



The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



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Part 4

Mark 2:1-12

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REVIEW of Mark 1:1-45

In chapter 1, we were introduced to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

Jesus came, as John announced, in fulfillment of the anticipated arrival of God's kingdom, proclaiming its nearness.

The nearness of this Kingdom was evidenced by exorcisms, healings, prayer, and authoritative teaching.

This also demonstrated that the Kingdom of God involves the restoration of people to wholeness.

By the end of chapter 1, Jesus' fame had grown throughout the region of Galilee.

Now, we will begin to see that the introduction of the Kingdom and its values generates conflict and controversy.

Mark 2:1 (NIV)

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.



<https://bibleatlas.org/capernaum.htm>

“again entered Capernaum”

From 1:39-45, Jesus had been traveling throughout Galilee.

Now, we are back in the same location where the events of 1:21-38 took place.

“come home”

This does not imply a “hometown” in Capernaum for Jesus.

In fact, a better translation might be “that he had come back to the house”.

Mark 2:2 (NIV)

So many gathered there that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

“and he preached the word to them”

Jesus starting point is again, as we saw in 1:21, preaching and teaching.

MANY people are attracted to his teaching – there is no room for everyone, even outside.

The gospel is Good News that people wanted to hear!

“the word”

This is New Testament “shorthand” for the content of Jesus’ teaching.

At this point, with regard to the Kingdom of God.

Later, with regard to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Remember that Kingdom values were being demonstrated through healings and exorcisms.

Therefore, Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom **HERE** sets the stage for what comes next.

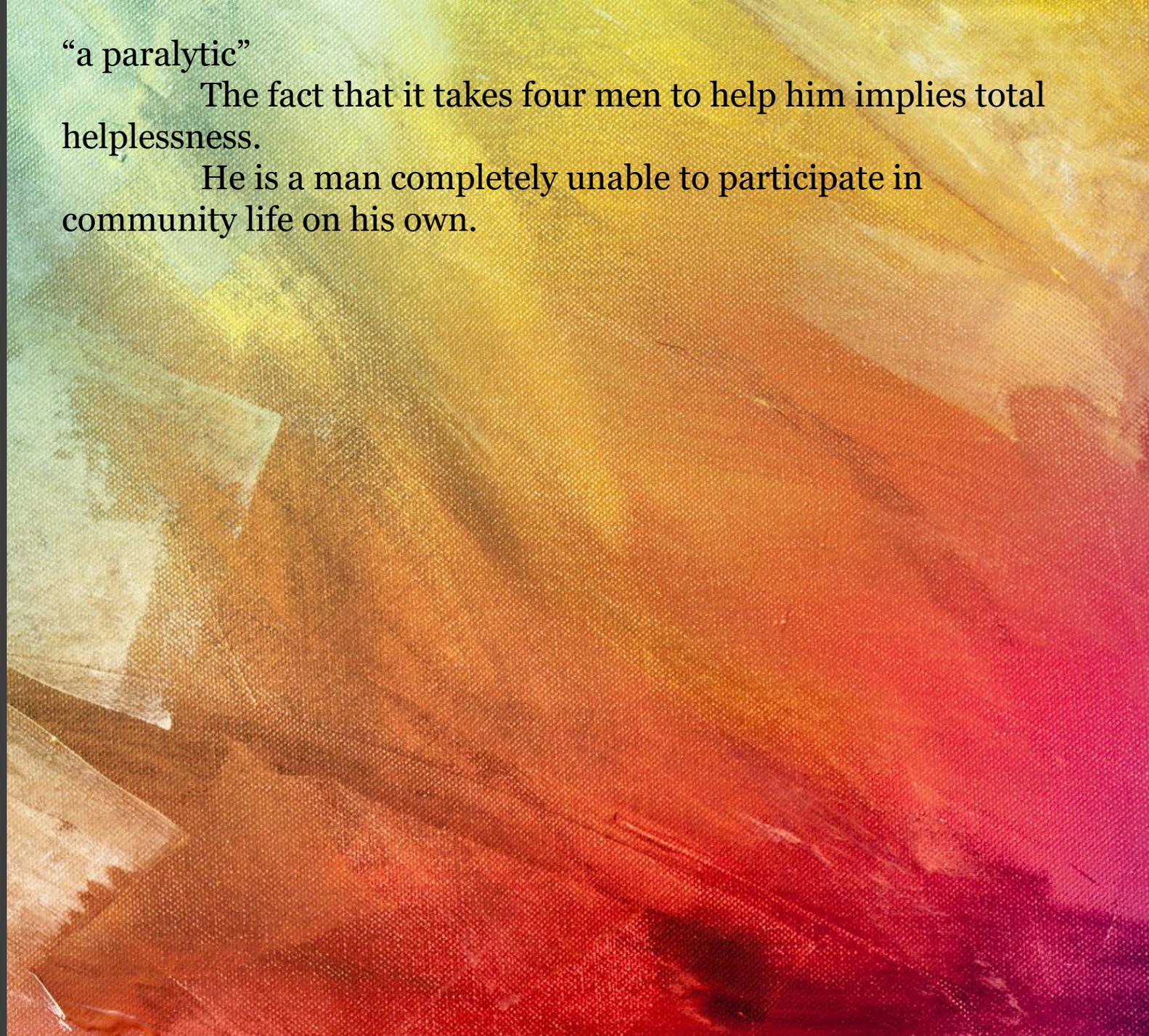
Mark 2:3 (NIV)

Some men came,
bringing to him a
paralytic, carried by
four of them.

“a paralytic”

The fact that it takes four men to help him implies total helplessness.

He is a man completely unable to participate in community life on his own.



Mark 2:4 (NIV)

Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

“they made an opening in the roof”

In Jesus’ day, homes had flat roofs, exterior stairways or ladders, and roofs were used as additional living space.

The roof was probably made of thatch/mud/plaster. Luke 5:19 refers to “tiles” on the roof in the same story, with no reference to “digging through”. Homes with tiles were of a much more Greek than traditional middle eastern architecture.

In Mark’s Gospel, it appears to take significant effort to dig through the roof rather than just to remove tiles to gain access.

“lowered the mat”

The hole must have been large!

And, it was dug directly over where Jesus was teaching.

Imagine the dust and dirt falling on Jesus and the crowds as they dug!

Mark 2:5 (NIV)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

“their faith”

Note the power of COLLECTIVE faith! Jesus saw THEIR faith.

How was their faith evident to Jesus? By their hard physical work and perseverance in getting their friend to Jesus.

Nothing is said about the faith of the man himself!

IF he had faith, it was in the form of allowing his friends to carry out this task.

In Mark’s Gospel, faith is always evidenced in actions that transcend obstacles, limitations, or that cross social boundaries.

Faith, in Mark, is an attitude toward Jesus expressed in conduct.

“Son, your sins are forgiven”

Calling the sufferer “son” established intimacy and care.

Note that the man had not requested forgiveness! Jesus was remembered as a healer from his previous visit to Capernaum, and the paralytic was brought to Jesus so he could heal him.

Jesus made a deeper diagnosis and did what needed to be done first.

Mark 2:5 (NIV)

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

“paralytic ... forgiven”

In early Judaism, there was a close association between sin and sickness.

Jesus refutes this understanding in John 9:1-3:

“As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.’” (NIV)

However, Numbers 12:9-11 show Miriam’s sin causing her to be stricken with leprosy:

“The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam – leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy, and he said to Moses, ‘Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.’” (NIV)

But James 5:15 implies that sickness is not **NECESSARILY** caused by sin:

“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.” (NIV)

So, whereas sickness does not **IMPLY** sin, some sin may well lead to sickness. In Jesus’ day, the association was implicit – sickness = sin!

Mark 2:6 (NIV)

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,

“teachers of the law”

Their style of teaching as already been contrasted with Jesus' in 1:22.

They were educated, literate men serving in a dual role. First, in civil or secular matters, they provided legal services.

Second, they studied and then interpreted Scripture for religious matters.

Hence, they WOULD be turned to for an expert evaluation of Jesus' words and actions.

They come to the conclusion that Jesus is out of line (although they do not state it explicitly here).

Mark 2:7 (NIV)

“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

“He’s blaspheming!”

This is equivalent to claiming to do something God alone can do.

A charge of blasphemy called for the death penalty, making this the most serious of the charges Jesus faces in the other controversies that immediately follow this one.

Leviticus 24:15-16: “Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.”

We will see this again in Mark 14:64, at Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin.

Mark 2:7 (NIV)

“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

“who can forgive sins but God alone?”

This is the crux of the charge of blasphemy.

Forgiveness is the prerogative of God – not a priest’s, not a prophet’s, not even the anticipated (human) Messiah’s!

Exodus 34:6-7a - “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.’”

Isaiah 43:25 – “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

Isaiah 44:22 – “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

So, the issue is – is Jesus declaring that GOD forgives the paralytic (perhaps, as Jesus’ word of comfort to him), OR, is Jesus HIMSELF declaring it, usurping God’s authority?

We need to remember that the hope of the new age of salvation included that with the coming of the Kingdom would come forgiveness of sin – John’s baptism of “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” in 1:4 reminds is of this.

So, part of proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom’s nearness includes the proclamation of God’s forgiveness.

Mark 2:7 (NIV)

“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

“who can forgive sins but God alone?” (continued)

A basic way to understand Jesus’ action of forgiveness, but God’s prerogative to forgive, is to say “If no one but God can forgive sin, and Jesus has just done so, it’s because Jesus IS God.”

The alternative seems to be to say “If no one but God can forgive sin, and Jesus has just done so, he DID blaspheme.”

But another approach, without denying his divinity, but also affirming his humanity, is to see that Jesus has been granted an unparalleled authority by God to act in this way, because of, and demonstrating, his profound intimacy with God.

This is a more Trinitarian approach than simply equating Jesus with God ... it is saying that what we see here is the action of the Father, carried out by the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 2:8-9 (NIV)

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? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’”

“knew in his spirit”

The sense here is more by his human intuition than by divine, HOLY Spirit, knowledge.

However, Jesus’ closeness to the will/mind of the Father is also in view here. Mark may be including a reference to Solomon’s prayer to God:

1 Kings 8:39 – “then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of all men)”

“Which is easier”

This is a rhetorical question.

But which IS easier?

Clearly, healing is harder – and can be verified by observation, whereas forgiveness cannot.

Jesus’ argument is that if healing is harder, and I can do THAT, then I can do the easier thing as well.

This leads to the statement following, in verse 10, “But that you may know ...”, and the clear demonstration of Jesus’ authority.

Mark 2:10-11

(NIV)

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”
He said to the paralytic,
“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

“the Son of Man”

This is the first of 14 occurrences of this designation in Mark’s Gospel.

The traditional understanding of this phrase goes like this:

To say Jesus is “Son of Man” is to say Jesus is fully human.

To say Jesus is “Son of God” is to say Jesus is fully divine.

Put together, they express the orthodox Christian belief that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine.

Mark 2:10-11

(NIV)

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”
He said to the paralytic,
“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

“the Son of Man” (continued)

A more biblical/historical research approach suggests:

“Son of God” speaks more to one’s role as a human “king” of Israel, as we discussed back in 1:11, with reference to David’s anointing as king of Israel, and Psalm 2’s “today you are my Son”.

“Son of Man”, it should be noted, is only used by Jesus in reference to himself. It seems to be a title he claimed for himself.

And when he does, it is often combined with mention of power, authority, glory, clouds, and/or angels (as in 15:26, for example).

The background for this is likely Daniel 7:13-14

Daniel 7:13-14 – “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

This prophesies a heavenly figure with human appearance (like a “son of man”), but granted universal power and authority.

This was NOT read as a Messianic text in Jesus’ day.

So ... “Son of God” = human king

“Son of man” = an otherworldly universal ruler

Jesus likely referred to himself in this way to indicate his origin and authority WITHOUT it including an explicit Messianic claim that was recognizable.

Mark 2:10-11

(NIV)

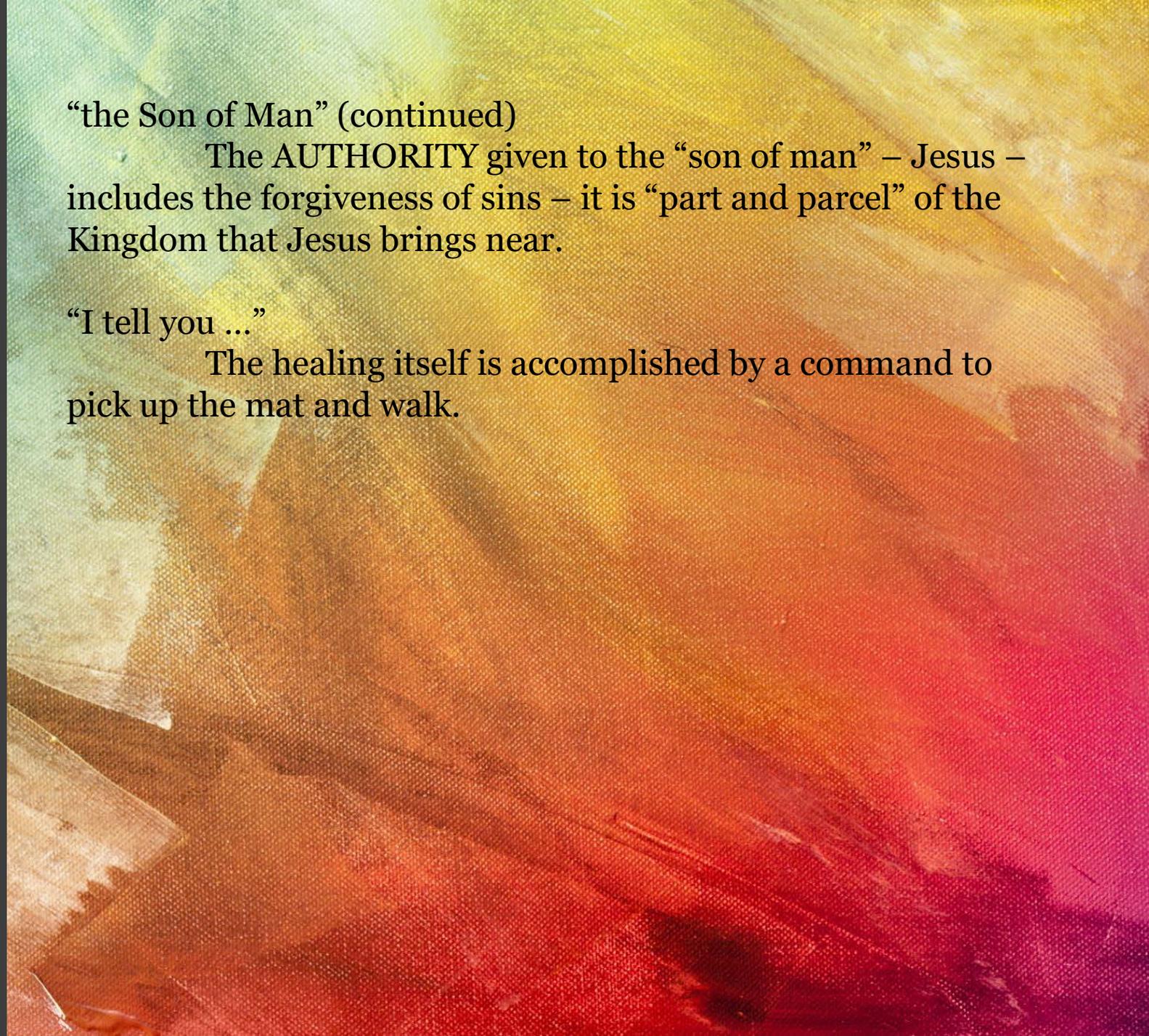
“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...”
He said to the paralytic,
“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

“the Son of Man” (continued)

The AUTHORITY given to the “son of man” – Jesus – includes the forgiveness of sins – it is “part and parcel” of the Kingdom that Jesus brings near.

“I tell you ...”

The healing itself is accomplished by a command to pick up the mat and walk.



Mark 2:12 (NIV)

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!”

“amazed everyone”

We are forced to wonder – including the scribes?
They are not mentioned now!

“they praised God”

God, after all, is the One at work in Jesus.
This IS the appropriate response to the work of Jesus!

What we see clearly in this story is that Jesus’ ministry includes both healing AND forgiveness of sin.

BOTH are necessary for WHOLENESS, both are necessary for physical AND spiritual wellness!

BUT ... Jesus’ authority to accomplish these things creates conflict with those who already hold the ESTABLISHED authority.



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