

SERMON NOTES

Fourth Sunday of Transfiguration
(Eve of the Fast of Assumption)

Synaxis Gospel
Mark 2:1-12

THE SON OF MAN: DIVINE SAVIOR AND ETERNAL KING

INTRODUCTION

In the first line of his Gospel, St. Mark¹ wrote, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” What follows tells the story of that great good news. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did come, and Mark records His life, His deeds, His death for sinners, and His Resurrection. Yet, in telling the story, Mark only uses the title, “Son of God,” only four times: in the opening statement of the Gospel, once when demons fell at His feet and cried out, “You are the Son of God,”² once when a demon screamed, “What do I have to do with You, Jesus, You Son of the Most High God?” and once more at His crucifixion, when the centurion said, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”³ The title used fourteen times in Mark of our Lord, and all by Jesus Himself, was “Son of Man.” Our reading records the first of the fourteen uses.

Jesus and His disciples have just returned from a circuit tour of the villages of Galilee, where He preached to them the good news of the kingdom of God.⁴ The publicity concerning Jesus’ curing of a leper had caused Him to abandon the villages and preach in the more deserted places, and then to return to Capernaum, the home town of Peter and his brother, Andrew.

SYNAXIS READING

Mark 2:1-12

And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.

¹ Of the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Mark is considered by most scholars to have been written first. Evidence from the writings of the early Church Fathers, as well as internal evidence, leads us to believe that the writer, Mark, was a close associate of St. Peter and the Gospel’s information came from that Apostle. See the introductory discussions of Henry Barclay Swete’s *Commentary on Mark* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977).

² Mark 3:11

³ Mark 15:39

⁴ Mark 1:14

And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.

And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”

And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your pallet and walk’?

“But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” –He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.”

And he rose up and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

NOTES

And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.

Mark recorded that after His baptism and the gathering of some of His disciples, Jesus had come to Capernaum. After a time, He had left to make a circuit of the other towns in Galilee.

The phrase “several days afterward” is misleading. Actually the Greek “δι’ ἡμερῶν” does not indicate how much time has passed. A better translation is “after some time.”

The *home* might have been that of Peter. Possibly Jesus’ mother, Mary, and her family might have moved to Capernaum from Nazareth. Matthew (4:13) tells us that after John the Baptist was imprisoned, Jesus, “leaving Nazareth, He came and lived in Capernaum.” Also after the wedding in Cana, John (2:12) records that Mary and Jesus’ brothers and disciples went to Capernaum where they remained for a time.

And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.

If the house were the home of Peter, it was probably not a large house, for Peter was a simple fisherman. This home's door probably opened directly to the street, without the benefit of a courtyard or gateway.

The fame of Jesus had begun in Capernaum, before Jesus had left on the preaching tour. It was even greater now, and so, drew large crowds.

The *word* that Jesus spoke here is the message that Jesus brought from God.⁵ It was the message of the kingdom of God. It is the good news of salvation.

And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.

It seems "they" represents more than the four men that carried the paralytic. He had a group of friends that wished to see him cured.

And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.

Roofs in those days were flat. They were constructed of rafters over which thorny branches were laid. These were covered with a mud plaster and finally tiles were laid on top.

The entire roof was not removed, only the portion under which Jesus was teaching. This must have been a terrific effort on the part of the friends of the paralytic. It must have been shocking to those packed into the house to see the debris falling in as that hole was dug over the head of the famous Rabbi, and then to see the pallet with the paralytic slowly lowered, until it rested at His feet.

And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven."

The friends of the man had faith that, if they could just get the paralytic to Jesus, He would cure him. Therefore, they took the desperate measure of digging a hole in the roof.

The man, like all of us sinners, had more than a health issue that needed addressing. But he obviously believed that Jesus was sent by God, and he trusted Him. Note that Jesus addressed him as "My son." This trust was enough for Jesus, Who knew the thoughts and concerns this man had about his sins. Therefore, Jesus promptly assured the man of forgiveness.

But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

This is the first instance in Mark that Jesus' opponents are mentioned as being in the audience. Evidently, the fame of Jesus had reached the ears of the rulers in Jerusalem, and these scribes, or experts in the Law, were there to observe Him.

The scribes were not speaking audibly, they were simply reasoning in their minds. They rightly knew that forgiveness was a prerogative of God. For a mere man to assume that prerogative was not only shocking, but was a crime of blasphemy, a crime that was punishable by death.

⁵ See John 2:22 as an example of more than 130 uses of this term *the word* in the New Testament for the message of salvation.

And immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?”

But God is not only the only One Who could forgive sins, He is also the One who reads the hearts and minds of men. His eyes search even the most hidden of thoughts. Jesus immediately responded to their silent thoughts, which His spirit discerned.

“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Arise, and take up your pallet and walk’?”

Jesus answered the unspoken question of their thoughts by asking a question of His own. In one sense, it would be easier to say “Your sins are forgiven” because there would be no outward proof that they were forgiven. But to say, “Arise, and take up your pallet and walk” would necessitate the proof of a healing.

On the other hand, forgiveness was actually the more difficult, for to forgive the sins of mankind would necessitate the tremendous sacrificial work of Christ on the Cross. This was something only God could accomplish.

“But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” –He said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.”

Jesus knew which statement the scribes had concluded was easier. So, He did what they thought would be harder. He healed the man. This should have been proof positive of His identity, and His authority to do the prerogatives of God.

This is the first time that Mark records our Lord referring to Himself as the *Son of Man*. There are fourteen instances of His use of the title for Himself in the Gospel of Mark. The title is never explained by Mark. From the other uses of the term in Mark, it seems to be based on the record of Daniel’s vision recorded in Daniel 7:13-14. In that vision Daniel saw:

“And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”

[“With the clouds of heaven” is a way of indicating Deity. The clouds of heaven accompany God. That this heavenly figure had the attributes of God and Man points to the figure being the Incarnation]

Why the authority to forgive sins is qualified by “on earth” is not known. Possibly it is because the recipients of forgiveness are earth beings, and must be forgiven while still living on earth.

And he rose up and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all;

In John 9:31, the man cured of his congenital blindness stated the commonly held belief that “we know that God does not hear sinners: but if any man is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him.” If Jesus had committed blasphemy as the scribes were thinking, He could not have

cured the paralytic, for such a miracle required God's power. The cure proved that Jesus was not a blasphemer, and it was His prerogative to forgive sins.

so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

This miracle (and the fact that it proved that Jesus could do what only God could do) amazed the crowd. The scribes may have been an exception from the term *all*, for in the next chapter we read of more trouble from the religious leaders.

APPLICATION

We know Him as *The Son of God*. That title was given to rulers in ancient times. It was the title of the Kings who reigned on the throne of David in Jerusalem; it is the title of angels who rule in their assigned spheres; it was even the title of the first man, Adam,⁶ for he too was a ruler—the first ruler of the earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ bears the title the Son of God because He is the promised great king of the Jews that the prophets foresaw. Even more, He bears the title the Son of God because He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings of everything in heaven and on earth. He is the supreme ruler.

Although others—men, demons, and even God the Father— used the title the Son of God with respect to our Lord, Jesus rarely used it Himself. He preferred the title *the Son of Man*. This is the way He referred to Himself almost exclusively, but others rarely applied the title to Him. Why not? Perhaps it was because the other title was better understood. Son of God was like *the Christ*, or *the Messiah*, all familiar terms that simply meant the anointed King.

But the Son of Man, on the other hand, was a mysterious title for a mysterious heavenly being that the prophet Daniel, hundreds of years earlier, had reported seeing in a vision. However, that heavenly being was also named as the king—the eternal King that would rule all nations and peoples of every language.

The One Daniel saw had the attributes of a man, but also appeared with the "clouds of heaven." Various passages of Scripture indicate that the One coming with the clouds of heaven is God Himself. For example, Moses tells us that God descended on Mount Sinai with clouds and thick darkness.⁷ David also wrote that God comes surrounding Himself with clouds of the heavens.⁸ It is probable, then, that we have in Daniel a vision of God Incarnate, coming to receive His eternal kingdom after His Resurrection and Ascension.

The Hebrew word used in Daniel's vision for *man* has a verb form which means *to be weak, sick or wounded*. It is sometimes used metaphorically of the incurable wounds that sin causes.⁹ In particular, it is used in a portion of Psalm 69 that is a prophecy of Christ's

⁶ Luke 3:38; Genesis 1:28.

⁷ Exodus 20:21; Deuteronomy 4:11

⁸ 2 Samuel 22:12

⁹ Micah 1:9; Jeremiah 15:18; Psalm 69:20-21

suffering on the Cross.¹⁰ Furthermore, in Isaiah 53, we find that He bore our sins and it was because of our transgressions that He was wounded and died. The prophet also tells us that because of His obedience “He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.”¹¹

As St Paul points out, Isaiah’s prophecy has been fulfilled.

And being found in appearance as a man, He [Jesus Christ] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of [belonging to] Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹²

Possibly, then, Jesus chose to use the title Son of Man because of its association with the vision of Daniel, and its hint of the suffering He would endure on the Cross for our sakes. The title sums up both sides of His identity—Divine King and Savior.

Indeed, a perusal of the usages in the Gospel of Mark shows Jesus’ intention to employ the title both to identify Himself as the great fulfillment of Daniel’s vision when He will return as the great King in “the clouds with great power and glory,”¹³ with the holy angels,¹⁴ and to identify Himself as the One Who Isaiah prophesied would die for the sins of all. In this second usage, He often mentions His betrayal, His suffering, His rejection by the religious leaders and His crucifixion and resurrection summed up by the saying, “For the Son of Man [the heavenly king of Daniel’s vision] came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.”¹⁵

Our reading today gives our Lord’s first use of the title Son of Man recorded by Mark: “The Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.” The scribes were offended because they thought that Jesus had usurped on of God’s prerogatives. Only God can forgive sins. But as we have seen, the One Who bears the title Son of Man is God Incarnate. Moreover, it is to Him that we owe our release from our sins through His death for us on the Cross. He is our Divine Savior.

But Jesus also underscored His authority on earth as the Son of Man. He is the great Divine King before Whom we must all bow and acknowledge that His Name is the

¹⁰ Psalm 69:20-221 cf. Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-30

¹¹ Isaiah 52:13

¹² Philippians 2:8-11 The Name that is above every name can only be that of God, Himself, expressed in the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. This Name is not pronounced out of respect for its holiness and is usually substituted with the word *LORD*. The genitive *of* is better translated *belonging to*, avoiding the misconception that the Name bestowed is actually the name *Jesus*. The quotation embedded in Philippians 2:10 is from Isaiah 45:23 where it is the LORD, Himself, Who says: To Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.” See also Isaiah 52:13.

¹³ Mark 13:26

¹⁴ Mark 8:38. See also Mark 14:62. As the Divine Incarnation, He would also be “Lord of the Sabbath,” Mark 2:28.

¹⁵ Mark 10:45. See also Mark 8:31, 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33; 14:21, 41.

LORD. He will return someday, with all the glorious accompaniment of His Deity, as the great Judge of all men. On that day, may we, like the paralytic of our reading, be found as recipients of His kindness and forgiveness, and not as objects of His judgment.

If we are among those He calls His own people, Daniel's vision has pictured us as well; we will be those holy people of the Most High God to whom will be given "the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven."¹⁶ His love is such that He desires to save us, and share everything that is His with us, even His glorious throne. May He give us the grace to respond in love to Him, and cherish the truth that He truly is the Son of Man, our divine Savior and eternal King.

¹⁶ Daniel 7:17