

## STRUCTURE

### Plot Structure

As noted earlier, vv.1-12 constitute a controversy story within a healing story. For this reason, the text should be divided into three sections: Healing (a), Controversy, Healing (b)

- A) (v.1) Jesus returns to Capernaum
  - a. (v.2) There is a gathering around the house Jesus is at.
- B) (v.3a) A group comes with a paralyzed man
  - a. (v.3b) 4 people carrying him
  - b. (v.4a-b) Dig a hole in the roof
  - c. (v.4c) Lower the friend
- C) (v.5a) [Authorial transition] Jesus sees their faith.
- D) (v.5b) Jesus forgives the man's sins.
  - a. (v.6-7) The scribes questions Jesus' authority to forgive sins.
  - b. (v.8a) Jesus discerns the hearts of Scribes.
  - c. (v.8b-9) Jesus questions the scribes.
  - d. (v.10) [Authorial transition] Jesus assigns authority to the "Son of Man"
- E) (v.11) Jesus heals the man
  - a. (v.12) Everyone is amazed and glorifies God.

### Text Criticism

Mark 2:1-12 is most likely the combination of a healing story and a controversy story. Mark 2:1-4 constitutes the first half of the miracle story, but instead of offering the customary touch or word of healing in v.5, the story diverts to a pronouncement from vv.5-10. The miracle story resumes in vv.11-12. "Rudolph Bultmann has argued (*History of the Synoptic Tradition* 12-39) that almost all these [controversy] dialogues are artificially constructed and reflect post-Easter disputes between the followers of Jesus and other Jewish groups..." (Sacra Pagina, 98) It is likely, therefore, that vv.1-12 do not constitute an original story, rather a compilation of stories, reflective of the community's circumstances.

## CONTENT

### Vocabulary

The language of the text is generally very clear, with only a few words with significance beyond the literal reading.

- 1) "Home" – "oikos" meaning "house; edifice" [3875] (Mark 2:1)
  - a. Probably refers to the house of Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:29)
- 2) "Authority" – "exousia" meaning "authority, power; the area or sphere of jurisdiction" [2026] (Mark 2:10)
- 3) "The word" – "logos" meaning "word, spoken or written" [3364] (Mark 2:2b)
  - a. The same word is used in John 1 to emphasize Jesus' divinity.
  - b. In Mark, "logos" is used to refer to words spoken by Jesus, as well as words spoken about Jesus.
- 4) "Paralyzed man" – Paralysis was thought to be due to sin.
  - a. Lameness/paralysis constituted a form of uncleanness in the OT (Lev 21:18)
  - b. At Qumran, "the lame, the blind, and the crippled" were not eligible for full participation in the community.
  - c. Reversal – restoration of the "lame" (Isa 35:6; Jer 31:8; Mic 4:7; Zeph 3:19); blessings of the kingdom (Luke 7:22 = Matt 11:5, Luke 14:13, 21)

- 5) “Sin” (v.5)
  - a. Not so much a reference to a specific act, rather a reference to the disordering of things—the result of a corrupted creation. “Sins” (always plural, never singular as with Paul) (Interpretation, 65)
- 6) “This fellow” (v.7)
  - a. “houtos” – Used in a derogatory sense.
- 7) “Son of Man” (v.10)
  - a. Possibly an authorial aside commenting on the Christology of the community.
  - b. The phrase has connotations of Jesus as an eschatological figure (Daniel 7:14) as well as a representative of authority available to all human beings.
- 8) “He said to the paralytic” (vv.5b, 10)
  - a. Repeated phrase that forms an inclusio between vv.5b and 11.
  - b. The purpose of the repeated phrase is to draw the audience’s attention to the content between vv.5b and 10.

### **Grammar and Syntax**

Mark is widely considered to be the most unpolished of the three synoptic gospels. For that reason, one expects to find awkward phrasing and language within Mark’s Gospel. In this case, however, only v.10 is noteworthy for its awkwardness.

“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth...” is a difficult phrase and is considered by some to have been inserted by the author into the story. Nevertheless, the significance of the phrase is not hidden: Jesus is the “Son of Man” and has authority on earth to forgive sins.

### **Literary Context**

The controversy story from vv.5-10 follows a pattern specific to controversy stories in the synoptic gospels:

- 1) Form of controversy stories
  - a. An action by Jesus/Disciples (2:5)
  - b. An objection to this action (2:7)
  - c. A reposit by Jesus—often in the form of a counter question (2:9)
  - d. A saying that is the real point of the dialogue (2:10)

In addition, the shape of passage in vv. 1-12 mirrors the development of the whole Gospel of Mark:

- 2) The story mirrors the major themes of the Markan Gospel
  - a. Faith is the proper response to Jesus (1:15)
  - b. Faith breaks through boundaries (1:16-45)
  - c. Jesus is powerful in word and work (1:28)
  - d. This power evokes opposition and eventually death (14:64)

Lastly, vv.1-12 serve as the last in a series of 5 healing stories, and the first in a series of 5 controversy stories. Thereby, this passage marks a significant transition in the Markan Gospel.

### **Formal Context**

The text is both a miracle story (healing) and a controversy story.

### **Redaction Criticism**

- e. “The roof” – different in Matthew and Luke
  - i. Matthew – no mention of roof or lowering the man (Matt 9:2)
  - ii. Luke – the roof has tiles (altered for a more urban/Hellenized audience) (Luke 5:19)
- f. “In 1:45, the narrative said that Jesus could not go about openly in the towns, but that is exactly what he does in 2:1. These tensions indicate that the juxtaposition of 1:14-45 and 2:1-3:6 is determined by criteria other than chronological sequence.” (composition analysis) (Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark*, 60-62.)
- g. Luke – Scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5:21)

- h. “Forgive sins” – Matthew omits defining the blasphemy (v.3b)
- i. Matthew & Luke- the man goes home (obeys Jesus’ command)—disobeys Jesus in Mark. (Matt 9:7; Luke 5:25)
- j. Matthew – Clearly states this authority has been given to humans (v.8)

### **Historical Context**

The Markan Gospel, composed at a time of great turmoil and persecution for Jews and Christians within the Roman Empire, demonstrates the challenges facing this community. As previously noted, the controversy stories most likely follow a formula that gives evidence to struggles and tensions between the early Christian Church and other Jewish sects. One might interpret the story, then, as the Markan community’s way of beginning to define its Christology and to counter accusations from leaders of other Jewish sects about the community’s “blasphemy.”

### **Canonical Context**

An understanding of OT passages regarding the effects of sin can enlighten the reader as to the condition of the paralyzed man and Jesus’ forgiveness of his sins. As noted on p. 94 of the Sacra Pagina Commentary on Mark, “Both communities (see Exod 20:20; 32:31) and individuals (Lev 4:3; 1 Sam 12:23; 2 Sam 12:13; Pss 32:5; 38:18) can sin. Though sin can be personal rebellion or disobedience, biblical sin is more an objective reality (what should not be or happen) than the modern individualistic and subjective notion of sin.” Jesus’ forgiveness of the paralyzed man’s sin is the central event of this passage. This forgiveness not only exercises the authority Jesus prescribes to himself for the forgiveness of sins, it restores the paralyzed man to his community.

## **Themes**

### **Exegetical Focus**

In this passage, two themes emerge as central. First, *faith results in miracles*. “In these Markan miracles faith is not so much a precondition for healing (see 1:34; 6:5-6), but rather it dramatizes the willingness of suffering people to break through the physical and social boundaries in order to approach Jesus.” (Sacra Pagina, 98) Second, Jesus has great authority on earth, and that authority is not exercised through powerful dominion over the weak or in opposition to the powerful, rather Jesus’ authority is used in service to others, the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of marginalized members of society.

Clearly, the Markan community faced great opposition both from the Roman Empire and the other Jewish sects. Indeed, this passage most likely spells out one of the greatest disputes between their Christology and claim of Jesus’ authority to forgive sins and the Jewish authorities’ accusation of blasphemy.

### **Exposition**

Clearly, there is great significance in the role the author allows the friends of the paralytic to play in his healing. Indeed, it is their faith that prompts Jesus to restore the man. This is a powerful message for the Church and me, as we consider how God desires to use our active service to bring about healing and restoration in the world.

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