

Does Jesus Claim to Be God in Mark? And My Former Converts. Mailbag March 19, 2017

Two questions in this week's Mailbag, one about whether Jesus was claiming to be God in the Gospel of Mark, and the other about my personal life: whether today, as an agnostic, I ever meet people I once converted when I was a gung-ho conservative evangelical Christian. If you have a question you would like me to address, ask away!

QUESTION:

Dr. Ehrman, the other day I was discussing with an Evangelical pastor that the sayings of Jesus in which he claimed to be God were only found in the Gospel of John. He had me read Mark 2:5-7. This is the verse where Jesus heals a paralytic and says to him "Son, your sins are forgiven". The religious leaders say "Who can forgive sins but God alone". The pastor said that this shows that even in the earliest Gospel Mark, Jesus claimed to be God. I wasn't sure how to respond but told him that there was still a big difference in the comparison. Do you have any thoughts or comments in which I could have responded to this pastor?

RESPONSE:

Yes this is a very interesting passage, and one that, in my opinion, regularly gets misread. First some background: in the Gospel of *John* Jesus does, repeatedly, claim a divine status for himself: "I and the Father are One," "Before Abraham was, I AM," "If you have seen me you

have seen the Father," and so on. These sayings are found only in John, not in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That seems very odd if the historical Jesus really went around making such claims about himself. How could the three earliest Gospels (and their sources: Q, M, and L!) not say anything about Jesus making such radical claims if they knew he made them. Wouldn't that be the most significant thing to say about Jesus, that he called himself God? Did all of them simply decide not to *mention* that part?

That seems unlikely. It is far more likely that they had never heard of such a thing, and so didn't report it.

But what about Mark 2, where Jesus heals the paralytic? He first pronounces that man's sins forgiven, the opponents claim that only God can forgive sins, and Jesus responds by asking whether it is easier to pronounce a person forgiven or to tell a paralytic to be healed, take up his pallet, and walk. Obviously the former is easier, since there is no way of seeing if the words had their stated effect. Then Jesus says "But so that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" ... and he orders the man to take up his pallet and walk. And he does so.

Doesn't this show that Jesus is claiming to be God?

Not necessarily...

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