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Jesus Heals A Paralytic

Notice the presences of the Jewish leaders, scribes and Pharisees and along with them comes controversy and dispute. This type of exchange between them and Jesus will follow us from 2.1-3.6 and will follow Jesus until the end of the gospel of Mark.

The tension of the text is found in 2.6-10a. The scribes object to something that Jesus has said and He answers their objections.

Notice the structure of the text

Introduction (2.1-2)

Spiritual Healing (2.3-5)

Controversy (2.6-10a)

Physical healing (2.10b-12a)

Conclusion (2.12b)

The Scene

- His presence draws a crowd eager to hear Him and one in need of healing.
- The man's helpless condition mimics the helpless condition of humanity in Mark's idea of cosmic struggle.
- As with most healing narratives, there is an obstacle to the healing. In this case, it is the crowd that is drawn by the power of Jesus' teaching. Notice how what is a blessing for some (the teachings of Jesus) represents an obstacle for others (the man in need of healing.)
- The obstacles provides the one in need to demonstrate some extraordinary initiative or faith. (5.34, 10.52; Matt 15.28).
- Jesus presents himself as one who can forgive sins. This creates a predictable reaction from the scribes. They interpret Jesus claim to forgive sins as equating Him with God who, according to several OT text, is the one who has the power to forgive sins (Ex. 34.6-7; Isaiah 43.25; 44.22).
- The scribes underline their objection by appealing to the Shema (Deut. 6.4). Jesus does not back away from His claim inspite of their objection. The fact that He can discern their hearts only further supports His claim as the Son of God, especially since God is the one describe in OT text as the one who can discern the heart (1 Sam 17.28; Ps 139.23; Prov 24.12).
- Jesus goes on to imply that the healing itself will demonstrate His power and credentials. He then goes forth to heal the paralytic.....

Next Sections

- Jesus Eats with Tax Collectors and Sinners (2.13-17)
- The New and the Old (2.18-22)
- The Lord of the Sabbath (2.23-28)

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (3.1-6)

The series of 5 controversy stories that began in 2.1 is rounded off with a second argument taking place on and concerning the Sabbath (2.23-28). This time, unlike the early controversy, it is not the action of Jesus' disciples, but Jesus himself that is called into question.

Jesus Heals on the Sabbath (3.1-6)

- Elements of Mark 3.1-6 as contrasted with Mark 2.1-12
- Hostile opponents stands in tension with welcoming crowds
- No celebration of miracle. Instead passage ends with murder plot.
- In both passages, healed men overshadowed by other characters in text.

Narrative Features

Emotions Displayed by Jesus

- Provocative Behavior (3.3)
- Anger/Sorrow (3.5)

Compare to Emotions Displayed by Pharisees

- Desire to condemn Jesus (3.2)
- Hostile Silence (3.4)
- Hardness of Heart (3.5)
- Instigation of Murder Plot (3.6)

What effect does the movement of the characters within the narrative have on your understanding of the text's meaning?

Pharisees' Charge

2 They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

- Claimed grounded in Ex. 20.10

Ex. 20.10 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

Unlike the previous accusation

- Jesus moves the man to the center
- Jesus actions create the opportunity for controversy. Jesus' actions seem premeditated.
- Consistent with Mark's portrayal of Jesus as warrior
- Jesus also heads off objections with his question.

3.4 Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?"

Hardened Hearts

- Jesus angered by the Pharisees hardened heart.
- Pharaoh always positioned as an enemy of God.
- Mark links the Pharisees to this image implying they too are serving as enemies of God

Hardening of Pharaoh's heart

Described in two ways

- His Choice (Ex. 8.11, 28; 9.34; Ps. 95.8; Ep 4.18)
- God's Will (Ex. 7.3; 9.12; 11.10; 14.4, 8, 17)
- Seen as both the product of his sin and his affliction
- Produces both anger and grief from God
- Similar to the emotions expressed by Jesus in the passage

Interesting Solution

What is the heart of the Pharisees objection?

- One cannot work on Sabbath.

Pharisees' Response

- They go out.
- How can this be read in light on John 13.30?
- In what ways is this a decision to exclude one's self from the divine presence of God?
- What is the relationship between their plot and their objection to Jesus' healing of the man?
- Mark 1.24

The Struggle Intensifies (3.7-35)

- The Spreading Impact of Jesus (3.7-12)

- The Commissioning of the Twelve (3.13-19)
- Which Side is Jesus on? (3.20-35)

The Parabolic Discourse about the Dominion of God (4.1-34)

- The Parable of the Sower (4.1-9)
- Why Jesus Speaks in Parables (4.10-12)
- The Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower (4.13-20)
- The Parables of the Lamp and the Measure (4.21-25)
- Two More Seed Parables (4.26-34)

Placement on the Narrative

- We have seen increasing sharp division between Jesus and his opponents. By the end of Mark 3, they are accusing him of doing miracles through demonic power and He is accusing them of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.
- The first half of the parable traces the division between insiders and outsiders (good and bad soil).
- Immediately following the parable, Jesus will make his foray into Gentile territory.
- Second half of the chapter will speak to the expansion of the good news using dramatic images of light and darkness.

The Parable and the Question of Time

- In the Old Testament, fruitfulness is a standard image for the blessings of the “good time coming”, the hoped for new age. (See Jer. 31.12; Hos. 2.21-22; Joel 2.22; Amos 9.13; Zech 8.12)
- Lack of fruitfulness, on the contrary, is characteristic of “the present evil age” in which the earth languishes under God’s judgement (Gen. 3.17-18; Jer 8.13; Joel 1.12)
- The contrast between the failed seed of Mark 4.4-7 and the successful seed of 4.8 would probably remind some of the Markan readers of the apocalyptic contrast between the sterility of this present age and the fruitfulness of the age to come.
- To speak of the arrival of the dominion of God as a mystery implies that there is something elusive about it. It suggest that God’s time is arriving despite all of the evidence to the contrary.

What to make of the conclusion of the parable?

Mark 4.9 And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

Who is the Sower?

It is puzzling that the explanation goes on to interpret every other major element of the parable - the kinds of soil, the factors inhibiting the seed's growth, and the results of the sowing - with the conspicuous absence of the sower himself. Who is the sower?

- God himself.
- Jesus (2.2; 4.33; 8.32; 9.10; 10.22, 24; 11.29; 13.31; 14.39)
- Preachers proclaiming the good news (8.35; 10.29; 13.10; 14.9)

The Soil

- Note, the pattern of the parable:
 - Location
 - Result
- The soil is the way the soil is going to be. Note the passive nature of the soil. Either they are good soil or they are not.
- There is human action in the second and fourth soils (4.16-7, 18) particular emphasize the importance of human action of receiving the word and holding fast to it.
- But also note the first and the third soils (4.15; 18-19). The devil is specifically mentioned 4.15. There is not room for human action.. Satan immediately attacks the soil, removing the seed before it has a chance to germinate.
- The boundary between divine will and human will seems intentional blurred.
- Note that the parable speaks of good and bad soil and not good and bad seed.

Next Sections

- The Parables of the Lamp and the Measure (4.21-25)
- Two More Seed Parables (4.26-34)

Mark 4.21-25

- The section begins a series of four parables:
 - The Lamp
 - The Hidden and the Manifest
 - The Measure
 - Having and Not Having

These parables and their emphasis on revelation and the necessity of paying attention to the revelation unfolding before the disciples extends the imagery found in the Parable of the Sower that focuses on the word and the hearing.

The parables of this section divide naturally at 4:24. Each half consists of a pair of parables (4.21-22 and 4.24b-25) which is introduced by the phrase, "and he said to

them.” In each case the second parable explains the first. The two parables are held together by the central pair of commands to hear (4.23, 24a).

| SECTION STRUCTURE | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----|
| 4.21a | “And he said to them” | A |
| 4.21b | Parable of the lamp | B |
| 4.22 | Explanatory parable | C |
| 4.23 | Exhortation to hear | D |
| 4.24a | And he said to them | A’ |
| 4.24b | Exhortation to hear | D’ |
| 4.24c | Parable of Measure | B’ |
| 4.25 | Explanatory parable | C’ |

The similarity in structure between the two parables reinforces the connection between their themes: the coming transition from hiddenness to revelation (4.21-23) and the necessity of attentive listening. (4.24-25)

The Parable of the Sower and its interpretation have portrayed the dominion of God as a hidden reality; the good soil, i.e. attentive hearers of God’s word bear witness to the advent of the new age, but the unproductive soil, i.e. hearers that do not accept the word, provides evidence of the endurance of the old age. The beginning of this passage asserts forcefully; the covert action in God operation in the present, will soon give way and he will soon manifest his power openly.

But if the lamp is the symbol for the word of God, then the beginning of this passage provides a significant qualification of what Mark says regarding the purpose of the parables in Mark 4.11-12

Mark 4.11 And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; 12 in order that ‘they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.’”

Even if in the short run God intends those outside to misunderstand His parables, the lamp/word does not come to be hidden forever, but to be put on a lampstand i.e. to be publicly manifested. The link between these two passages

is strengthened by the fact that the phrase “in order that” (hina) of 4.12 is now repeated in 4.21-22 four times.

But why did the earlier passage speak of the deliberate veiling of the truth if the truth is meant to come out? Jesus responds in 4.22a that even obscurity serves the purpose of disclosure: For there is nothing hid, except in order that it might be made manifest. But what sense does it make to hide something only to reveal it? This is as paradoxical as speaking to crowds in order that they might not understand (4.11-12)

God’s word, spoken by Jesus, is misunderstood by his opponents - misunderstood in the existential sense of being rejected, not allowed to penetrate, or emptied of its force (7.8-9, 13; 8.38; 11.29-33; 12.13) This rejection of the word lead to Jesus’ death, a result that, from the divine perspective, is necessary (8.31;9.31; 10.33-34); Jesus is killed by those who cannot grasp his identity and who look and look but never see, hear and hearing never understand (see the echos of 4.12 in the use of the verbs “to see” and “to hear” in the trial and death scenes in 14.64; 15.32, 35, 36)

But through divinely willed death, which is caused by spiritual blindness and deafness of human beings, a new age of revelation begins; after Good Friday and Easter Sunday Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and the Son of God, which was hidden from all during his earthly lifetime, becomes the open proclamation of the Markan community. The hiddenness of the word tus ultimately serves the purpose of its revelation by leading to Jesus’ revelatory death. What was hidden was hidden only in order that it might come into the light.

If this interpretation is correct, then the audience hearing this letter represents a high point in the revelation of God: The lamp of God’s word has come into the room and is now casting its light into every dark crevice (1 John 2.8). At the same time the hiddenness continues to be a factor in the present. The dominion of God over the world in Jesus is still a hidden dominion, and there are many who oppose the word of the gospel. But this blind opposition too must ultimately serve the purpose of revelation; even the persecution that the Markan community faces for the sake of the good news (8.35; 10.29) will be an occasion for the news to spread. Because of the continuing hiddenness of God’ dominion, however Mark’s hearers must be called to attention, so it is logical for this section to end with the exhortation to hear (4.23). As in 4.3, 9, the command to hear is a call to the necessity of continuous turing to the divine word.

The Necessity of Hearing

Note that the call is a pay attention that focuses not simply how one hears (Luke 8.18) but what one hears. For in a world that is still Satan’s house and dominion (3.23-26) not all of the voices that may be heard ought to heard (consider Jesus in 5.36, where he ignores what is said regarding Jarius’ daughter being dead.) You have in the world not simply the word of God, but also a deceitful, Satanic

word claiming to be God's word and capable of leading away even the elect (13.5-6, 22-23). To listen to this Satanic word is, ultimately to lose one's root in ones self (4.17) and in a real sense to die (4.15-19). On the other hand, to listen to God's word about his coming kingdom, which is already the secret reality of this world, is to ultimately to flourish even though one may lose one's life in the process (4.20; 8.35)

The Measure and Having and Not Having

Mark uses the allegory to focus not on the receipt of treasurer (as this is how the passage is used in the church) but rather on the issue of receiving knowledge or insight on the kingdom. People will receive insight according to their level of attentiveness. Attentiveness is normally for the benefit of the individual. The use of this language suggests that there is a benefit not only for others but for oneself from paying attention to the word of God that is being revealed. And the benefit is not simply a tit for tat, for the Markan text suggests that one receives more than what they bring to the moment. He taps into a common rabbinic thought that if one takes a small step, God will respond in a greater measure. Nor does Mark suggest that the reward for this attentiveness is some type of reward based on human merit.

Questions for next Section

- Notice the mention of many boats in 4.36, but then they fade away. What do you think happened to the other boats? Why are they included in the narrative? What do the other boats mean to?
- Notice that in a moment of danger, when the disciples are in meed of a miracle, they refer to Jesus as Teacher? Is there a link between Jesus as teacher and his role in this text? Are there broader links between teaching and power?
- What other biblical character/episode does this text seem to build on? What individual finds himself in a similar situation with a slightly different outcome?
- What similarities or contrasts would you draw between that character and what the disciples and Jesus experience?
- In what ways are we called to have faith like Jesus? (Psalms 3.5; 4.8; Proverbs 3.24-25) How does the question of faith for disciples change in the narrative?
- A great storm confronts the disciples but it is overcome by a greater power. How would you make connections between this narrative and 3.27?
- Who is responsible for the storm battering the ship? What clues are offered by Jesus rebuke of the sea and 1.25? What parallels or contrasts would you draw between the disciple situation on the boat and your own?
- Read 5.1-20 and 6.45-52. Look at the role the sea plays. What conclusions do you draw?