

An Exegetical Discussion of Mark 2:1–12: Lessons for Forgiveness and Healing in Contemporary Christianity in Ghana¹

Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh

Abstract

This essay discusses the relationship between forgiveness and healing in the context of Mark 2:1–12, and draws lessons for contemporary healing ministry in Ghana. Mark 2:1–12 has been interpreted by some scholars and Christian leaders to mean that they have authority to forgive sins, leading to healing. This view has been widely accepted by some contemporary prophets in Ghana. The phenomenon can hardly be in consonance with the stipulations in the gospels concerning healing. Hence, it has the potential of giving false hope to Christians and distorting the meaning of Scripture. Narrational analysis is engaged for the exegetical work, to attempt a re-interpretation of the text.

Keywords

Confession; Disease; Sickness; Forgiveness; Healing; Health; Mark 2:1-12; Sin; Prophets

About the Author²

Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh (Rev) is the Ag. Dean of the School of Theology, Perez University College, Winneba Ghana. He teaches biblical Greek and Hebrew, and biblical hermeneutics. He is a PhD Candidate (Biblical Studies) at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon Ghana. He has published in the area of biblical interpretation, missions, and pentecostalism.

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1. Introduction: The Gospel of Mark and Healing

The gospel of Mark dedicates some substantial attention to the healing miracles of Jesus. One can literally identify a healing or miracle pericope in each chapter from chapters one to ten. According to L. Williamson Jr (2009:20–21), Mark gave considerable attention to healing, casting out of demons (exorcism), and miracles, more than the other canonical gospels. Of a total of 678 verses of Mark, 198 were dedicated to miracle stories, in which a greater portion concern healing. The healings took place mainly during the Galilean ministry recorded in chapters 1–8. Although Jesus' healings may have been referred to as myth, folklore, and legendary by Bultmann and Dibelius, and equated to Hellenistic and Greco-Roman magicians of his day, there is no doubt, Jesus' healings were distinct from his contemporaries, in that the healing sought to address humans' oppressive state and liberate them from the captivity of sickness (Eck and Aarde 1993:29), without claiming any glory for himself.

In addition, the miracles of Jesus differ remarkably from legendary miracle-workers' stories. William R. Eichhorst (1968:19) argues that the healings of Jesus were not psychosomatic or 'feats of superior knowledge'. He asserts that, although physical ailment may often have psychosomatic consequences, the healings of Jesus were not psychosomatic healings. He supported his argument that (i) the miracles of Jesus were performed in public and were subjected to public scrutiny; (ii) the miracles were performed in the presence of unbelievers; (iii) Jesus' miracles were performed over a period; and (iv) the beneficiaries of Jesus' miracles went to testify to others. It indicates that the healings and exorcisms of Jesus were not hero-creating narratives, narratives designed to project a public speaker as possessing a divine power and performing miracles, which when critically investigated, show the result that no miracle took place, or that the miracle incident reported had been exaggerated.

2. Historical Context of Mark

In order to understand the pericope under review, it is significant to understand the *sitz im leben* of Mark, particularly 2:1–12. Many scholars support the assertion that the gospel was written to Roman Christians during times of persecution. Others suggest Syria, the Decapolis, Transjordan, and Galilee (Brown 2007:127). According to Eusebius (1962:64–65),

The divine word having thus been established among the Romans, the power of Simon [Peter] was soon extinguished and destroyed together

with the man. So greatly, however, did the splendor of piety enlighten the minds of Peter's hearers, that it was not sufficient to hear but once, nor to receive the unwritten doctrine of the gospel of God, but they persevered in every variety of entreaties, to solicit Mark as the companion of Peter, and whose gospel we have, that he should leave them a monument of the doctrine thus orally communicated, in writing. Nor did they cease their solicitations until they had prevailed with the man, and thus become the means of that history which is called the gospel according to Mark.

It shows that Mark, who was an interpreter of apostle Peter, was being urged by the audience of Peter in Rome to write the gospel for them in order to consolidate their faith. Hence, the gospel was written to Christians in the Roman Empire. It is not clear whether the gospel of Mark was written to the same congregation to whom Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans.

However, church tradition indicates that 'the Roman Church was "founded" by the two chief Apostles [Peter and Paul]' (Kidd 1936:18). This historical postulation has been challenged, to say that Christianity was established in Rome by Jews who might have been present at the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) (Edwards, Reasoner, and Porter 2000:1010–1018). Thus, prior to the edict of Claudius in 49 CE, Christianity was vibrant in Rome, and caused intense debate among Jews in the Empire (Bruce 1972:291-299). Although it is not clear who specifically started the Church in Rome (Caird 1955:91; Bruce 1972:291–299; Jewett 2007:19–20), it is probable that the two chief apostles addressed different church congregations within the Roman Empire. This assertion is supported by early church history that both Peter and Paul were seen founding churches in Rome (Gwatkin 1911:89). D. J. Harrington (2007:596) and Robert H. Stein (2003:68) support the Rome *sitz im leben* due to the persecutions that are evidenced in the language of Mark; hence it was written for Roman Christians during the reign of Emperor Nero in 60 CE. The Roman *sitz im leben* is again emphasized by the use of Latin words: '*legion* (5:9, 15); *denarius* (12:15); *praetorium* (15:16); *centurion* (15:39)' and the translation of Aramaic words: '*Boanerges* (3:17); *talitha cum* (5:41; 14:36); *corban* (7:11); *ephphatha* (7:34); *Bartimaeus* (10:46); *Abba* (14:36); *Golgotha* (15:22); and *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (15:34)' (Powell 2009:129). To sum up, the assertion of Roman *sitz im leben* has support from history and some semantics in the account of the gospel.

On the contrary, J. Marcus (1992:441–462) argues against the view of the early church tradition and the majority view that the gospel was written for Roman Christians. He holds that Mark

hailed from Jerusalem and that the name 'Mark' was a common name in the Roman Empire. There is no evidence to show that Mark, as mentioned in the statement of Papias, could not be John Mark; and that the Latin words in the gospel could only be attributed to a Roman 'Mark' who was familiar with Roman military terms, because the Latin words relate to military technical duties and law. He further postulates that 'Syrophoenician' (7:26) denotes a descent of a Phoenician, and the discourse in chapters 8, 11 and 13 reflect a period of the Jewish war leading to the revolt against the Romans between 66 and 74 CE. Hence the *sitz im leben* of Mark is Syria. Although Marcus' contention may have some limited evidence in the account of the gospel of Mark, it, however, lacked historical support. In addition, the Jewish war was known in the inhabited world; therefore, any allusion to it does not necessarily mean that non-Roman audiences were being addressed. In view of the overwhelming evidence for the Roman *sitz im leben*, this study adapts a Greek-speaking Roman audience, whose Christianity was predominantly Jewish. Nonetheless, it is important to state that 'the NT writers understood their intended audience not so much as individual readers but as a corporate audience of hearers' (Stein 2003:71). This suggests that even though the gospel might have been written for a Roman audience, it was not limited to them.

3. Literary Context of Mark 2:1-12

The pericope under discussion is a 'Q' document and therefore a synoptic material, which can also be found in Matthew 9:1–8 and Luke 5:17–26 with varied emphasis, similarities, and differences. W. G. Kümmel (1975:82–83) divides the gospel of Mark into five literary parts. The first part, to which the pericope for discussion belongs, begins from Mark 1:14–5:53 and is titled Jesus in Galilee or ministry in Galilee. In this part, the author of the gospel indicates the beginning and ending of a unit or subunit either by 'time (in a day), or by subject matter (controversies), or by form (parables)' (Brown 2007:128). The pericope fits into the subject matter of controversies (2:1–3:6). This can be chiastically expressed thus:

A 2:1–12 healing (the paralytic person)

B 2:13–17 dinner (in the house of Levi)

C 2:18–22 discourse about fasting and religious ascetism

B 2:23–28 dinner (heads of grain corn)

A 3:1–6 healing (the withered hand)

Mark 2:1–12 is a co-text to the cleansing of a leper (1:40–45) and the call of Levi (2:13–17). It is the first of five conflicts in a row. The uniqueness of the first conflict is that it combines healing and controversy concerning the authority of Jesus to forgive sin (Harrington 2007:601). S. H. Travis (1977:156) and F. B. Craddock (1981:43–44) aver that miracle stories take the form/pattern of, (i) the description of the illness; (ii) a statement of appeal to Jesus and his response; and (iii) the result of the miracle: (a) effect on the onlookers (b) the reaction of the healed person. It is obvious that the story in the pericope is the amalgamation of miracle story and pronouncement story. However, the miracle story will be given priority in this study.

4. Some Scholarly Interpretations of Mark 2:1-12

Before we embark on the exegetical task, it is imperative to discuss the views of scholars on the pericope. There are two views concerning the interpretation of the pericope: (i) the authority of Jesus to forgive sin and heal: Williamson Jr (2009:65–66) examined the pericope from the viewpoint of the relationship between forgiveness and physical wholeness or healing. He holds that the heart of the text is God's forgiveness and the authority of Jesus. One can be forgiven without being healed, and one can be healed without being forgiven. It is God's intervention in human predicament through Jesus Christ, who has power to forgive and heal. Similarly, F. B. Craddock posits that forgiveness is very important in the life of humans, because it leaves them off the hook of punishment and fosters reconciliation. He was quick to add that the word of forgiveness of sin did not heal the paralytic person, but the word of healing did (Craddock 1982:46). (ii) The enigma of 'son of man' as an awkward Christological designation: D. H. Juel (1990:48–49) excursively offers that the use of 'son of man' as put on the lips of Jesus is very problematic. It is an attempt to translate an Aramaic concept into Greek. Jesus' reference to himself as the 'son of man' is enigmatic. B. B. Thurston (2002:29) offers that (a) the 'son of man' was used as a circumlocution for 'I' by Jesus; (b) reference to human being; and (c) Messianic concept link to Daniel 7:13–14. F. F. Bruce (cited in Thurston 2002:29) concurs that the use of 'son of man' is Jesus' own way of referring to himself and his ministry. The views of scholars who have traced a relationship between forgiveness and healing are persuasive; however, they did not consider sin as a probable cause of sickness, as could be deduced from Jesus' procedure of healing. Obviously, the parallel nature of the text to African Traditional Religion (ATR) and contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana was also not discussed. This paper seeks to

contribute to the debate on forgiveness and healing as discussed by some scholars above, and move on to comparatively analyse it in the context of contemporary prophetic Christianity in Ghana.

5. Exegetical Outline

The pericope under discussion is outlined as follows

- Exordium verses 1–2;
- Description of illness verses 3–4;
- Jesus' response verse 5;
- The reaction of the Scribes verses 6–11; and
- Effect of the healing on the sick person and onlookers verse 12.

Exordium, verses 1–2

The exordium indicates the setting of the incident—Capernaum. Capernaum is the compound of the Aramaic *Kepar* and Nahum meaning the 'village of Nahum'. Notwithstanding, there is no evidence showing a relationship between Capernaum and the prophet Nahum. Matthew and Luke did not mention the name of the place where the incident took place; however, Luke later mentioned that Jesus was near Capernaum (Luke 7:1); it is an attempt to widen the scope of Jesus' audience, suggesting that Jesus was ministering to a varied range of people. Capernaum is located at the northwest of the 'Sea of Galilee' and is the modern-day Tell Hum (Lawrence 1977:306), a corrupted form of a famous Jewish rabbi called Tankhum. It is a fishing community, where it is traditionally believed that Peter's house was located (1:29–34) (Harrington 2007:601).

Πάλιν (again) and οἶκος (home, house) suggest that Jesus was using the house of Peter as a base to reach the whole of Galilee. The narrator used οἶκος at the opening and closing of the pericope (verses 1 and 11) to show the literary cohesion of the narrative, and also create a social location for any reader to follow towards understanding/interpreting the passage. Further, it also indicates progression in the narrative, beginning from Jesus going home or into a house, and restoring a paralysed person who might be rejected, to the care of friends back home. During the time of Jesus' ministry, the population of Capernaum was about 10,000 adult inhabitants (Coleman 1984:200–202). The narrative suggests that Jesus' ministry attracted many persons, such that the house was full. That the house was full of people to listen to him signifies

the importance that Jesus had assumed. This resonates with how famous philosophers and miracle workers during the period were sought after. For example, Simon Magus and Elymas were sought due to their ability to perform miracles (Richardson 1969:21). In that regard, miracles served during the period of Jesus as a curtain raiser, or a bait to attract the attention of people, in order to present one's philosophy or teaching

Houses vary in size and design based on the economic status and social worldview of house owners. In first-century Palestine, the average home was a one-room dwelling house measuring about 3 metres square, with minimal architectural decoration (Coleman 1984:12). Many homes had a courtyard where activities of the family took place. Courtyards were usually 'tiled and decorated with shrubs, flowers or even trees, and possibly a cistern to catch rain water' (Coleman 1984:18). The courtyard was slightly bigger than the room. In the scenario of the text, both the room and the courtyard were occupied by the audience. Using the example of the house churches in Corinth of between 40 and 50 persons (Gill 1993:323–337; Jongkind 2001:139–148), we can speculate that an average of more than 70 people were listening to Jesus in the house at Capernaum.

It is not very clear in the text how the audience of the gospel of Mark, being Roman Christians, would understand the presentation of something that took place in a Jewish setting. Probably, the narrator was attempting to re-contextualise a Jewish thought in a Roman worldview. The Romans had more elaborate homes than the Jews. They dedicated a room in the home for religious purposes. Sacrifices were offered to protective gods and spirits such as Genius and Penates (Pearson 2000:208–302). This reflects the household gods *teraphim* of Laban during the Patriarchal period (Gen. 31:19) (Ntreh 2006:8). During the Patriarchal era, many Hebrew homes had an altar to offer sacrifices where the husband and father was the priest of the family, until the institution of the priesthood by Moses, when their duties were transferred to the tribe of Levi (Wight 1969:118–120). Hence, socio-religio-theologically, the gathering of the people in the house of Peter to listen to Jesus may have been understood by the initial audience (Jews) as the religion of the Patriarchs to offer sacrifices unto Yahweh for favour, and the secondary audience (Romans) may have understood it as the worship of household gods and spirits for protection. The engagement of the worldviews of the audience by the narrator to communicate the activities of Jesus was to invite the key interest(s) of the readers/audience to the story, which may have involved cultural adaptations.

Description of Illness, verses 3-4

Four friends carried a paralytic to a publicised meeting of Jesus in the house of Peter. Probably they were late, so the room and the courtyard were filled-up. Παραλυτικός (paralytic) is ‘a disease that begins in one’s legs and proceeds quickly to the arms and neck, generally being fatal within three weeks’ (Verbrusse 2000:437). It is a neurological disease, which was very prevalent in Palestine during the time of Jesus. Often, it was as a result of an accident, tuberculosis, polio and spine defects (Crown 2008:459–464). D. N. Peterson (2006:261–272) argues that the use of παραλυτικός is ambiguous, because it does not indicate its etiology. He explains that the term refers to any form of disability, which could be paraplegia or quadriplegia, therefore παραλυτικός should be understood as being crippled. Παραλυτικός during the era of Jesus began as paraplegia—paralysis of the lower half of the human body, and graduated into quadriplegia—paralysis of both arms and both legs. It alludes to a less emphatic παραλύω used by the author of the Lukan version (see 5:17–26). Being carried by four friends clearly shows that the illness was beyond three weeks, and the narrator wanted to aesthetically present how fatal and grievous the situation had become, and which demanded divine intervention.

Wight (1969:22–24) and Coleman (1984:12–14) posit that many homes had a staircase in front of the room, in the courtyard, that gave access to the rooftop. The roof was usually flat, made of clay and straw or stones bonded with mud. Usually, there were parapet walls at the ends with spouts, to prevent people from falling off the roof, and to make a way for rainwater to run off the roof. After heavy rain, the surface of the roof was re-dressed in mud or clay to prevent leakage. The rooftop was strong enough to hold a small family dinner, and during summer some family members slept on the rooftop. Generally, Jews like to pray on high-level locations; Peter used a rooftop as a place of prayer (Acts 10:1–23).

There is no evidence in the text to indicate that the owner of the house resisted the friends of the paralytic person pulling down or damaging the roof. Neither did Jesus or his audience stop them from causing an interruption, although it is very likely that the attention of the audience would be attracted to the opening of the roof, and the pieces of dry mud or clay may drop on the audience. According to Thurston (2002:28), the removal of the roof by the four was not an act of vandalism but the expression of faith. Commenting on the Lukan version of the narrative, I. Howard Marshall similarly states that ‘the perseverance and ingenuity of the companions of the sick man are seen by Jesus as an indication

of the presence of a faith which believes in his power to such an extent that it is prepared to go to the limit in order to reach him' (Marshall 1978:213). This postulation suggests that other persons' properties could be vandalised in the process of expressing faith. Alternatively, the four friends could express faith by seeking a way through the audience to reach Jesus, which could have been easier than digging through the roof. In addition, if the four were able to get through the audience in the courtyard to the stairway in front of the room, then it would have been easier for them to force their way into the room where Jesus was, rather than to use the narrow staircase to the roof and dig through. However, it is obvious that the intention of the narrator was to praise πίστις (faith) as the highest virtue for his readers to emulate through difficult situations in issues of seeking for divine intervention. Faith is an indispensable *topos* in some miracles in the gospels. The efforts of the four directed towards the healing of the paralytic were said to have been described by Jesus as faith (Robbins 2012:62–63).

Nonetheless, since Jews would generally like to position themselves on serene mountain-tops, rooftops, and other elevated structures to pray (Exod. 19: 9–25; 1 Kgs. 19: 11–18; Matt. 3: 1–4; 4: 1–11; 17: 1–13; Mark. 1: 4–8; 3:13–19; 6: 46; 9: 2–8; Luke 4: 1–13; 6:12–16; 9: 29–38; Acts 10: 9), it can be argued that the four went up onto the roof as a sign of prayer before digging through the roof to let down the paralytic person for Jesus to heal. It is an attempt to draw on the Jewish preferred place for prayer. During the patriarchal period, Jews offered sacrifices on home altars for God's favour. Thus, the incident would have been understood by Jews as the four having carried the paralytic to Jesus for God's favour to spare the life of their friend, whilst the Roman audience would understand the incident as the four having brought the paralytic for protection against the illness becoming fatal, or even death.

Jesus' response, verse 5

In miracle discourses, usually there was an appeal to Jesus for healing, after which he would respond. In this narrative, there was no appeal to Jesus to forgive sin or heal. Probably, the tenacity of the four in digging through the roof and letting down the paralytic person had appealed to Jesus: 'when Jesus saw their faith' verse 5a. This is an enthymeme expression by the author. He attributed to Jesus that he referred to the paralytic as τέκνον. Τέκνον (child) can be used to refer to a relationship between a child and parents, an elderly son, descendants, the relationship between a disciple and a master, or as an address. In this context, it is used as an

address (Braumann 1975:285–287; Verbrusse 2000:558), to show affection (Harrington 2002:602). This is in agreement with the use of οἶκος in the opening and closing of the pericope, because one experiences unconditional affection in οἶκος.

Both Matthew and Mark used τέκνον as the opening word of address by Jesus to the paralytic. Conversely, Luke used ἄνθρωπος, a more universal term to advance the all-inclusiveness of his gospel. Jesus' initial remarks for healing: 'your sins are forgiven' is unusual with healing narratives. Usually, the demonstration of faith follows the healing command or words from Jesus. The remark of forgiveness of sins suggests that the paralysis was caused by the paralytic person's or his parents' sin(s). This assertion is substantiated in John 9:2, when the disciples asked Jesus if the blindness of the man was caused by his sins or the sins of his parents. In Jewish tradition, the consequences of sin are either sickness, death, or general misfortune (Verbrusse 2000:38). In the Greco-Roman setting, sickness can be caused by demonic activities (Kotansky 2000:269–273), and sin is 'intellectually oriented' (Günther 1975:577–585). In other words, intellectual deficiency leads to uninformed choices; these can cause sickness, which may culminate in sicknesses or misfortunes. It is obvious that the author was appealing to the Jewish concept of the consequences of sin. Unfortunately, the sin of the paralytic person had not been mentioned, neither did Mark provide a clue to indicate that the man was aware that the illness was caused by sin. It is probable that the author left out the particular sin committed because, technically, Jesus was not a priest to take offerings for ritual forgiveness.

Ἀφίημι (let go, forgive, release) is used to refer to forgiveness by humans on behalf of God, whilst its cognates ἄφεσις and πάρεσις refer to forgiveness directly by God (Bultmann 1965:509–512), through sacrifices or any laid-down rules or requirements for forgiveness and cleansing. Ἀφίημι in classical Greek and the New Testament 'denotes the voluntary release of a person or thing over which one has legal or actual control' (Verbrusse 2000:80–81). This gives justification for the author's statement attributed to Jesus that he has ἐξουσία (authority) to forgive sin. Ἀφίημι is used in a religious sense of forgiveness. In a Jewish religious milieu, there is a link between sin and sickness, and forgiveness and healing (Deut. 28:27; 2 Sam. 12:13; Pss 41:4; 107:17–18; 103:3; Isa. 38:17; 57:18–19; Jas. 5:15).

The paralytic person's sins would have had to be forgiven in the Temple after elaborate sacrifice (Lev. 9:2ff) led by a priest. Be that as it may, the author was presenting Jesus to his audience as a

priest who forgives sin leading to recovery/healing without cultic ritual. Theologically, Jesus' forgiveness in a house and without cultic rituals suggests that he was inaugurating a new era or covenant, which was misconstrued by the Scribes as lawlessness and blasphemy. The forgiveness of sins believed to have been caused by illness reflects Old Testament stipulations and Jewish tradition. According to the Talmud, sickness caused by sin must be forgiven to the letter before a person could be healed (*Nedarim* 41a) (cited in Thurston 2002:28). This justifies the reason why the paralytic person would have to be first forgiven before healing. Mark was appealing to the Talmud for support for Jesus' remarks.

H. Vorländer (1975:697–703) states that forgiveness is composed of 'making of no account the sin which has been committed ... and the acceptance of the sinner ... deliverance from the dominion of the powers [of evil] and transference to the kingdom of Christ, to whom a new life is given and with it the promise of eternal life'. The view of Vorländer combines Jewish understanding of the relationship between forgiveness and healing, and the Greco-Roman concept of demonic causality of sickness. Thus, both the Jewish and Greco-Roman audience may have understood Jesus as initiating a system to help the paralytic person recover from the illness. However, one may argue that since a particular sin was not mentioned, Jesus was referring to the digging through the roof by the 'four' friends as sin, because it was usually thieves who dig through roofs to steal (Matt. 6:19; 24:43 ARV margin). Although the breaking of the roof was undertaken by the four for the benefit of the paralysed man, the argument of Vorländer can hardly be sustained, because the forgiveness of sins was directed at the paralytic not the 'four' friends, who essentially broke the roof.

The Reaction of the Scribes, verses 6-11

Jesus' statement of forgiveness triggered a reaction from the scribes in the audience. Scribes were trained as the primary interpreters of the law. They knew that it was only God who could absolutely forgive sins, and the priest was the only mandatory religious officer who performed rituals for forgiveness of sins. Both Mark and Matthew mentioned scribes, only Luke mentioned scribes and Pharisees suggesting that Luke was zeroing in on scribes who were members of the Pharisee sect. It is an attempt to give details. A comparative statement in Mark 1:22 shows that Jesus' teachings have more authority than the scribes. Juel (1992:46–47) argues that the authority of the scribes is derived from the law whilst that of Jesus is from himself. This was considered by the scribes as blasphemy, which could be punished by death, because it was equivalent to taking the place of God. Juel

further postulates that the passive nature of ἀφίενται shows that Jesus was declaring what God had done by forgiving the paralytic person. Therefore, it should be interpreted as ‘God forgives your sins.’ Hence the remark of the scribes that only God can forgive sins vividly reflects Jesus’ declaration of God’s forgiveness.

Consequently, Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic based on his special relationship with God, as his representative (see Thurston 2002:29; and Verbrusse 2000:571). In effect, the statement of forgiveness by Jesus to the paralytic is not blasphemous. Jesus rhetorically asked the scribes: what is easier than saying that one’s sins are forgiven? This is an indication that Jesus was willing to forgive sins as much as possible and on every occasion. It is significant to note that Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic without cultic requirements or sacrifice, probably because he was not a priest.

Upon the forgiveness remark, Jesus referred to himself as the ‘son of man’ who has authority to forgive sins. The reference to Jesus as the ‘son of man’ is an enigmatic Greek expression (Juel 1992:47). The title ‘son of man’ has generated many speculative comments among scholars. Thurston (2002:29) offers that there are three opinions concerning this issue: (i) Jesus used ‘son of man’ as a euphemism for himself; (ii) as representing humans in general; and (iii) as a Messianic title reflecting Daniel 7:13–14. He added that the title had no significance for the audience, but Jesus used it to indicate that he had authority to do what he did. Harrington (2007:602) holds that the phrase occurred in 2:28; 8:31, 38; 9:9, 12, 31; 10: 33, 45; 13:26; 13:21, 41, 62, but each has a unique function. In this context, it denotes Jesus as the representative of God. Bruce (1986:66) complements the views of Harrington when he states that ‘... “the son of man” was Jesus’ way of referring to himself and his mission...’. However, the early church generally understood it to mean the humanity of Jesus (Verbrusse 2000:571). In view of the various assertions concerning ‘the son of man’ and the affectionate opening word to the paralytic as τέκνον, it can be argued that the narrator presented Jesus as the father of all humans, who forgives and heals with the condition of faith, not sacrifices and offerings.

Effect of the Healing on the Sick Person and Onlookers, verse 12

The expression of onlookers is the climax of many miracle stories. At the command of Jesus, the paralytic took his mat and began to walk. This is proof that the paralytic’s sin had been forgiven (Thurston 2002:28). All were amazed at the healing of the paralytic. Harrington avers that ‘all’ includes the scribes, and the

amazement was about both Jesus' authority to forgive sin and the healing event (Harrington 2007:602). However, in view of the opposition of the Scribe to Jesus, πάντων (all) was used as illustrative to emphasise the healing event, and show that an appreciable number of persons present were amazed. The glorification of God by the audience suggests that they were religious, and that the healing was the intervention of God in human suffering and illness.

To sum up the analysis of the pericope, the text is a narrative that reports events in order to keep it flowing with embellished scenes. The narrator was presenting Jesus as someone who had more power than the priest to forgive sins and heal the sick. He used the Jewish patriarchal system of domestic worship and praying on mountain-tops and high places, and the Roman domestic worship system to make his argument. The enthymeme attributed to Jesus having knowledge concerning the discussion in the heart of the scribes contributes to the issue of controversies concerning the miracles of Jesus and the Law (Mark 1:40–45; 3:1–6). The intention of the narrator as presented in verse 12 is to draw the readers to God through faith in Jesus, who is God's representative to forgive sins and bring recovery to the ailing in society. It is also significant to mention that the worldview of the audience was not left out in the exercise. Faith rather than religious rituals was used as a praised virtue to be emulated by the readers.

6. Healing Practices by Contemporary Prophetic Ministries in Ghana: The Case of Reverend Obofour

Faith healing or divine healing is emphasised by Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries in Ghana. The Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries organise healing crusades or revival programmes to pray for sick persons to be healed. F. M. Amevenku (2015:98–99) reasons that, due to lack of medical facilities, personnel and a weak National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), religious solutions for healing are highly patronised. Therefore, for the Ghanaian Christian the gospel must address issues of health, then it can be considered as the word of God. Generally, Pentecostals anoint the sick with olive oil, lay hands on them and pray for healing (Ajibade 2008:166; Gifford 1998:166–169) without a diagnosis to ascertain the cause of the sickness. The emergence of prophetism and neo-prophetism has introduced systems of diagnosing sicknesses prior to healing.

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2002:43) avers that 'in the context of healing, prophecy helps in diagnosis and for the ailing African, who is familiar with the methods of the traditional diviner,

prophecy is important for establishing the *cause* of one's condition'. Demons, witches, ancestors, one's neighbours, relatives, and sin were mostly blamed as the cause of sicknesses.

Recently, the paradigm has been gradually changing. Reverend Obofour,³ General Overseer of Anointed Palace Chapel (APC) located at Tabora Star Junction, Accra and owner of Sweet Television on Multi-Television Channel, often diagnoses HIV/AIDS, hypertension, diabetes and other fatal illnesses as a result of sin. Members are asked to confess their sins to him (Rev. Obofour) to forgive them before they can be healed. He does not point them to a particular sin committed, but insists that they confess in the presence of all the members present. These confessions are broadcast on Sweet Television for the general public to view. Forcing vulnerable, sick persons to confess to sin without pointing to the particular sin that caused the sickness is a very frustrating experience, which is evident on the faces of the sick who go to APC for healing. Most often, Reverend Obofour asks the sick person to describe how the sin was committed; those who have committed fornication and adultery describe, in public, how they had sex prior to or in an extramarital relationship. This does not foster reconciliation between the sinner/sick person and the spouse, because some of the spouses get to hear of it for the first time and feel deceived. In the traditional Ghanaian context, it is witches who are being forced to confess their sins publicly as a way of disgracing them and making the public aware of their evil deeds. This is because witches were considered as the cause of many misfortunes and sicknesses in society (Quarcoopome 1987:151).

3 The author tried to find his full name, but many of the members and Church workers reached claimed that they do not know his full name.

7. Comparative Analysis

Analysing sin, sickness, forgiveness, and healing in Mark 2:1–12, ATR, and contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana, I posit that, although seekers/members testify of healing after confession and being forgiven by Reverend Obofour, his approach does not reflect sin, sickness, forgiveness and healing as in Mark 2: 1–12 as he may claim. It is an innovation by contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana that must not be upheld, because it has the potential of publicly disgracing sick persons and blurring the meaning of Scripture. After confession of sins to Reverend Obofour, he often responds 'I forgive you'. Mark 2:1–12 did not suggest that Jesus had given his power to prophets or pastors to forgive sins committed against God, although they may facilitate the forgiveness process for God's intervention. Hence, for a prophet or pastor to act as Jesus, the Messiah, to forgive sins is usurping the

power of Jesus, which is highly deceptive. Meanwhile, Reverend Obofour does not point to a particular sin that caused the sickness. It is left to the victim to speculate.

The text did not show that Jesus mentioned a particular sin that caused the paralysis. Hence, there was no need for confession. Confession should be a personal private activity between God and the sinner. It is not the forgiveness statement of Jesus that triggered the healing of the paralytic, but the faith of his 'four' friends (Robbins 2012:62–63). Therefore, any healing event by a contemporary prophet purportedly based on Mark 2:1–12 but neglects the *topos* of faith is highly questionable.

In ATR, where it has been spiritually diagnosed that a person's illness was caused by a sin, that particular sin is mentioned by the priest for the victim's elaborate confession. Confession, forgiveness, and consequent healing of sick person(s) by Reverend Obofour resonates with some aspects of confession in ATR, where witches confess their wicked deeds against members of the community, which does not lead to healing but to the disgrace of the individual witch. But when the witch is sick and the only means of healing is through confession, then he/she will be healed through ritual means. Mark 2:1–12 did not suggest that the paralysis was as a result of personal sin.

The situation cannot be equated with penance. Penance was even done in private, that is, between the priest and the candidate (Christian) who was not necessarily sick. The aim of penance is to confess sin(s) that a Christian has just committed in order to have a good relationship with God. The goal is not necessarily to be healed of physical sickness. On the contrary, confession at Reverend Obofour's Church is done in public in order to receive healing. The challenge is that sins that do not result in sickness will not be confessed. Hence, the proliferation of nominal Christians in Ghana.

The phenomenon is due to poor biblical interpretation among contemporary prophetic churches in Ghana. Usually, any narrative that seems to have some resemblances with/to African religio-cultural milieu is expounded without recourse to its historical context and the goal of the narrator. This is more often referred to as being biblical. I state that being biblical or Bible-based is not merely choosing a passage to justify what one intends to do: a kind of proof-texting. It is to study the text in its historical context and allow the meaning of the text to determine what to do or not do. The text under study made reference to worldviews, but the intention of the narrator was to transform them to conform to faith in Jesus. The phenomenon raises issues of biblical interpretation

in the African context. There is the need to move from the popular interpretation to a more structured form of interpretation (Ossom-Batsa 2007:92–93) that exposes the historical underpinnings of a text to allow for appropriate contextualisation. I am not arguing that forgiveness does not lead to healing. Forgiveness repairs the relationship between a Christian and God, which may lead to healing. However, the process used must be gospel based.

8. Conclusion

During the time of Jesus in Palestine, religious meetings were usually held in the synagogues and the Temple. Acclaimed rabbis in the communities led teaching services at the synagogues whilst the priests officiated in the Temple. In this incident, Jesus was ministering in a house that was not set apart for religious functions. However, the inserting of a pronouncement story in a typical miracle story suggests that Jesus might have been preaching or teaching about forgiveness. It suggests that forgiveness must not be limited to only cultic rituals in the Temple, conducted by priests but it should be expressed in social and cultural settings. To the Jewish audience, Jesus might have been perceived as restoring the worship of Yahweh during the Patriarchal periods where altars were built in homes for sacrifices to Yahweh for favour. To the Roman audience, Jesus might have been using the system of religion at home where sacrifices were offered to the spirits and gods for protection.

The healing of the paralytic person demonstrates a thaumaturgical approach. It is an approach that deals with ‘response [that] focuses on the concern of individual people to receive special dispensations for relief from present and specific ills’ (Tate 2012:415). Jesus’ procedure is to first forgive the paralytic before healing him. This procedure has some similarities in ATR and some contemporary prophetic procedure of healing. However, the contemporary prophetic procedure of healing has a closer affinity to ATR rather than to Mark 2:1-12. This misinterpretation is due to poor biblical hermeneutics by some contemporary prophetic ministries in Ghana. The situation can be resolved by theological education of leaders of contemporary prophetic ministries and the willingness of mainstream theological seminaries/institutions to design programmes that welcome and respond to the theological needs of contemporary prophetic ministries. In addition, contemporary prophetic churches ought to complement the efforts of State institutions and health services/agencies in educating Ghanaians on preventing sicknesses.

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