

The Gospel According to Mark, 1:29-31, Raised Up to Serve⁽¹⁾

"And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them." (Mark 1:29-31)

Last lesson of last semester: Mark 1:21-28, Jesus taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath, demonstrating divine authority in both his teaching on the imminence of the kingdom of God and his authority over demons.

This lesson: Jesus heals on the Sabbath, raising up a woman on the brink of death to serve in newness of life.

Trivia: This is the first recorded healing in Mark's gospel.

It is the shortest healing account in the New Testament.

47% of verses in the first ten chapters of Mark deal directly or indirectly with miracles, including healing.⁽²⁾

Over 30% overall - most of any gospel.⁽³⁾

I. Sabbath Lunch - 1:29: "Immediately he left the synagogue..."

A. Solus Christus? - Was Jesus alone or with the disciples? Some versions have "he" (RSV, ESV, NJB, NABRE, Phillips, etc.) but most major translations have "they" (KJV, ASV, NASB, AMP, NRSV, NKJV, NIV, REB, GNT, NLT, Moffatt, etc.). Both readings are found in ancient Greek manuscripts of Mark.⁽⁴⁾ The choice of readings, however, is not monumental. The context makes clear that the disciples accompanied Jesus from the synagogue to Simon and Andrew's house.⁽⁵⁾

B. Still the Sabbath - Mark often uses the word "immediately" hyperbolically to emphasize the power and dynamism of the ministry of Jesus. Here, it seems to be used normally, indicating that they went straight to Simon and Andrew's house after leaving the synagogue on the Sabbath. Three reasons:

1. Synagogue usually ended around high noon, and Jews would customarily return home to eat a meal prepared beforehand.
2. Archaeologists believe they have unearthed both the synagogue and Simon and Andrew's house at Capernaum. If correctly identified, the distance separating the two was a stone's throw.⁽⁶⁾
3. In v. 32 we are told that the townspeople waited until sundown to bring their sick and possessed loved ones to Jesus, reflecting a fear of breaking the Sabbath for carrying a load.

II. Saturday Afternoon Fever - 1:30: "Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever..."

A Family Emergency - The mother-in-law (1 Cor. 9:5) would ordinarily have been laying out the spread for their lunch, but she was found bedridden with fever.

Fever was understood in that day to be a disease of itself, not a symptom.⁽⁷⁾ It was associated with demonic oppression⁽⁸⁾ and punishment for sin⁽⁹⁾ (Lev. 26:14-16; Deut. 28:22).

We can infer from the bedridden state of the woman that her fever was very high.

Mark uses the historical present tense to portray the urgency of the situation: "immediately they tell [not told] him about her".⁽¹⁰⁾

In the third gospel, Luke, with his physician's eye for medical details, specifically categorizes the fever as *megas* (great) as opposed to *mikros* (small).⁽¹¹⁾

A high fever was very worrisome, especially in a child or elderly person, as it could lead to death. "We should not allow modern advances in medicine to lead us into underestimating the seriousness of fever in ancient times (see John 4:46-54)."⁽¹²⁾

B. To Heal or Not to Heal? - Healing on the Sabbath was forbidden according to the interpretation of some Jewish authorities:

"And they [the Pharisees] watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him" (Mark 3:2).

"But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." (Luke 13:14).

"A prohibition of work on the Sabbath is found in the Decalog (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15) and several other texts (e.g. Ex. 31:12-17; 35:2) ... however ... the questions of proper observance were often a matter of interpretation. The various religious parties of Jesus' day not infrequently differed in their practice."⁽¹³⁾

Jesus opposed this stricture, however, and healed on the Sabbath more than once.

III. Liberated to Serve - Mark 1:31: "And he...lifted her up...and she began to serve them."

A. No Day Like Today - In view of its origin, unfolding purpose, and goal, the Sabbath is the perfect day for healing.

1. Origin in the Rest of God - As God "worked" at creating the heavens and the earth, the first chapter of Genesis continually affirms that "God saw that it was good". On the creation Sabbath, God declared his work of creation complete; he "rested" on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-2).

He blessed that day and set it apart from the other days (Gen. 2:3), to be observed by his people as a divine pattern (Exo. 20:8-11).

Even though God created Adam to "work" and "keep" the garden (Gen. 2:15), yet it is clear that Adam and Eve were in the "rest" of God, because they were in his presence and enjoyed the provision and protection of the Almighty.

When God banished Adam from the garden for his sin, he was also banished from God's rest: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:17, NIV).⁽¹⁴⁾ God also ceased his resting, and began the work of redemption for his people.

2. Unfolding Purpose in the Liberation of Creation - Besides rest, there are several purposes stated or alluded to concerning the Sabbath in Scripture. One OT scholar lists as many as seven.⁽¹⁵⁾ One of those purposes, the theme of liberation, is especially relevant to our passage:

a. The people of Israel were to remember and celebrate the fact that the Lord redeemed them from slavery to serve him:

"You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Deut. 5:15).

b. The theme of liberation was amplified in the year of Jubilee. This was to be observed every 50th year, which was also based on the principle of the pattern of seven. In that year every slave was to be set free:

"You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan."

c. The ultimate Jubilee was to be brought in by the Anointed One of Isaiah's prophecies (Isa. 61:1-2a). The Messiah would "proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Christ read this passage from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth and declared it fulfilled even as they were hearing it (Luke 4:18b-19).

3. Moving Toward a Goal - These two themes associated with the Sabbath--rest and liberation--are both associated with Christ in his first advent, and with the eternal age to come. Both are found in Christ. Rest and liberation are even now enjoyed in Christ by the people of God as a foretaste, in anticipation of the fulness to come. We have been given rest from the burden of works-righteousness and have been liberated from sin's dominion over us, enabling us to serve God with joy and gratitude. In the age to come, we will dwell with our Creator and Savior in the peace and safety of the eternal rest of God.

a. Rest

Foretaste: "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light." (Matt 11:28-30).

Fulness: "...the promise of entering his rest still stands...we who have believed enter that rest...there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (Heb. 4:1, 3, 9-11)

b. Liberation

Foretaste: Christ specifically linked the Sabbath and the theme of liberation:

"Now he [Christ] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your disability.' And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, 'There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.' Then the Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?'" As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him' (Luke 13:10-17).

Fulness: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:20-21).

B. Picture of the Resurrection

"Jesus *raises her up*. This is the language of most of Jesus' restorations. It is the language of the resurrection (cf., Mk. 5:41; 6:14, 16; 14:28; 16:6), but Mark finds a way of working it into most of his accounts of restorations. Not only does Jesus 'raise' many up, but even those who are not unable to stand nevertheless are found seated and need to be told to 'arise' (3:3; 10:49)."⁽¹⁶⁾

"Even more significant is the verb used to describe Jesus' lifting of the woman from her sickbed, *ēgeiren* ('he raised'; the same verb is used in the story of the resuscitation of the dead girl in 5:41-42). While certainly appropriate to the context, this verb would probably also have reminded Mark's readers of the general resurrection of the dead (see 12:26) and of Jesus' resurrection in particular (see 6:14, 16; 14:28; 16:7)."⁽¹⁷⁾

C. Raised to Serve

Jesus restored Simon's mother-in-law to health, and to her normal social function, to care for her family and guests, to serve the meal. Jesus always has the initiative in the life of his people.

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." (John 15:16)

"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32)

We live spiritually because he raised us up from death (Eph. 2:1, 6). We are being recreated in his image (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:2), who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). We draw our strength to serve through him (John 15:1-8). Martha did not realize this; her fault was not that she served, but that she did not first sit at the feet of Jesus to hear his words of life (Luke 10:38-42). After we draw our refreshment from him, then we can serve others in his strength:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27-28).

Notes:

1. I am indebted to Mark Horne for the title of this study, as found in his commentary, The Victory According to Mark, p. 44.
2. Cranfield, C. E. B. - The Gospel According to St. Mark [Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary], p. 82.
3. Green, McKnight, and Marshall, eds. Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Scholarship, p. 302.
4. Despite the strong manuscript support for the singular ("he"), the committee that produced the 4th edition of the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament chose the plural ("they") based on internal evidence:
"...a majority [of the Committee] was inclined to follow the plural because copyists would tend to change the plural to the singular in order a) to focus attention on Jesus, (b) to conform the reading to the parallels in Matt. 8:15 and Luke 4:38, and (c) to provide a nearer antecedent for *auto* of ver. 30." Metzger, Bruce M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (Second Edition), p. 64.
Though the translators of the ESV used the above-mentioned UBS⁴ edition of the Greek New Testament (along with the near-identical Nestle-Aland 27th) as their base text, the ESV team ended up departing from the judgment of both committees at this point.
5. Nicoll, W. Robertson, ed. - The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume One: Synoptic Gospels, St. John, p. 346 (note on Mark 1:29-31).
6. Edwards, James R. - The Gospel According to Mark [The Pillar New Testament Commentary], p. 59.
7. Guelich, Robert A. - Mark 1-8:26 [Word Biblical Commentary, v. 34a], p. 62.
8. Guelich, Robert A. - Mark 1-8:26 [Word Biblical Commentary, v. 34a], p. 62.
9. Osbourne, Grant R. - Mark [Teach the Text Commentary Series], p. 31.
10. Gundry, Robert H. - Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross, p. 86.
11. Cranfield, C. E. B. - The Gospel According to St. Mark [Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary], p. 82.
12. Gundry, Robert H. - Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross, p. 86.
13. Green, McKnight, and Marshall, eds. - Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Scholarship, pp. 716-717.
14. The Heb. word can mean emotional as well as physical pain. The KJV translates it as "sorrow," and the ESV leaves it more ambiguous ("pain"). But the word can mean pain from burdensome labor. The context makes clear that is the case here, and the NIV (NKJV, RSV, NASB) gets it right.
15. Waltke, Bruce K. - An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach, pp.420-425.
16. Horne, Mark - The Victory According to Mark: An Exposition of the Second Gospel, p. 44.
17. Marcus, Joel - Mark 1-8 [The Anchor Bible], p. 199.

All scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.