct it at all. He goes along with that, because that's what he is in fact doing.

He is himself forgiving this man's sins. So how can Jesus do that? Who does he think he is? In the eyes of the scribes, this amounts to blasphemy, claiming to do something that only God has the right to do.

[17 : 54] And that was very serious. In the Torah, in the Jewish scriptures, the punishment for that was death. Well, in verse 8, we read that right away, Jesus knew what they were thinking.

That may be supernatural knowledge, or maybe just he knew the kind of people they were, and that that would be the kind of thing they would think. So he says to them in verse 8, Why do you question these things in your hearts?

Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed, and walk. Now it's easier to say, your sins are forgiven.

I'm not talking about what's easy to do, but what's easy to say. It's easier to say, your sins are forgiven, because no one there can see whether that happens or not. It's not an outward, visible thing.

That can be observed by witnesses. It's not something that is falsifiable. But to say to a paralysed man, get up, pick up your stretcher, and walk, everyone there can see right away whether that happens or not.

[19 : 13] And if after saying that, the man is still lying there in the same paralysed condition, then anyone saying, get up, pick up your stretcher, and walk, would just look ridiculous.

They would be a laughing stock. It's something that's immediately verifiable. Well, Jesus says the harder thing. He says to the paralysed man, I say to you, pick up your bed, and walk.

So Jesus says, the harder thing. And so demonstrates that he has authority, on earth to forgive sins. Now, other prophets from Israel's past, particularly people like Moses, and Elijah, and Elisha, also performed great miracles.

But they never tied their miracles to a self-directed claim like this one. They never claimed that they had authority to forgive sins.

But notice Jesus doesn't say, I, he says, the son of man. He says to them, so that you may know that the son of man has authority, on earth, to forgive sins.

[20 : 25] Now, anyone reading through, any of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, will soon notice that Jesus frequently spoke about, the son of man. And it doesn't take long to work out that Jesus is referring to himself when he uses that phrase.

In fact, it's not used by other people in the New Testament of Jesus. It's used just, mainly just by Jesus himself, speaking of himself. Now, this is the first time in Mark that Jesus uses this phrase.

And the parallel passage in Luke, it's also the first time in Luke, of Jesus using this phrase, the son of man. But what does it mean?

What does Jesus mean by it? Well, in some contexts, in the Old Testament, son of man simply means, human being, person.

In, we sang earlier from Psalm 8, and there it speaks about, the son of man. And it's used there of, Psalm 8 is really a reflection, on God's creation, of, of Adam, of human beings, in the, and their place in the created order.

[21 : 42] So, Psalm 8, it says, what is mankind, that you call him to mind? The son of man, that you pay him attention. You made him a little lower than God. You crowned him with glory and honour.

You appointed him ruler, over what your hands had made. You put everything, under his feet. So, when Jesus uses son of man, it perhaps includes the idea of him, of him being human, but also of being a new Adam.

Also, we sang from Psalm 80, verse 17, which is a prayer, that, to God, let your right, let your hand rest, on the man at your right hand, the son of man, you have raised up for yourself.

And it's, that's speaking about the king, in the line of David. And so, it has reference to, the Messiah, because, the promise in the Old Testament, that sort of develops, throughout the Old Testament, is that there will be, an ultimate king, and deliverer, a Messiah, from David's line, who will come, to, rule over, and rescue his people.

So, son of man, maybe has that, sort of, connotation of Messiah. But perhaps, the most important passage, is, the book of Daniel, chapter 7. And there the prophet Daniel, has a vision from God.

[23 : 09] And in that vision, Daniel sees, four, ferocious beasts, which represent, four, kingdoms, or empires, in succession of each other.

And then he sees, into heaven, and the throne of God, who in the vision, is given a title, the Ancient of Days. In Daniel 7, verses 13 and 14, Daniel says, in the visions of the night, I saw, one like, a son of man.

That's that, this title. One like, a son of man, coming with the clouds, of heaven. He came, to the Ancient of Days, and was presented, before him.

He was given, authority, honour, and kingship. All peoples, nations, and languages, will serve him. His authority, is an everlasting authority, that will not pass away, and his kingdom, will never end.

So there, in that passage, it speaks of, one like a son of man, who is given, authority. And this, you know, whole debate, is about, authority. So, when Jesus speaks, of the son of man, having authority, on earth, he's referring, to Daniel's vision.

[24 : 23] And these scribes, these teachers of Torah, well versed as they were, in the Hebrew scriptures, they would make, that connection. And I think, what Jesus is doing here, is he's doing something, quite skillful, and wise.

In fact, he's doing two things. First of all, these scribes, they're thinking, that he's committing, blasphemy, for claiming, to forgive sins. And Jesus responds, with a kind of sidestep.

It's as if, it's like a game of football, and, the scribes are coming, in with a heavy tackle, and Jesus just sidesteps, with the ball, dribbling the ball, keeping possession of it.

He doesn't say, so that you may know, that I have, authority on earth, to forgive sins. He says, so that you may know, that the son of man, has authority, on earth, to forgive sins.

So he's, he's appealing to the Bible, he's appealing to the Old Testament, to Daniel chapter 7. And, it's as if Jesus is saying, doesn't, the one like a son of man, in Daniel's vision, have, universal, authority, given to him, by God, by the ancient of days.

[25 : 32] That gives them something, to think about, something to chew on. But the second thing, Jesus is, doing his ■■■■■■, what and not the time of man has done. He may know, the note, and that that means, is to secondary, the one like a passage, to 35 to 33, to an hour the without him now.

And, to think about he was a Choice, and that was a R ■■■■, the dav analytic of taking note, and he's long beast, that he was about to lift the mic. And then, as I said, he continues saying, to look at his taylor, so that he's giving Mrs.

the one like a son of man's friends, what you can see in the way to wait on, that I love to turn through the Bhagawan, way to Reverend Paul Sveind to the other side. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[27 : 36] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[30 : 06] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.