

HEALING INSIGHTS FROM *THE GOSPEL OF MARK*

LESSON 3 – CHAPTERS 2 AND 3

Healing the Paralytic - Mark 2:1-12

A. Social Influence and Health

- 1) Jesus is back in Capernaum, the city where He had some of His strongest social relations. Although Jesus had no formal home to call His own (see Matthew 8:19-20), He did apparently stay for a time in Capernaum (see Matthew 4:12-13). In the parallel account to Mark 2, Matthew 9:1 calls Capernaum Jesus' "own city."
- 2) Here we find Jesus engaged in the threefold ministry introduced in chapter 1. He is not merely teaching and preaching (Mark 2:2), but also healing (subsequent verses).
- 3) Four friends brought the paralytic - without them he would not have been able to come to Jesus:
 - a. When did healing actually begin for the paralytic?
 - i. Note: many feel that acts of kindness have a healing effect. Was the paralytic being healed (at least on a certain level) when he saw that his friends cared enough for him to go through all the effort of bringing him into the presence of Jesus?
 - ii. Note also the contrast between Jesus and the religious leaders: Jesus was always doing acts of kindness, the Pharisees were not.
 - b. Indeed, the dedication of the four friends is impressive. To what lengths are we willing to go to help encourage others in health and faith? Do I realize that I too have the opportunity to come close to Jesus by serving others?
 - c. In what ways could I help others come closer to Jesus? In light of this story, what are some of the needs/obstacles people encounter in coming to Jesus today?
Examples:
 - i. Financial issues
 - ii. Timidity
 - iii. Inability to make wise decisions
 - d. How can I, like one of those four friends, help others overcome these obstacles? Could this relate to the various dimensions of social health?
 - i. Financial issues (tangible support)
 - ii. Timidity (emotional support)
 - iii. Ability to make wise decision (informational support—spiritual counsel)
 - e. What more often brings you into Jesus' presence? Is it your own felt needs, like the paralytic? Or is when you go out of your way to bring someone else to the Savior like the four friends did?

B. Forgiveness and Health

- 1) Jesus seems to connect forgiveness of sin and physical healing in this passage. Based on the passage, what might be the connection? In other words, why did Christ say "Son, your sins are forgiven"?

- 2) This man could have felt separated from God, thinking his sickness was the result of his own sin (Note: in antiquity, a significant cause of paralysis was untreated syphilis which ultimately traveled to the nervous system; so called “neurosyphilis”)
 - a. Indeed, many cases sickness occur because of sin (breaking the laws of health). However, we can also suffer from others’ sins (e.g., injuries inflicted when hit by a drunk driver). Clearly, sickness is sometimes the result of sinful actions, other times it is merely the consequence of living in a sinful world.
 - b. The law of God is a shield protecting us from evil/sickness. Thus the law also shows us God’s love, seeking to protect us from disease. Ironically, that which many view as restrictive is actually evidence of God trying to keep us free.
 - c. The Bible makes these connections clear. Consider, for example, Psalm 31:9-10, where David connected his own physical maladies to his sin:

“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
My eye is wasted away from grief, my soul and my body also.
For my life is spent with sorrow
And my years with sighing;
My strength has failed because of my iniquity,
And my body has wasted away.” (New American Standard Bible, NASB)

- 3) Furthermore, in the context of healing, the gospels provide a remarkable insight into the character of Jesus.
 - a. Jesus knew the true burden of the man’s heart: relief from the curse and pain of guilt from his sins was a greater need than healing his physical maladies.
 - b. The very fact the paralytic raised no objection when Jesus pardoned his sin, indicates forgiveness was indeed his greatest perceived need (i.e., between verses 5 and 6 the paralytic never said, “Jesus, you misunderstood, I came here to be healed of my palsy.”)
 - c. In the same way, we can be assured Jesus knows the deepest needs of our hearts—and He will meet us at that point of need.
 - d. What did it cost Jesus to be able to say that “your sins are forgiven?” The Bible indicates it was the suffering and death of Jesus: “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5, NASB)

- 4) Sometimes, like here in Mark 2, Jesus gives the assurance of forgiveness before physically healing. Other times, as in Luke 17:11-19, He heals physically first, later giving the assurance of forgiveness/salvation (“thy faith hath *made thee whole*” is a translation of the Greek root *sozo* which has the connotation of not only physical healing, but spiritual salvation). The implications are profound:

- a. Sometimes we need physical healing before we can appreciate or understand what is being taught or preached (or written in the Bible)
- b. Other times we need the assurance of God’s forgiveness and acceptance before we have any motivation to care for our physical health—or even be healed.
- c. In Mark 2:9, Jesus asked a question, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?”
- d. How would you answer? Which really was easier to say?
- e. The implication of the passage is that from an observational level it was harder to say “Take up your bed and walk” and then actually have corresponding results follow.
- f. However, saying your “sins are forgiven” and really having them forgiven is much harder. Indeed, on this account Jesus’ critics were right: the only one who can forgive sins is God alone. And as, Isaiah 53 pointed out, it is only by the suffering and death of the son of God that we can have spiritual healing as well as physical healing.

C. Jesus’ Personal Influence and Health

- 1) What happened when Jesus said “rise, pick up your bed, and go home”? The paralytic was immediately (*euthus*) healed.
 - a. This demonstrated that Jesus has the power to instantaneously heal both physically and spiritually
 - b. “This same Jesus” has the power today to heal us. The book of Hebrews reminds us: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:16, ESV)
- 2) Additional insights into the Greek word, *euthus*
 - a. We have already noted that this is a key, recurring word in the Gospel of Mark. One sense in which John Mark uses this term is to demonstrate that when Jesus speaks, things happen.
 - b. In this way *euthus* links with the creation account where God spoke “and it was” (e.g., Genesis 1:6, 9). Just as things happened during creation when God spoke, so in the Gospel of Mark things happen in re-creation when Jesus speaks.

The Call of the Publican Levi (also known as Matthew) and Its Aftermath - Mark 2:13-17

- A. What does Jesus’ mingling with “the lowest of the low” (tax collectors in the eyes of first century Jews) teach us? Was he “guilty by association?”
 - 1) Social Health implications. In response to the scribes and Pharisees’ accusation, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners,” Jesus’ answer revealed it was His mission to reach those who recognized their need: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (ESV)

- 2) This was in contrast to the church leaders of His day who, rather than ministering to these classes, looked down upon them.
- B. The Savior’s answer also suggests that His eating with “publicans and sinners” had a healing function. In essence, as He sat at the table, He was healing those in His presence.
- 1) How was this healing taking place?
 - 2) Could it be that Jesus was healing the social and emotional scars of those who had been ostracized from society—in addition to offering them spiritual healing?
- C. In the spiritual realm, who really is in need of a physician?
- 1) In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that the Jewish leaders did not recognize their diagnosis of sinners and therefore did not realize their need of the Divine Physician, Jesus. Years later, another who had been a Pharisee, the Apostle Paul, made it clear that every human is a sinner in need of a Savior: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23, KJV)
 - a. So in Jesus’s day all, both Pharisee and “sinner” alike, needed Him, but only the “sinners” felt their need. Is it any different today?
 - b. In general how responsive are people to being diagnosed as “sinners”—let alone coming to Jesus for the treatment and follow up?
 - 2) What about the atheist or agnostic who seems to be happy living a life contrary to God’s law? Is ignorance bliss?
 - a. Not when it comes to “silent killers” in the physical realm. Whether or not you realize you have heart disease, it can still kill you in an instant. Being unaware that cancer has a foothold in your body makes it no less lethal. Sin is like unrecognized or unacknowledged disease—a silent killer.
 - b. Jesus dialogue implies there is also danger from the unknown with regard to our spiritual condition. Clearly, in the spiritual realm, what we don’t know can indeed hurt us.
 - 3) Remember the message of this passage, although Bible religion points out our sinfulness, it also provides the true remedy, for there is healing in the presence of Jesus, the Divine Physician. The psalmist wrote:
 “In Your presence is fullness of joy;
 In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” Ps 16:11, NASB

Jewish Ceremonies—Contrasting the New and the Old – Mark 2:18-22

- A. This section begins with a question on fasting: “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”
- B. The crowd wanted to know why Jesus’ disciples were not following the Jewish customs. Jesus answers with two illustrations:
 - 1) First, he uses a wedding analogy to direct their minds to the fact that He was the promised Deliverer. In essence, by describing Himself as the Bridegroom, He was revealing Himself as the one to whom the entire Jewish economy looked forward. In Isaiah 62:5 we see this imagery of God as Bridegroom: “For *as* a young man marrieth

a virgin, *so* shall thy sons marry thee: and *as* the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, *so* shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

- 2) Look at it this way: a wedding is a joyful celebration, but the preparations leading up to it can be a grueling process. In essence, John and his disciples were the ones preparing for the wedding. They had a difficult work to do which included the spiritual preparation of calling people to repentance. Fasting was clearly appropriate in this context. On the other hand, Jesus comes as the King and Bridegroom to the wedding feast. [Elsewhere in the gospels Jesus used this marriage imagery to indicate the arrival of His kingdom (see Matthew 22:1-14).] Consequently, it is inappropriate to expect the groom or His guests to fast at a wedding feast.
- 3) Next, in Mark 2:21, 22 Jesus talks about new cloth on old clothes. Just as one cannot expect to put an unshrunk patch on pre-shrunk clothes, so Jesus reveals His kingdom is not merely an addition to one’s old ways, but an altogether new system or order. Everyone who comes to His kingdom needs a new life. In order to accept this, we all need to lay aside our preconceived ideas. Specifically in this context, those who criticized Jesus for His failure to fast, need to abandon their old human-instituted rules and customs.
- 4) If we want to live the new life in Jesus we will not pick and choose from His teachings, but will be willing to accept all He has to offer—we will receive the “new garment” He offers us, rather than trying to keep our old clothes and add “patches” of God’s newly appreciated truth.

C. Was Jesus then, setting aside the practice of fasting? Quite to the contrary.

- 1) Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was demonstrating the true spirit of fasting which is selfless ministry to others (see Isaiah 58).
- 2) In contrast, the self-imposed fasts of the Jews were often designed to impress others. In Matthew 6:16 Jesus referred to this practice: “Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast.” (KJV)

Controversies Regarding the Sabbath - Mark 2:23-3:6

A. When Jesus performed His first public Sabbath healing (Mark 1:21-28), He seemed to face no opposition. But by the time we get to chapter 2, His enemies are already assailing Him for His Sabbath activities.

B. In this section of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is first confronted for allowing His disciples to “harvest” and “thresh” on the Sabbath.

- 1) He begins by highlighting their hypocrisy. The Jews were happy to speak of their noble lineage from Abraham and David. They would never think of criticizing David for doing something that was not “lawful” on the Sabbath. How much more then should they have been lenient with Jesus and His disciples who were doing what was permissible according to the Bible (see Deuteronomy 23:24-25).
- 2) Some have gone so far as to say that Jesus’ words here were indicating: “If excessive hunger excused David for violating even the holiness of the sanctuary, and made his

act guiltless, how much more excusable was the simple act of the disciples in plucking the grain and eating it upon the Sabbath day. Jesus would teach his disciples and his enemies that the service of God was first of all; and, if fatigue and hunger attended the work, it was right to satisfy the wants of humanity, even upon the Sabbath day. That holy institution was not given to interfere with the needs of our being, bringing pain, and discomfort, instead of blessings. ‘The Sabbath was made for man,’ to give him rest and peace, and remind him of the work of his Creator, not to be a grievous burden.” *The Spirit of Prophecy, Volume 2*, p. 196

This same source continues to illustrate the healing work of Jesus, in breaking down barriers of superstition and spiritual bondage—and revealing His utmost compassion:

Jesus “declared that in their blindness they had mistaken the object of the Sabbath. Said he: ‘But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.’ He then contrasted their many heartless rites with the truthful integrity, and tender love that should characterize the true worshipers of God: ‘For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings. But they like men have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me.’

“Jesus was reared among this people, so marked with bigotry and prejudice; and he therefore knew that in healing upon the Sabbath day, he would be regarded as a transgressor of the law. He was aware that the Pharisees would seize upon such acts with great indignation, and thereby seek to influence the people against him. He knew that they would use these works of mercy as strong arguments to affect the minds of the masses, who had all their lives been bound by the Jewish restrictions and exactions. Nevertheless he was not prevented by this knowledge from breaking down the senseless wall of superstition that barricaded the Sabbath, and teaching men that charity and benevolence were lawful upon all days.”

- 3) Note Jesus’ affirmation of the creation account in Genesis 1, “the Sabbath was made [created]” (see Genesis 2:1-3). What aspects of health would the biblical account of creation bring to the mind of a Jew?
 - a. The Sabbath was a “blessed” or happy and holy day.
 - b. The seventh-day Sabbath was among the very first things God put His blessing upon (see Genesis 2:1-3; compare Genesis 1:22, 28). According to the Genesis account, this blessing was pronounced before mankind sinned.
 - c. In the Bible’s description creation, God designed mankind to live forever, death would only occur if humans broke their faith relationship with God (see Gen 2:16-17).
 - d. Thus everything in the Garden of Eden was designed to minister to eternal life and optimal health. This included:
 - A total vegetarian diet (Gen 1:29)
 - Useful outdoor physical labor (Gen 2:15)
 - Weekly rest and fellowship with their Creator (Gen 2:2-3)
 - Loving dependence on their Creator (Gen 2:16-17)

- 4) Discussion point - why might the Sabbath have been made for man, even at a time when people needed less rest than people need today?
 - a. In the context of **social health**...
 - Sacred time once a week helps humans regularly prioritize their relationship with their Creator. The fact that God was the One who made the appointment shows His commitment to meeting with His children.
 - Jesus Himself valued time to fellowship with His Father. Earlier in Mark we saw Jesus getting up earlier to spend time with God (Mark 1:35). If it was important with Jesus shouldn't it be important for us?
 - b. In the context of **mental health**...
 - A specific weekly day of rest provides a respite for our daily stresses. If all kept this day how much would we lighten our chronic stress load?
 - Singling out a specific day ensures we make time for this rejuvenating rest. If it is just the principle of "one day in seven" it becomes easier to modify our schedules and sometimes actually miss that full 24-hour period in its entirety.
 - c. In the context of **physical health**...
 - Our bodies need physical rest, not only on a daily basis but also weekly. (Our bodies have circaseptan rhythms as well as circadian rhythms.)
 - To have optimal physical health, we must cultivate balance in our lives. The Sabbath reminds us each week that there is a time for work and also a time for rest.

C. As Mark 3 opens up, Jesus is next confronted for healing on the Sabbath. The context is illuminating. The Bible reveals that Jesus is the active agent in the original Genesis creation (John 1:1-4, 14; Colossians 1:12-17; Hebrews 1:2). Thus it is Jesus, the Creator, who re-creates on the Sabbath when He heals the man's withered hand.

- 1) Why does Jesus deliberately heal on the Sabbath even when He knows it will get Him into trouble?
 - a. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." Jesus' heart of compassion would not turn away from even one case of need.
 - b. We can come to Jesus any day of the week and look to Him for healing.
- 2) As we see again in this story, Jesus did a lot of His healing on the Sabbath. Might this have been calculated to turn the minds of people then—and now—to the idea that the Sabbath is a day of restoration and re-creation?
 - a. In Jesus' day many thought of the Sabbath as a day of restriction.
 - b. However, Jesus' acts of healing brought to mind the Genesis origins of the Sabbath as a blessed gift from God.
- 3) Do you think Jesus performed the healing publicly—and drew the religious leaders into the dialogue—to highlight the social dimension of the Sabbath?
 - a. Jesus' act of healing demonstrated the Sabbath to be foremost a time to do good and help others—rather than a day defined by a list of dos and don'ts.
 - b. Do you see evidence in the Genesis creation account that would suggest God's original intent was for the Sabbath to be a time of fellowship/relationship?
- 4) Jesus Sabbath healings reveal a Savior who meets us where we are at—at our point of need whether it is hunger or physical infirmity.

- a. He meets us regardless of those who seek to keep us away from Jesus' healing power because of their narrow views of religion.
 - b. Rather than imposing burdens and restrictions like the Jewish leaders did, Jesus longs to give healing freedom and joy to those who have forgotten the true meaning of the Sabbath.
 - c. Indeed, although He always operated in harmony with His Father's laws, He ministered to humanity's needs for whole person health without regard to social taboos.
- D. Some use examples like the stories found in Mark 2 and 3 to say that Jesus was setting aside the seventh-day Sabbath as God's special day of worship. Is this the case?
- 1) No, quite to the contrary, in these two Sabbath accounts, Jesus is vindicating God's law.
 - 2) He is revealing that, rightly understood, the law is something that grows out of God's character of love rather than being a set of arbitrary rules.
 - a. The Seventh-day Sabbath is one of God's Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:8-11).
 - b. In a clear reference to God's commandments, Jesus made it very clear: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:17-20, ESV) Compare John 15:10.
- E. Do you think the Holy Spirit impressed Mark to have preceded these Sabbath controversies with the story of four men carrying the paralytic? Could this have set the stage for a focus on the law? Consider the following:
- 1) In Old Testament times the ten commandment Law of God was kept in the ark of the covenant (1 Kings 8:9)
 - 2) That ark was carried by four priests of the tribe of Levi (see, for example, Exodus 37:5 and Deuteronomy 10:8)
 - 3) Would the average Jew connect four ministering men carrying something with the priests carrying the ark of God?
 - 4) If so, had the law of God become like the paralytic man—was it so encumbered with rules and restrictions that only God Himself could restore it to its true "made for man" function?

More on Mental and Social Health - Mark 3:20-35

- A. Discuss the family challenges Jesus faced.
- B. According to this passage, what connection exists between spiritual and mental health?