

Reflections on the Gospel of Mark

Reflection 2 – Breaching the Walls of Religion

Bible Passage

The whole of Mark 2 recounts events which challenged the religious assumptions of Jesus's day. This passage covers the first of them and begins with some people literally breaking through boundaries – in this case, the roof rather than the walls.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? ¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, ¹¹ 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!' (Mark 2:1-12)

Reflection

As well as being a lesson in faith, a great example of Jesus's power to heal, and an account of the crowd's attraction to him, this story is one of the first examples, in Mark, of Jesus's clash with the religious leaders. They were offended at his claim to be able to forgive sins. Instead of being rooted in a living, authentic relationship with God, many people choose to hide behind religious walls, with rigidly drawn rules and regulations, preferring letter over spirit, and clearly drawn lines between the insider and the outsider, the clean and the unclean. If we are honest, we can all fall prey to this religious spirit at times too. It's easier to protect ourselves behind religious walls than it is to deepen our roots of faith.

The clash between Jesus and religion is a central theme in Mark, and all of the gospels, and it especially comes out in this second chapter. As well as this story, there is:

- The calling of the hated tax collectors and mixing with sinners (vv.13-17)
- Feasting instead of fasting (vv.18-20)
- Picking ears of corn on the Sabbath (vv.23-28)

The cryptic parable about the patch on an old garment, or the new wine in old wineskins (vv.21-22) is about this incompatibility between the life in Jesus and the hardened, worn-out religion of many of the religious leaders. It's the age old collision between religion and life. Jesus, in his life and his teaching, is breaching religion's walls.

We should not underestimate, of course, how shocking it was for the religious leaders to hear a man claim to forgive someone's sin. The problem was that they were so locked into their religion that they missed God when he actually turned up among them.

Questions for Discussion

1. What did you learn from this story?
2. Why would the religious leaders have been so offended?
3. Which is easier: to say to a paralysed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"?
4. Could we miss God if he turned up? How might we sometimes build walls of religion rather than deepen roots of life?

Further Reading

- Read the rest of chapter 2
- Carry on reading Mark and look out for other clashes with the religious leaders of his day
- I recommend a book called **The End of Religion** by Bruxy Cavey