

Mark 2:1-12—An Example

“Who Can Forgive Sins but God Alone?”

1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. **2** And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. **3** And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. **4** And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. **5** And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” **6** Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, **7** “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” **8** And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? **9** Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? **10** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— **11** “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” **12** And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

Four Things to look for when Studying the Bible—the PLACE, the PLAN, the PARTICULARS, and the POINT.¹

Illustrated by Mark 2:1-12,
Jesus Forgives the Paralytic's Sin

I. The **PLACE** of Mark 2:1-12

Mark 1:1-15 **prepares** for Jesus' ministry and **introduces** his message. In 1:16-45 he increasingly reveals his authority and his popularity grows to a **climax** in 1:45. However, 2:1-12 is a **turning point** from popularity to opposition. Here Jesus makes the divine nature of his claim to authority clear and thus challenges the religious establishment. In 2:1-3:6 the absolute and thus offensive (to the authorities) nature of his claim is made ever clearer (**progression**) and the opposition to him **climaxes** in the plot to kill him (3:1-6). This opposition from the authorities in 2:1-3:6 **contrasts** sharply with his popularity among the people in 1:16-45. Thus 2:1-12 is important in understanding the nature of Jesus' claim to authority that evoked such opposition.



II. The **PLAN** of Mark 2:1-12

Vv. 1-4 **prepare** for Jesus' **crucial** statement to the paralytic in v. 5, which is **questioned** or **challenged** by the scribes in vv. 6, 7 and **substantiated** by Jesus in vv. 8-12. V. 12 is the **climax** of His substantiation and conclusion of the passage.



Vv. 1, 2 set the scene of the crowded house and show why the four men, unable to enter, had to open the roof in vv. 3, 4 in order to bring the paralytic to Jesus. Their opening the roof sets the stage for v. 5. In v. 5 Jesus responds to their cry for help but in a surprising way—by forgiving instead of healing. This is the **turning point** which introduces the main subject of debate in this passage—Jesus' authority to forgive sin.

In vv. 6, 7 the scribes challenge Jesus' authority to forgive with their unspoken **question**. Their challenge shows how important this issue is to them and helps us to understand its significance.

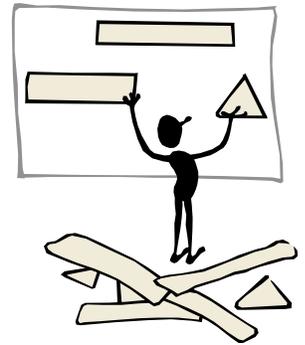
¹ This material presented by Gareth Lee Cockerill at MTI, June 28, 2011. © Gareth Lee Cockerill

Jesus brings their objection into the open with His **question** in v. 8 and then counters it with a **question** of His own in v. 9. With this second question He **substantiates** His authority to forgive. He implies that it is just as easy for Him to forgive as it is for Him to heal. In vv. 10, 11 He then demonstrates how easy it is for Him to heal—the paralytic is healed instantly by His mere word

In v. 12 the tension reaches its resolution by the lame man being healed. The **contrast** between the way he entered and the way he left emphasizes Jesus' authority. The crowd's glorifying God at this healing **contrasts** with the scribes rejection of Jesus' (see vv. 6, 7) and with the faith of the four and the paralytic (vv. 3-4).

II. The *PARTICULARS* of Mark 2:1-12

Capernaum: Jesus has returned to the place where he cast out the evil spirit at the inauguration of his ministry. It appears here that we are at a new beginning point. This seems to be his headquarters in Galilee, where he is “at home.” Due to his recent popularity (1:40-45), it is a bit surprising that he is back in a town. This helps to explain why the four could not get in.



preaching the word: This passage must be seen within the context of the preaching ministry of Jesus begun in 1:14-15, destined for other cities (1:36-39) but exercised here in Capernaum. Jesus' claim to divine authority through forgiving sins and its substantiation are integral to his preaching, the message he came to proclaim, i.e. the kingdom of God overthrowing the power of evil.

no more room: The result of Jesus reputation as indicated by the crowds approval and finally by his having to stay out in desolate places lest he be mobbed (1:45). As soon as he enters this town he is swamped with people. Before he healed many at the “door” (1:33). Now there is no room, even at the door. This situation sets the stage in this passage for the entrance of the paralytic. Because there was no room, those who brought him had to resort to the unusual action of breaking a hole in the roof.

Jesus saw their Faith Faith of the four and possibly the paralytic as well. This is obviously faith that Jesus can heal this man. Jesus saw this faith by their actions—their determination to bring the paralytic to Jesus even if it meant braking a hole in the roof. Lack of room serves to highlight the extent of their faith. This faith becomes the occasion for Jesus' action.

Paralytic: This person was completely helpless, as indicated by his being carried by four others. His need of Jesus was obvious and extreme. Thus their determination to bring him to Jesus. The healing of a paralytic was very visible. Thus its effectiveness in demonstrating Jesus’ authority to do something that was invisible—i.e. forgive sins.

Son, your sins are forgiven: Jesus is the one who forgives the paralytic’s sin. This was a surprising action. The paralytic was expecting healing. The challenge of the scribes shows us the significance of this action. Jesus is claiming a prerogative that belongs only to God. The authority over evil claimed in 1:21-28 and demonstrated in his teaching and his miracles is now clarified. It is God’s own authority exercised to forgive people and release them from sin. Jesus shows his compassion on this man by calling him “Son.” Thus Jesus has a divine claim on people’s loyalty. No wonder the scribes were troubled.

Which is easier? . . . Authority: Jesus demonstrates this divine authority to forgive sin by healing the paralytic. His question implies that it is as easy for him to say “your sins are forgiven” as to say “take up your bed and walk.” He puts the scribes in a quandary. He claims to be able to forgive. He can obviously heal a paralytic with a mere word.

IV. The ***POINT*** of Mark 2:1-12

Jesus claims to have authority by forgiving sins here and now. This claim is a claim to divine authority (explanation, vv. 6-7).² The magnitude of this claim is shown by the scribes accusing Jesus of blasphemy (explanation/challenge, vv. 6-7). He proves His authority to forgive by healing the lame man and implying that it is all one to Him--by merely speaking a word He can heal and by merely speaking a word He can forgive. Jesus’ ability to heal with such authority and His claim to forgive with such authority forced the scribes to choose—either He was of God or of the devil (substantiation, vv. 8-12). People reacted to this claim in different ways (contrast). The scribes rejected Jesus and used their correct theology to rationalize their rejection. The crowds were amazed, but their involvement seems superficial. The four men who brought the paralytic had faith and were rewarded for it. The paralytic, who came in complete helplessness, received from Jesus not only healing but forgiveness.



² Alternatively, one might include this significance of Jesus’ claim in the main point statement itself. Then the opening would read as follows: “*Jesus claims to have divine authority by forgiving sins here and now.* (turning point, v. 5; explanation, vv. 6-7). The magnitude of this claim . . .” etc.