

We are considering to gather during these weeks, we began last Sunday and we will continue up until the time of Easter, our study of the life of Jesus Christ according to the Book of Mark. I have prepared a study guide for the Book of Mark for any of you that would like to study along and do your own study by yourself or even in small groups study, and those are available on the Christian office and just pick one up today yourself or maybe there are some on the back here today also.

Let me invite you to take advantage of this study of sermons that we're going to be doing between now and Easter. So this might become for you a journey in-depth experience. Don't just come and attend these services, sermons, but why not yourself take

hold of the Book of Mark during these weeks and make it your own journey experience? Now for some it may become for you a searching out of the sources and the implications of the faith you presently hold. And in that case, you will be making discoveries from the Book of Mark, I believe, already I've made them just in getting ready for the series, discoveries, insights, breakthroughs in this book that have profoundly challenged my faith. And I hope that will be your experience, too. And many of you, that will be your pilgrimage. Searching out the sources, implications of the faith you already hold. And then for others of you, it may well be that this study of Mark could become the first tentative steps toward the very possibility of faith itself. I hope you'll take advantage of the Book of Mark, too, and let the Book of Mark challenge and open up

to you the narrative of the life of Jesus of Nazareth so that you can consider its implications and the meaning of the life of Jesus Christ for your life.

Now, what are you going to find when you read the Book of Mark? Probably the most important single sentence in the opening of this book that states the purpose of the book comes from our Lord Himself and it's recorded for us in the 14th and 15th verses of the first chapter. We read it last week. Here's how Mark records it. "*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled.'*" That could be literally translated, the time is near, it's here. "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent – now that word

“repent” means literally turn around – and trust in the gospel.”

Remember how last week I translated Kingdom of God the way Dietrich Bonhoeffer does, the Kingdom of God means literally the kingly reign of Christ is here. The king is here. Look at you, consider Him, turn around, take a look at this king, and trust Him. Your freedom will never be compromised. You’ll never be forced to trust Him. This gospel will preserve as our Lord Himself preserves your freedom to make the discovery of who He is. I invite you to make that pilgrimage during these next weeks.

Now, what are you going to find? You're going to find in the Book of Mark a highly visual, a very matter of fact, to the point, scene by scene portrayal of the life in ministry of Jesus. Mark has very little comment on the events that he narrates. He gives you narration that really is more visual than it is auditory. And it's the kind of portrayal you expect of a young person and we believe that Mark was a young person, perhaps a teenager during the time of these events. And you get a kind of teenager perspective, a highly visual, scene by scene, almost multimedia approach, an event is in focus, then it's brought out of focus, another event is superimposed right on it. Very little transitions. Very little comment. Hardly any reflective passages like you find in John or in Luke. Very brisk style. And there is, in that very brevity, a kind of hitting force, an

impact that is unique to the gospel of Mark. So I'm sure you're going to enjoying the study of this book.

All right, today I want you to turn to the second chapter and we'll look at an incident that Mark records for us.

This incident in the second chapter now is quite an important one, we know that by studying the Book of Luke which has the same incident recorded in more of a characteristically Lukien style, little more flowing style, little more details coming out in Luke but the same incident. It occurs in Capernaum, whereas the first chapter opened if you remember last week at Judah down by the river Jordan where

our Lord was baptized. Now we're up in Capernaum some 85 miles north of the River Jordan on the Sea of Galilee, the little town of Capernaum, it's still there today, that town is there still a settlement at the town of Capernaum. Capernaum was a place where Jesus was most popular during his ministry. We have witnesses to that from all four gospels. This is a town like Jesus very much. And this incident we're now going to read about in the second chapter I think is the first incident given major treatment by Mark. Everything up to this point has been so brief that we really don't get a feel for the incident in any kind of detail at all. And now we get an incident that Mark spends more time on, gives us more of a feel for it, very important incident, gives us a chance to see Jesus Christ in action which of course is going to be a major feel in this book to watch Him in action.

All right, here's the event. I'd like to read it and then I'll interrupt it from time to time to try to make the scene as visible as it can be for us. When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days it was reported that He was at home. Now Luke will clarify that for us it doesn't mean His home, Jesus' home was actually in Nazareth. Capernaum is several miles from Nazareth. But this means a home probably because we know from Luke that this is the home of a person in Capernaum where our Lord is teaching. And many were gathered together in this home so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door, and He was preaching to them the words. Now here our Lord is in this house, belongs to some man there in Capernaum, it's probably one of the biggest houses in town and

there's no room for anybody in this house, even the doorway Mark says is jammed up.

Now I'll give you a little more details that come from Luke. Luke tells us too that Pharisees have come all the way from Jerusalem to be here at the time of this incident. So this now in Luke's account, if you want to know where Luke tells the same account it's in the fifth chapter of Luke, and Luke tells us that this is the first time the Pharisees have come up to see Jesus. This is a very important religious group. Little later in this account Mark will tell you about some scribes who spoke. Those scribes are Pharisees. Scribes means lawyers. But most of the lawyers were Pharisees. They're laymen who are experts in the law. They've come all the

way from Jerusalem to hear Jesus. So this is quite an auspicious occasion, these highly respected Pharisees have come from Jerusalem, they are at Capernaum, there's Jesus is doing some teaching in the house probably of a wealthy man in town and the house is jammed, it's a large house. Evidently you'll see in a few moments there are hints of that. It's a large house and the doorway is even jammed up. Jesus is teaching. Okay, there's the scene.

Now, there came some men bringing to Him a paralyzed man carried by four men. And when they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him and when they made an opening they let the man down on the pallet in which this paralyzed man was lying. All right. I have

to once again give you a little information from Luke. Most homes in the Middle East at that time had mud roofs. It was seen quite impossible to us to understand how these men during the course of one lecture could dig a hole through a mud roof in a Middle Eastern first century home. But Luke helps us out here by telling us in his account that this particular house had a tile roof. Now that's interesting because the Romans introduced tile roofs in the Middle East, we know that. And that's our clue this is a house of a very wealthy person because the Romans had introduced tiles and those kinds of roofs were only used for limited numbers of houses. The average house would have a mud roof. And so this is the tile roof and Luke's the one who tells us that little detail. So, add that to this account and we can understand what happened. Jesus is teaching, He

has a great crowd of people there. These four friends of a paralyzed friend are bringing him to be healed.

We know from the first chapter that our Lord's fame is already established in Capernaum and in that whole region for healings that He's done. In fact, the account just before this is our Lord healing a person with Hansen's disease, leprosy. So Jesus Christ is already known as a healer. The people they want to bring this man to have Him healed. They can't get in the room. Well, they're very ingenious fellows. So they go up on the roof, it is a flat roof, they walk around the top and they start pulling the tiles out. Trying to get a feeling for what's going on inside the room when that was happening. Jesus is teaching, it's a very exciting moment. I can imagine the owner

of the house standing there, pride busting out all over having this famous teacher, Jesus is loved in Capernaum, Pharisees are here from Jerusalem, we don't have big shots like that up here very often in Capernaum, little C-town, a little fishing town. And that this is just too good to be true. It's funny I never noticed that little shaft of light coming down from the middle of my ceiling. Just had this roof put on three months ago. Have to have that fixed before the rain set in. And then he notices the shaft of light gets a little larger and then maybe little trickles of dust coming down onto the audience. Then it becomes obvious to him what was happening.

These fellows on the roof have pulled out a few tiles first one, two, three, then their face is looking down.

Now they're doing their very best to be careful. But even though they are being as careful as possible, every now and then one tile does slip away, falls down. The owner of the house is now just a little more concerned as the hole gets larger. Then the face peers over, they see where Jesus is standing in the room and they build the hole over toward Him. And mind you, this has got to be a big hole. According to Luke and Mark, they built a hole in that roof big enough to lower a person, kind of a 1st century elevator, they lowered a person on a stretcher, on a pallet that they were carrying him on right in front of Jesus. Now that's some scene. I'm trying to empathize with the owner of the house a little bit. All the things that are going through his mind. First when the meeting starts, pride. Then a little bit of concern over winter leaks. And then out-and-out

concern when he sees a hole and wondering what are you going to do next and then wondering about lawsuits from falling tiles on distinguished guests and also our Lord. This impresses me. You know, according to this account, Jesus Christ – and we get inside into Jesus Christ in this account like you do from every account in the New Testament, be sure to look for these little markers – Jesus doesn't stop teaching. Now does that surprise you in a way? Wouldn't you expect Him to say, "Oh, something's happening in this house, let's all adjourn out to the ocean or to the sea. I have a friend who has a boat, I'll teach from the boat." For all Jesus did that we know, He taught from Peter's boat. "Why don't we go out there, I'll teach there, it's just easy." No, no, Jesus doesn't. He stays right there. Maybe He stops teaching and just watches and everybody else is

watching as this hole gets larger and larger. And finally in front of everybody – see, I want you to see this event because that’s the way you’ve got to read Book of Mark, you’ve got to read the Book of Mark with your eyes and with your feelings – the hole is now made. These four fellows carefully lowering their friend, being sure that each person lowers the rope at the same rate of speed. Could have quite a disaster if they didn’t do that. And so they’re lowering their friend, “Okay, little bit on your side, little bit on my side, there we go, right now.” And right in front of Jesus now is lowered this man that they were trying to bring to Him. Okay, now let’s read on the account.

So they made the hole in the roof. They'd lowered him down. Now Verse 5, "When Jesus saw their faith" – boy, talk about an understatement, that is interesting – He saw their faith, "He said to the man who was paralyzed, 'my son' – from this we get the impression that this was a young man that Jesus has now presented to Him in front of Him – 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'" You know, I'm trying to get my feelings in tune with those fellows that are up on the roof. I can imagine they lowered this man right in front of Jesus and then they see Jesus look at this young man and He says, "My son, your sins are forgiven." And I can imagine the fellows on the roof said, "What did He say? What was He saying?" He says his sins are forgiven. Oh, you mean we've gone to all this trouble, we brought this fellow up in the roof, we made a hole in this tile roof, we've lowered

him down so his sins can be forgiven? He could've shouted that out the window, you know? Couldn't he just have handed a little document like Isaiah 1, which I had read this morning for us. There's lots of why that. I want to submit to you that perhaps they were a little disappointed. Would you be a little disappointed? Did they bring their friend all the way up, tear open a \$40,000 home, somebody's got to pay for that, you know. You ever tried to put tiles back? Imagine the cedar shake ceiling ripping all those cedar shakes out, lowering him down so his sins can be forgiven. I have a feeling they were disappointed.

By the way, it's interesting though that the other people standing around, the Pharisees were in the

crowd, now we meet them, they understand the theological significance of what Jesus said. I don't imagine the others did because Mark especially singles out the scribes. Now, some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak this way? It is a blasphemy. Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And you know they're right. They saw the significance of it, of what Jesus said. Jesus says to this man, "My son, your sins are forgiven." And the scribes say, "What in the world is He saying? That is a statement that only God Himself can really say." And immediately Jesus perceiving in His spirit that they thus question within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralyzed man, 'your sins are forgiven' or to say 'rise, take up your pallet and walk.'" But 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 and he went out before them all so that they were all amazed and they glorified God saying – and I love this last sentence from Mark – “We never saw anything like this.” Little understated again from Mark.

By the way, Luke puts it this way. Luke says that when the man got up and went out of the house, they were all amazed and they said – forgot what Luke said – they were all amazed and they said, “We have seen strange things today.” That’s the way Luke puts it. “We have seen strange things today.” You’ll notice in Mark and in Luke and all the writers there

tends to be an understatement rather than an overstatement of the events. You see that here too. People said we never saw anything like this. Okay. All right, I want you to interpret what's happened here in this account if I can. I want you to consider the theological significance of what's happened because the scribes were standing by, they sensed the theological significance of what was happening. I want you to notice the element of surprise. I want you to notice that Jesus Christ disappoints expectations just as much as He affirms and fulfill expectations. That's why I had the little dialogue about the four men up in the roof. I can imagine they were pretty surprised when they after all that work heard that their good friend had his sins forgiven. That's not what they came for. They came for a healing. But Jesus Christ asserts His authority in the

event. His perception of your needs are profounder than your perception of your needs. And He insists on resolving the needs that you have in the order that He sees them. And that was a disappointment to those men on the roof, I'm sure, at first. It was a shock to those who were more theologically perceptive standing in the room.

But the thing that's so exciting in this account is it in this account Jesus Christ becomes the great integrator. He refuses to treat this person as merely physical and play the role of healer, nor does He treat this person as merely moral spiritual and become therefore just the one who resolves the moral crisis, which this person is really probably fully aware of. Certainly his friends aren't. They

think his big problem is paralysis. So Jesus Christ keeps the balance between both. He doesn't relate to the person strictly morally spiritually or strictly physically, but He unites this man and makes him a whole being. I'm awfully glad He did grapple with this person's physical illness and I want to make a parenthetical comment here that Jesus Christ gave to Christians in these kinds of events the miracles of healing of our Lord gave to Christians from that moment on a profound instinct and sense of the possibility of healing. He gave us a desire to see people heal physically and planted that into the whole gospel experience of the Christian Church.

But the people when they saw this event they say, "We never saw anything like this." What are they

getting at? I believe the shock primarily is the shock that the people feel because of the totality of the event. It's what Jesus does, the totality of what He does in this event is what shocks the people and it still shocks us today. For instance – I'll show what I mean – I think some of us are quite prepared as they were in that century quite prepared for spiritual inspiration and on the other hand some of us are quite prepared for concrete physical healings. In fact, we know from Josephus and other writers of the 1st century that in both the Greek-Roman world and in the Jewish world there was a great deal of healing that was done. There were healers who healed people. But what Jesus Christ does is He unites the two. He treats this young man as a whole person, as a complex whole person, and he puts those two parts of that person's self together.

Now I want you to think of what this means in practical terms. It means that the real you, the real me, the real I, we are beloved by Jesus Christ in our totality. It means that Jesus Christ has ascertained His lordship in this account over all of life, not just the physical, not just the spiritual. But here at the very beginning of Mark we have our Lord asserting His sovereignty over the whole of life. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, Jesus Christ doesn't just become the God of the gaps who handles certain problems on the edges of the city but He becomes the Lord of the center. Therefore, no more can we just embrace either the spiritualized solutions, sometimes that's what we think we want, or secularized physical solutions, sometimes we think that's what we want. But now we see that if we're going to be disciples of

Christ we're going to discover from Him a whole solution, to the whole of our life. He cares about the whole of you.

And let me make one last theological observation. This account shows us in the deepest sense it shows us who Christ is. We're now beginning to see – and we're going to see more of these throughout the Book of Mark – we're beginning to see who He is. This is an account, brothers and sisters, that shows us the love of Jesus Christ. We're beginning to get that love in focus. The love of Christ is an event. It's what He is and what He does, it's not just words.

Now, what I want you not to do is to say, “Ah! Oh, this is such a marvelous illustration of the authority and the love of Christ.” No, this account is not an illustration of the love and authority of Christ, this is it; this is the very thing itself. This gives the authority of Christ grappling with our lives and our totality, surprising our expectations. And this is the love of Jesus Christ, finding this young man, ministering to him in a deeper way than he ever imagined, refusing just to treat him as one more person on a stretcher who wants to be healed of some disease, but treating him as a whole person, that He cared about his moral and spiritual self. Jesus Christ honored this young man and He honored his four friends too by the words He said. This is the love of Christ.

Now, I have a postscript to this account. Again, you won't find this in Mark or Luke but it just sort of ran through my mind. The text says that when the man was healed, he jumped up out of his bed and went out of the room and went home and the people were amazed and they glorified God. And I don't imagine the lecture continued. I have a feeling that ended our Lord's talk and everybody left, I'm sure. And they went running off one direction to another direction to tell what they had seen. You know it was exciting to be around Jesus Christ. And when you experience this element of His surprise, it always profoundly challenges you and they all left.

Now I want to go back to the owner of that house in my postscript, standing in the room, "Yes, goodbye,

goodbye. Thanks, thanks for the meeting. I'm glad you came. Yes, it's a wonderful way it all happened, isn't it? Yeah." And they all left and he's standing there and I can just imagine walking around in his living room looking up at the hole, shuffling his feet through some of the tiles, rolling up the rope, wondering how you repair a tile roof that has a hole in the very middle of it. You start from one end to take them all off again. What do you do, put the poles down again, oh man. I wonder if my insurance company will cover this. All these thoughts going through his head. And then that great shaft of light as the sunset begins to set in and the light comes down through the hole and you know it just occurred to me that there is something even symbolic in there. The hole is still there. What happened is that God's grace has broken through. It's kind of an embarrassing

breakthrough. It takes us by surprise and the fresh air is now just blowing through that house. Nothing will be the same again. Jesus Christ has been there. Now we're ready to really study this book and watch this Jesus Christ as He moves through the Book of Mark.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the hole on that roof. We thank you for the faith of these four friends who simply wanted very much to get this friend to Christ. They didn't know what Jesus would really do. They knew what they wanted Him to do. Lord, we thank you for the surprises that came upon everyone. Most of all, we thank you for the Lord who knows how to minister to the deepest needs we have, who knows our names, who knows how to find us. We thank you that He surprises our expectations,

that He always makes us a whole person. And Lord, we thank you now as we celebrate the Lord's Supper that in this last night you're with the disciples, that you wash their feet. You, the Lord of life, gave them signs of bread and wine, common wine that would be signs that your very life would be given in their behalf on the cross and that you would conquer death itself. Lord, we thank you for the way you not only spoke to the disciples but you did something for them and to them and gave something to them concrete in actual as well as words. And now Father as we participate in the Lord's Supper may we also share in that joyous breakthrough of your grace that heals us and makes us whole. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.