

1 Meeting Jesus

MARK 2:1-12

Hands down, the best way to learn something about a significant historical figure is to ask the person himself *and* those who know that person best. In the case of Jesus, since we have no access to him directly (all information comes to us secondhand), we will have to ask a set of relevant persons. These would include (but not be limited to) the *crowds* who witnessed him, the *opponents* who thought less of him than did his followers, and then finally from his closest followers, the *disciples*.

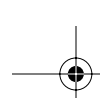
■ OPEN

Talk about a person you have been wanting to meet—an accomplished athlete, leader or person a friend knows. What draws you to this person?

■ STUDY

Jesus' healing of a paralytic man is perhaps familiar, namely because the man's friends lower him through the roof of a house. Both Mark and Luke tell us the reason for their desperation: "they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd" (Mark 2:4; cf. Luke 5:19). Throughout the Gospels we read of various crowds who encounter Jesus. One theme emerges: he elicits





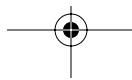
their attention and a marked response, whether awe or anger. Though he did not seek notice, Jesus' words and miracles drew crowds wherever he went. **Read Mark 2:1-12.**

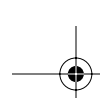
¹A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him 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. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Now 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?"

⁸Immediately 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? ⁹Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹²He 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!"

1. How do the people respond when they hear of Jesus' arrival in Capernaum?





What does Jesus do (see verses 1, 2)?

2. The crowds see the paralytic man lowered from the roof, yet Mark tells us that Jesus sees something more. What does Jesus see?

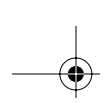
3. Imagine you were among the crowd in this room. What do you think would be your first impression of Jesus' reply to the man (verse 5)?



If there were crowds and if Jesus made a stir with his actions and his sayings, then it is likely that people in the crowds offered evaluations. More importantly, it is notable that the “Christology” of the crowds (their theological understanding of the person and work of Christ) is “low” (less than a full confession of Jesus as Son of God) and in some senses not what the Evangelists themselves put forward as their own Christology. Since the “Christology” of the crowds is appreciably lower than early Christian theology of the Evangelist (where Jesus was confessed to be Son of God and even divine), it is *more likely* that the Evangelist did *not* make up this “crowd Christology.” Had he made it up, it would have looked more like his own theology.

We have then in the reports of the crowds seeing Jesus' healings and hearing his teachings what amounts to an eye-witness testimony.





There is a consistent testimony in the Gospel stories that those who saw Jesus' healings, and sometimes those who heard him teach, were *impressed at a profound level* at what they saw and what they heard. Those who saw Jesus' healings would have felt the presence of the numinous or a sacred mystery. We are not asking for too much here; this is how humans respond whenever they encounter what appears to be the supernatural. They experience wonder (Matthew 8:27), astonishment (Mark 1:27), amazement (2:12), fear (4:41), or dumbfoundedness (7:37). The experience of wonder in the presence of an unusual occurrence is common to ancients and moderns. *If* Jesus did miracles, and *if* the crowds saw them, then it is certain that the crowds would have been amazed.

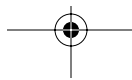


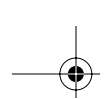
4. Why is it reasonable to believe that the crowds' observations and comments about Jesus are in keeping with what occurred?



5. Why would amazement be an appropriate reaction to Jesus' miracles?

6. Look again at the passage from Mark. Why do the teachers of the law become upset? Explain why they would reach this conclusion.





7. According to Jesus, what is the purpose of his healing ministry (verse 10)?

What does his statement tell us about who he claims to be and what we might expect as we continue to study his life and ministry?



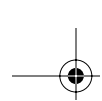
The friends of this paralyzed man did everything they could to bring him within the sight and touch of Jesus. They even disfigured the property of the person in whose house Jesus was visiting in the hope that he would perform a miracle for their friend. I suspect they must have reasoned that if Jesus could make a paralyzed man walk again, then replacing a roof would be a minor problem. But as they lowered this man within reach of the Savior, they were not expecting an apologetic discussion.



“Which of the two is harder,” asked the Lord, “to bring physical healing or to forgive a person’s sins?” The irresistible answer was self-evident, was it not? *To bring physical healing* because that would be such a miraculous thing, visible to the naked eye. The invisible act of forgiveness had far less evidentiary value. Yet, as they pondered and as we ponder, we discover repeatedly in life that the logic of God is so different to the logic of humanity. We move from the material to the spiritual in terms of the spectacular, but God moves from the spiritual to the material in terms of the *essential*. . . .

In this instance, Jesus followed the act of forgiveness with the easier act of physical healing so that the paralyzed man





would feel the touch of the Savior from what was more meaningful to what was more felt. If he was a wise man he would walk with the awareness that the apparently less visible miracle was actually more miraculous than the more visible one—but his feeling of gratitude for his restored body would remain a constant reminder to him of the restoration of his soul.¹

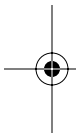
8. Can you think of an instance in your own life when you sought a miracle or instant relief from the sometimes hard road of daily living?

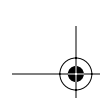
9. The Scriptures tell us that though God can and does perform miracles, he is also committed to our perseverance and character, which are forged in life's trials. Do you find it difficult to balance these two perspectives?

10. What does the passage above suggest is the ultimate miracle? Why?

11. Mark tells us everyone present responded in two ways after Jesus heals the paralytic man (verse 12). How might you maintain a sense of amazement and praise throughout the week?

¹Ravi Zacharias, "Apologetics: Shadow or Reality?" *Just Thinking*, fall 2004 (available online at www.rzim.org/publications/jttran.php?seqid=98).





■ GOING FURTHER

This biblical passage suggests that nothing could obstruct the paralytic man and his friends from seeking an audience with Jesus. Have you ever known such passion for God? What motivates you in your efforts? What hinders you? You may want to take time to write about these reflections.

Additional Reading

For a good introduction to the life and ministry of Jesus see F. F. Bruce's classic work *Jesus: Lord & Savior* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

