



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

How Dare He!?

David Anguish

An often cited argument by those who reject orthodox claims of Jesus’s deity alleges that they were later attributions derived from John’s “turn[ing] the merely human prophet of the three Synoptics into the figure Christians worship as God incarnate in human life.” But this alleged “contrast is certainly too stark” (Bauckham 2011, 93). To claim it is to “overestimate the exalted picture of Jesus” in John and to “underestimate the portrait of Jesus in the Synoptics” (Blomberg 1995, 38). It is also to overlook that what the gospel writers claim is that Jesus embodied the God of Israel’s intention to visit his people and do certain things (Wright 2012, 84). Mark’s general emphasis and depiction of specific actions and statements by Jesus illustrate both ideas.

He says right off that he is presenting “the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God” (Mark 1.1 NIV). As he tells the story, he repeatedly shows Jesus as a teacher and doer of deeds who operated with an authority others did not have. The word “authority” (ἐξουσία, *exousia*) in connection with Jesus appears several times in all the gospels, but when its use is examined with respect to the length of the writings, Mark uses it slightly more often, 10 times in 11,303 Greek words (UBS5 text), .88 uses per 1,000 words. Luke (16x; 19,481; .82 per 1,000) uses it nearly as often; Matthew (10x; 18,346; .55 per 1,000) and John (8x; 15,631; .51 per 1,000) use it slightly less (search results from Accordance Bible software).

In chapter 1, Mark refers to Jesus’s authority twice in one episode. People in the Capernaum synagogue “were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had *authority*, not as the teachers of the law” (1.22 NIV). When he was interrupted by a man with an unclean spirit which he then exorcised, the people “were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with *authority*! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him’” (1.27). We read similar statements about his authority to cast out demons (3.15), the authority he granted to the twelve over unclean spirits (6.7), his response to Jewish leaders who questioned his actions (11.28–29, 33), and in his analogy of a man leaving his servants “in charge” (*exousia*) as he urged his followers to remain awake in preparation for the coming of the Son of Man (13.34; cf. v. 26).¹

But do claims of superior authority equate to professions of deity? Mark 2, where *exousia* also appears, provides insight into what Mark intends. After a period of time in which Jesus healed, preached, and cast out demons “throughout all Galilee” (1.39), he returns to Capernaum. When news of his return gets out, so many gather at the house “that there was no more room, not even at the door” (2.2). Displaying a faith that Jesus notices (v. 5), four men bring a paralytic to be

healed and remove the roof of the house so they can get him close to Jesus. Having read multiple references to healing in Mark 1.23–42, we expect that this will be another occasion where Jesus heals the man. But we are surprised when he tells the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (2.5). His statement becomes the focal point of the passage’s controversy. Onlooking teachers of the law immediately recognize that Jesus has crossed a line. “Why does this man speak like that?” they ask. “He is blaspheming! *Who can forgive sins but God alone?*” (2.7). Their reasoning was correct: in the ultimate sense, only God *can* forgive sins; Jesus, therefore, must be claiming a prerogative no man has the right to assume.

Notice that, as the text presents the event, the paralytic was not someone Jesus had ever met. Thus, there is no record that he had ever personally sinned against the man Jesus. For Jesus as merely a man to forgive him would be akin to me forgiving someone for a personal offense against you. Significantly, Jesus did not dispute their conclusion, but he did reject their preconception about him. He *was* assuming the authority to forgive and his ability to heal the man proved he had that authority.

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? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has *authority [exousia]* on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (2.8–11).

Mark’s conclusion to the episode is telling. The paralytic “immediately” (a word Mark notably uses often) picks up his mat and walks out. And “they were all amazed and *glorified God*, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” (v. 12).

As Larry Hurtado observes, it is unlikely that the people who made that statement were expressing a “fully intelligent faith.” But it is clear that Mark intended his report of their response “to underline the unprecedented authority shown by Jesus in the healing and in the forgiving of sins, so that the reader is forced to choose between seeing Jesus as simply audacious or as truly acting with *divine* authority” (Hurtado 1989, 38, 42; emphasis mine).

Jesus’s statement in Mark 2.10 is not as direct as his declaration in John 14.9: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” But, within the context of Mark, it just as surely affirms that writer’s conviction that Jesus was God incarnate.

Works Cited

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¹ Appearances of *exousia* in the other gospels occur in Matt 7.29; 8.9; 9.6, 8; 10.1; 21.23-24, 27; 28.18; Luke 4.6, 32, 36; 5.24; 7.8; 9.1; 10.19; 12.5, 11; 19.17; 20.2, 8, 20; 22.53; 23.7; John 1.12; 5.27; 10.18; 17.2; 19.10-11.

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From the Sermon & Class Notes, Topical (page link [here](#)), “Learning to See (Like) Jesus (John 9.1–41)” — A class study of Jesus’s healing of a blind man, demonstrating that he was “the light of the world” (9:5) (lesson link [here](#)).

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