

Chapter 2 **He Healed Many Sick People**

Introduction

Mark makes it clear that the crowds did not come out to see Jesus because of his great teaching but because of the wonders that attended his public ministry. Although the students responded to Jesus' invitation to follow and learn from him, the crowds were there to ask for healing, to bring friends and family members for healing, and no doubt to witness other great deeds of power. The Gospel makes it clear that they were not disappointed.

On the other hand, it is Jesus' clear intent in Mark to teach the crowds and he does this with a passion that outweighs his own fatigue (6:34). Yet Mark's Gospel does not have a Sermon on the Mount as does Matthew's or a Sermon on the Plain as does Luke's. Jesus also does not speak in long discourses as he does in John. The Jesus phenomenon for most people, according to Mark, is the ministry of a miracle-worker.

To be sure, compassion is an important motivation for Jesus' acts of power in Mark's account as becomes clear early on in the story when a leper confronts Jesus and asks for healing:

And a leper comes to him beseeching him and bowing and saying to him, "If you want to, you can cleanse me." And he felt compassion, stretched out his hand and says to him, "I want to; be clean." And right away the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. (Mark 1:40-42)

The crowds, on the other hand and perhaps to our surprise, regard the healings as a kind of teaching. The response of the people in the synagogue who witnessed the first exorcism is instructive:

And all were astonished and besought one another, saying, "What is this, a new teaching? With authority he even commands the unclean spirits and they obey him." And his fame spread everywhere right away into all the surrounding country of the Galilee. (Mark 1:27-28)

Jesus recognizes this understanding of the crowds and does not disparage it. Indeed, in at least two cases he uses his healings to teach specific lessons (Mark 2:1-11; 3:1-6).

Demonology is important for Mark, and the modern reader may find this quaint or disconcerting, or even offensive. The same modern reader might be surprised to learn, however, that many in the ancient world shared that offense or bemusement. Mark did not recount the stories of Jesus' power over the unclean spirits in a credulous atmosphere that would simply accept his word. Instead, Mark takes the enormous risk of having us dismiss Jesus as a charlatan or magician in order to tell give us very important information about who Jesus is.

The Dangerous Business of Exorcism

When the man from the tombs in Gerasa encounters Jesus, he says something very strange:

What do we have to do with each other,¹ Jesus, Son of God Most High? I adjure you by God that you not torment² me. (Mark 5:7b)

It's the phrase "I adjure you by God" that is of interest right now. The Greek is **οἰκίζω σε τὸν θεόν** (*horkizō se ton theon*). The classical meaning of the verb **οἰκίζω** was to cause another to swear an oath, but by the first century the attested usage is magical.³ A second-century CE magical text addresses a demon with the same Greek syntax as the demoniac employs:

**οἰκίζω σε δαιμονιον pneuma τοῦ ἐρησαδε κειμενον, ...
τοῦ θεοῦ του=Αβρααν κτλ .**

I adjure you, demonic spirit that lies here, ... by the God of Abraan, *etc.*⁴

In compelling spirits to do anything, the trick seems to be to "adjure" them by a deity higher than themselves. The one doing the compelling—or wanting to do the compelling—is the demoniac, not Jesus. Looking at the passage again, we see that the man possessed with demons calls Jesus by name ("What do we have to do with each other, Jesus, Son of God Most High?") Then he "adjures" him. Finally, he appeals to a divinity that should be more powerful than Jesus, God.⁵ The adjuration doesn't work.

The reader knows, of course, exactly why the formula failed. The "higher power" was not different from Jesus. In fact, Jesus had already discussed this issue when scribes came down from Jerusalem to proclaim that Jesus was a magician who did his magic work through the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons (Mark 3:22-27). Jesus

¹Literally, "What to me and to you?" We see Jesus asking a similar question to his mother in John 2:4: **τι ἐμοὶ καὶ σοὶ, γουαί;** with the obvious meaning, "What is that to us?" The question is what Jesus, the Son of God, has to do with a foreign demoniac.

²"Torment" has a juridical sense here, meaning something like "examine by torture." See Bauer 134b.

³Perseus Digital Library Project. Ed. Gregory R. Crane. June 14, 2005. Tufts University. June 14, 2005 <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>>. Bauer³ 581ab, H-H 457b.

⁴H-H 457b, cited from G. Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, trans. A. Grieve (Edinburgh: T& T. Clark, 1901), 274ff. One assumes "Abraan" is a corruption of the biblical name Abraham.

⁵France, *Mark 228*, correctly sees that the issue is control and collects excellent material about the use of exorcistic formulas in Greco-Roman magic. Perhaps, though, he does not catch the dynamics of the attempt of the demoniac to exorcise Jesus. If the expression "Son of God Most High" establishes Jesus' superiority, then there is nothing to do. On the other hand, if one imagines that God might in some way be superior to the Son of God, then there would be some reason to try to exorcise the Son through the power of God. Sherman Johnson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1960), 102, cites with approval Loisy that this attempted exorcism shows *une assez piquante naïveté*. On the assumption, though, that there is nothing naïve about self-preservation, the formula seems more desperation than anything else.

refutes this scurrilous charge by an argument familiar to students of Jewish law: “The mouth that forbids is the mouth that permits,” *i. e.* the “worst case scenario” still shows the truth of the assertion. The Worst Case would be if Jesus were indeed casting out demons by the power of the ruler of the demons. But even if that were true, then the “house” of Satan would have to fall because Satan was divided against Satan. So Jesus would *still* be the agent of Satan’s overthrow, doing the work of the Holy Spirit.

So the appeal to God will not work simply because Jesus is doing the work of God. Notice how Jesus expels the legion of demons that inhabit the man: “Come out from the man, unclean spirit.” (Mark 5:8b) This is the command that had elicited the demons’ fearful and fruitless attempt to exorcise Jesus. Jesus does not have to “adjure” the demons, and he most certainly does not have to appeal to a power higher than the demons in order to command them to leave. There is no formula, no magic words, no adjuration. Jesus has authority over the demons, and they have to leave. He is the superior power.⁶

Only once does Jesus allude to a “technique” for exorcism, and that occurs in Mark 9:28-29 as Jesus discusses the failure of his students to expel a dumb demon:

And when they had gone into a house, his students asked him privately, asking, “[Why] were we not able to throw it out? And he said to them, “This type is not able to be expelled by anything except by prayer.”

Jesus, however, did not expel the demon with prayer, as verse 15 makes clear:

And Jesus, seeing the crowd coming together charged the unclean spirit, saying to him, “You dumb and mute spirit, get out of him and never go into anyone again.”

Even if there is a technique the students have to use (prayer), Jesus does not have to use it, as France correctly observes;⁷ but Jesus does not upbraid his students for their failure.

⁶ Doesn’t Jesus have to secure the name of the demons to exorcise them? Vincent Taylor, *Mark*, 281, tells us that this question comes from ancient ideas about the name giving one power over opponents, and Taylor sees no reason why Jesus would not have shared those ancient ideas. If he does share those ideas, Mark fails to have him act upon them in the other exorcisms of the Gospel, as France, *Mark*, 229, correctly notes. Further, as shown by the example cited above from Deissmann, it is no absolute necessity that the exorcist secure the name of a demon to banish it.

⁷ France, *Mark*, 369-370. Whether these verses actually teach a method of exorcism for a particular kind of demon (Taylor, *Mark*, 401) or a general practice that enables the students to exorcise (France) is a matter of some contention. Johnson, *Mark*, believes that verse 29 did not stand in the Gospel as first written but offers no textual evidence to support this view. Taylor, *Mark*, 401, called these verses an “appendix” and suggested they might have stood originally after verse 19, a suggestion Mann, *Mark*, 371, rejects while retaining the term “appendix.” The sense of a technique is enhanced with the addition of the words “and fasting” (**kaiINHstei#**) in P^{45vid} **x² A C D L W Q Y f^{1.13} 33 M lat sy^h co (sy^{s.p} bo^{ms})**. Although there is almost universal agreement among scholars to drop this variant with Nestle, *NTG*²⁷, the reasons are often less text-critical than they are higher-critical. If we add “and fasting” to the words “by prayer,” then we cannot say simply that Jesus is encouraging his students to depend upon God instead of upon themselves and their own techniques. Hooker, *Mark*, 225, for instance, correctly summarizes the textual evidence but then goes on to say that “and fasting” is “inappropriate.” One has to ask whether she would have found those words inappropriate if the textual evidence had demanded their inclusion.

Although Jesus does lament the lack of faith in the assembled group, including, perhaps, the members of his own entourage, Mark uses this statement of regret as a way of introducing the father's statement of faith.⁸ Indeed, the father admits both his faith and his lack of faith in verse 14, an in-between condition that could well apply to any or all of the followers of Jesus. In verses 28-29 Jesus instructs his students carefully about "this kind" of demon and about the fact that it is, for them at least, susceptible only to prayer. Jesus' knowledge of demonology and technique underscores strongly his failure to employ either in his own exorcisms.

What's so dangerous in all of this? Quite a bit, actually. The attitude of the Hebrew Bible is uniformly hostile to the practice of the magic arts.⁹ The Covenant Code of Exodus commands that a sorceress must not be allowed to live.¹⁰ Deuteronomy 18:9-11 prohibits an entire catalogue of magicians, soothsayers, and necromancers from participating in the community of Israel. There is sufficient suspicion of and condemnation of various kinds of magic in the Jewish Scriptures that it is impossible to believe that some Jews, at least, upon hearing the stories of Jesus' miraculous deeds would see those deeds as evidence that he was a sorcerer, not a savior.¹¹

Although it is true that magical healings are not clearly part of the prohibitions of sorcery, there is little reason to doubt that magical healing would at least raise the suspicion among early readers of Mark's Gospel about the relationship of Jesus' healings to the practices prohibited in scripture. Indeed, a late (Talmudic) tradition asserts that Jesus was executed in part, at least, because he practiced magic:

On the eve of Passover they hanged¹² Yeshu the Nazorean, and a herald went out before him for forty days: "Yeshu the Nazorean is going out to be stoned¹³ because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray into apostasy. Anyone who knows something exculpating for him should come and make it known about him." And they did not find anyone with exculpatory testimony for him, and they hanged him on the eve of the Passover. (*t. b. Sanhedrin* 43a).¹⁴

⁸ Mark 9:19. See Taylor, *Mark*, 398.

⁹See Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Magic (Old Testament)" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (CD-ROM Edition; New York: Doubleday) 1997, 1992. Hereafter *ABD-CD*.

¹⁰ Exodus 22:17. The reason for the feminine *מפכשפה* (*mekhashshēphah*) is not clear. Are male sorcerers allowed? The evidence seems otherwise.

¹¹ See Deuteronomy 18:9-11; Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:1-6, 27; Exodus 22:17; 1 Samuel 28; Isaiah 8:19; 57:3; Ezekiel 22:28; Malachi 3:5.

¹² The word here is תלאוהו "they hanged him."

¹³ Was he hanged or stoned? The verb סקל refers to stoning, but may here be a term for execution in general. See Jastrow, *Dictionary* 1020b

¹⁴ My translation. This passage came to be excised from later editions of the Talmud in response to Christian pressure.

This lat account does not, of course, mean that Jesus was actually executed in such a manner, but this reminiscence in the Talmud makes clear that some later authorities¹⁵ considered Jesus worthy of a sorcerer's death. R. Travers Herford believes that the traditions of Jesus' miracles led to the idea that he had visited Egypt and brought magic spells back to Palestine hidden within an incision in his body.¹⁶

Magic *per se* would not automatically condemn a person, and there are many instances in which the Rabbis themselves employ magical spells to accomplish their purposes. There is the fanciful, if fascinating story about King Solomon who wanted to build his temple but had to do so without iron tools. The Rabbis suggested that Solomon employ the magical worm, the *shamir*. Discovering the *shamir* and getting it to Jerusalem for temple building involved two unnamed demons, one male and one female, the prince of demons Ashmedai,¹⁷ and the Prince of the Sea. (*t. b. Gittin* 68ab) The magical trickery used by Benaiah son of Jehoiada to accomplish the King's desire is regarded with nothing but admiration.

Herford digests a story from *t. j. Sanhedrin* 25d that pokes fun at the attempts of a heretic (*min*),¹⁸ who tried to outdo three famous teachers in a bath at Tiberias.¹⁹ The *min* made the arched roof of the bath reach down and hold the Rabbis fast, but R. Yehoshua retaliated by charming the door into holding the heretic fast, and as the helpless heretic stood immobile and helpless, those who entered rained blows upon the would-be magician. After both sides had released the other from captivity, the heretic at Yehoshua's urging decided to show off at the Sea²⁰ by dividing the water just as Moses had done. The Rabbis then raised the question as to whether Moses hadn't crossed over to the other side on dry land, and the clueless heretic headed across the channel he had created. As he got into the middle of the Sea, the Rabbis implored the Prince of the Sea to swallow up the *min*, and he drowned. The Rabbis won by dint of their superior intellect and, perhaps, lack of hubris. Certainly, the tradition did not condemn them for their magic any more than it did the "Rabbis" of Solomon.

¹⁵ Mention of Ulla later in the discussion certainly puts the passage into the Byzantine era. Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der babylonischen Amoräer* (Hildersheim: G. Olms, 1967). 93-97. See also JewishEncyclopedia.Com, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=12&letter=U&search=Ulla>, June 17, 2005.

¹⁶ R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1903) 55.

¹⁷ It is difficult not to notice that there seems to be no problem with using the power of the Prince of Demons even if he has a different name in this story from the one he has in Mark 3.

¹⁸ Herford takes the word מִן *min* here to mean a Christian, but this is not necessary to the meaning of the story.

¹⁹ Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* 112-115.

²⁰ The Sea in question is the Sea of Galilee. Tiberias and its hot baths are situated on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

What, specifically, is the danger in magic? Herford is right to believe that the danger stems from the character of the one who performed the deed,²¹ an issue we shall revisit in the next chapter.

Faith and Power (Mark 5:24b-34; Mark 11:20-25)

Mark does not contend that every healing of Jesus took place because of faith. For instance, the first physical healing in Mark, the story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-32), occurs without any statement or act of faith.²² This is likewise true of the events described in Mark's summary, "And he healed many sick people of their various illnesses, and he threw out many demons and did not allow the demons to speak because they knew him." (Mark 1:33) If faith were necessary for healing, then we might expect the text to inform us that Jesus healed many who believed in him. Jesus can heal just because it suits his purpose as in 7:31-37.

Yet faith is often the operative element in healings. In Mark 5:36 Jesus encourages the father of the apparently dead child, "Don't fear. Only believe." This impossible faith in light of the grim news of his daughter's death is a necessary backdrop to the subsequent healing. Even in the face of this last loss of hope,²³ Jesus encourages the man to believe.²⁴

Such belief appears to be difficult for the father of another child whose demon the students of Jesus could not expel. After inquiring carefully about the circumstances of the child's affliction Jesus responds to the man's request for help:

And Jesus said to him, "As far as 'if you are able' is concerned,²⁵ all things are possible to the one who believes." Right away the child's father shouted out saying, "I believe. Help my lack of belief." (Mark 9:23-24)

Belief has healed the blind man in Jericho (Mark 10:52), and the faith of the paralytic's bearers is the triggering factor in Jesus' forgiving and healing action (Mark 2:5). When Peter noticed that the fig tree Jesus had cursed had withered, Jesus' reply to him was as follows:

And answering Jesus says to them, "Have a holy faith.²⁶ *Amen*, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be picked up and cast into the sea,'

²¹ Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* 114.

²² Taylor, *Mark* 179, contends that the impersonal "they told him" amounts to an "artless request" for Jesus to heal the woman. The usual explanation is that they tell him about her to explain why she can't offer him hospitality in her home. Johnson, *Mark* 49. Johnson is certainly right to point out to us that women in ancient Palestine did not normally serve at table. This was the job of the male host.

²³ Schweizer, *Mark* 118.

²⁴ S. E. Dowd's dissertation, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS; 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) contains a very important discussion of the role of faith in the healing stories in Mark.

²⁵ The indefinite **to**/introduces Jesus' quotation of the father's words: **ei)duh\$**, omitting the **ti** of the original statement. On this use of the article see BI-D §267(1).

and does not debate in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, will have it. Therefore, I say to you, all things you pray for and request, believe that you have received them, and you will have them. (Mark 11:22-24)

We may believe that Jesus' words are more than instructions about how to dispose of recalcitrant fig trees. The saying is thematic for the entire Gospel.

“Debating in the heart,”²⁷ as Jesus puts it in Mark 11:23, is a difficult expression to parse, but we may get our best clue as to its meaning in Mark from the stories in Mark about those who successfully act on faith. The story of the woman with the hemorrhage in Mark 5: 24-34 provides us an excellent model of the implications of faith without debate. The operative passage is in verses 27-28.

Having heard about Jesus and having come into the crowd behind him, she touched his garment. For she was saying,²⁸ “If I touch even his garments, I will be saved.”

She is right. The prohibition against debating in the heart does not, evidently, prohibit the intellectual work of her mind to recognize in Jesus a power to heal and the deduction from that recognition that even touching his clothes will bring about salvation for her. The indicative in verse 28, **swqh̄sōmai**, *sōthēsōmai*, is important here. Although it is by no means sure that the woman can get close enough to Jesus to touch his clothes,²⁹ if she *is* able to do so there is no doubt that she will receive salvation from her affliction. Her deduction was correct and the hemorrhage ceased: “And right away the spring of her blood dried up and she knew in her body that she had been healed from her affliction.” (Mark 5:29)

Contrary to Morna Hooker's opinion, Mark takes no measures to make us believe that the woman acts in an especially surreptitious way.³⁰ Mann, *Mark* 285 believes that she must be sly about the matter because having a woman with a flow of blood touch his garments would raise issues of ritual impurity.³¹ Perhaps so in some abstract sense, but

²⁶ Literally, “faith of God,” **pīstin qeou**.—See further on this expression below.

²⁷ **mh̄diakriqv=eh̄ tv=kardi# aūtou**—denotes a mental act, the act of weighing the evidence and the probabilities. The verb means “discern,” and it may have surprised the ancient reader to discover that such intellectual discernment was antithetical to faith. See Bauer, *Lexicon* Electronic Edition, 231.

²⁸ This reflects the Hebrew “say in the heart,” meaning “think” or “reason.” Mann, *Mark* 285, is correct to translate it “says to herself,” but he does not need to remind us of this because of the Semitic idiom.

²⁹ The verb **alywmai** is, on the other hand, appropriately subjunctive, indicating some doubt as to whether she can get close enough to touch Jesus' clothing.

³⁰ Hooker, *Mark* 148.

³¹ Mann, *Mark* 285.

realistically Jewish law has tried to be balanced in such matters. Indeed, some vaginal discharges do not even make a woman unclean for sexual relations with her husband.³²

The touch not only produced healing but also produced a surprising revelation. In Mark the woman does not work out a theory about how touching Jesus' garment would heal her, she is simply convinced that touching it will do so. She does not speculate about any resident energy in Jesus.³³ The story could end without any additional comment from Jesus. The woman's faith had already healed her, but there is a surprise in store:

And right away Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, turning around in the crowd was saying, "Who touched my garments?" (Mark 5:30)

Mark has laid no basis for this perception or this question. Bultmann takes the act of touching as a normal feature of a miracle story of healing,³⁴ but that observation does not take into account the lack of preparation for it. Although we may agree with C. S. Mann that the word "power," *duhamij*, *dynamis*, indicates divine power,³⁵ Mark has given us no reason to think that Jesus has a power that could extend through his clothing and out into the people who might brush up against him. Indeed, the students of Jesus make just this objection: "You see the big crowd pressing in on you, and you say 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5:31)

Vincent Taylor is correct to stress the fact that *dynamis* occurs in the LXX to mean the power of God as expressed in acts of deliverance.³⁶ If that is the meaning here, then Mark 5:30 does not mean that Jesus felt the discharge of some magical energy or charge but that Jesus recognized that a great wonder had occurred of which he was the origin. The sign of this knowledge was that he knew that someone had touched his clothing. The surprise is the fact that the woman's faith could bring about this wonderful work of salvation:

And he looked around to see the one who had done this. And the woman, afraid and trembling, who knew what had been done for her, came and fell down before him and told him the entire truth." But he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. God in peace and be healed of your affliction."

³² See, for instance, *t. b. Nidah* 11b.

³³ Hooker, *Mark* 149, amusingly reminds us that Jesus is not, after all, the conductor of an electrical current here. She contends that in the time of Jesus it was common to consider clothing as an extension of the personality (148). Has that changed over the centuries?

³⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* 229.

³⁵ Mann, *Mark* 285.

³⁶ Taylor, *Mark* 291.

The woman's faith is the efficient cause of her salvation, not some power resident in the clothing of Jesus.³⁷ It is this faith, not the will of Jesus, which calls forth the healing *dynamis*.

If we now return to the fig tree in Mark 11:20-25, we see congruence with the paradigm of faith in Mark 5:24b-34.

And answering Jesus says to them, "Have a holy faith.³⁸ *Amen*, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be picked up and cast into the sea,' and does not debate in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, will have it."

If we could use the model of the woman with the flow of blood, the faith involved would be an audacious stepping out of oneself beyond the realm of debating the likelihood of success or failure. Her "holy faith" effects the wondrous healing because she acts without internal dispute except as to whether she will be able to get close enough to touch the teacher's garment. She believes it, and she has it.

We see this paradigm again in Mark 10:46-32. "Faith" in verse 32 cannot point to any particular piety on the part of Bartimaeus. The "content" of his faith is the audacious nuisance Bartimaeus is making of himself at the gate of Jericho, his persistence, his insistence that Jesus stop and have mercy on him (Mark 10:47, 48). When asked what he wanted from Jesus, the beggar had no qualms about asking for a restoration of his sight (Mark 10:51b).

³⁷ This is different from the account in Acts 19:11-12 where Paul's articles of clothing that had touched Paul's body became the means for long-distance healing. See also the reference in Acts 5:15 to bringing out sick people to the streets so that Peter's shadow might fall on them. Although Acts reports 19:12 that the clothing was effective, there is no report on the efficacy of Peter's shadow. Richard Strelan, "Acts 19:12: Paul's 'Aprons' Again," *JTS* ns 54/1 (April, 2003): 154-157, makes an excellent argument that the articles of clothing, **sudaria** and **simikihqia**, in Acts 19 represent a scarf and a belt respectively, garments that were appropriate to the dress of an orator. He also presents evidence from the magical literature to suggest that they could both be considered to bear healing/magical power because they clothed the seats of the orator's personal power: the scarf about the neck, the seat of the power of speech, and the belt around the waist, near the locus of personal and sexual energy. This is, however, removed from the concerns of Mark 5. Whatever faith the sick or their caretakers might have had, the curative agents were articles of clothing.

³⁸ Mann, Mark 453 calls the expression "faith of God," **piſtin qeou**, "barely defensible," without explaining what there is to defend. Given the setting, Taylor, *Mark* 466, claims that the exhortation to have faith does not fit the context in Mark. This he also finds true for the three sayings following. Does this expression mean "faith in God," with the object expressed as a genitive? Turner, "Semitisms in the New Testament," in *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Volume II: Accidence and Word-Formation with an Appendix on Semitisms in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 440-441. consider such constructions Hebraisms without, however, mentioning this example. (See also BI-D § 165.) My translation, therefore, renders the expression as a Semitism in which the genitive modifies the preceding noun (faith). This would mean something like "divine faith" or "holy faith." This is the the only place in the New Testament where we find this expression **piſtin qeou**, as Hooker, *Mark* 269, and many others explain

There is an interesting comparison between the healing of Bartimaeus and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida:

And they are coming to Bethsaida. And they are bringing to him a blind man and asking him to touch him. And grasping the blind man's hand, he led him outside the village³⁹ and having spit into his eyes⁴⁰ he put his hands on him and asked him, "Do you see something?" And when he had looked up, he was saying, "I see people—⁴¹I see them like trees walking around. Once again he put his hand on his eyes, and he looked intently and was cured and he saw everything clearly. And Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village." (Mark 8:22-26)

Although people bring the blind man of Bethsaida to Jesus and ask for healing, their act lacks the audaciousness of Bartimaeus.⁴² The healing is not straightforward, and Jesus must repeat the act for its fulfillment. It is often the case in Mark where healings do not proceed from faith that Jesus must resort to some means of healing such as an incantation (Mark 5:41; 7:34), a negotiation (Mark 5:1-13), liturgical action (Mark 6:41; 8:7). In Mark 9:24, where faith is specifically the issue, the father of the boy possessed by a dumb spirit admits both faith and lack of faith. In that instance too, the healing is somewhat protracted.⁴³

³⁹ Although the plural of **kw̄mh** can designate the unwalled villages in the vicinity of a large walled city, to call the walled city of Bethsaida a **kw̄mh** is, to say, the least, a stretch. It is difficult to agree with R. T. France, *Gospel of Mark* 324, 324n32, following W. L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* 283n42, that because the fortification of the city and its new status (Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.28) that organizationally it remained a **kw̄mh**. The usage here is not political but geographical.

⁴⁰ The word **of̄nma** is common in poetry, less so in prose. The "eye" of the soul in Plato's Republic is **of̄nma**, M-M 448a gives several references to magical literature, and R. Reitzenstein, *Die Hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*³ 296-297 and 318-319, provide evidence from the mystery religions for the word. In all, it is not clear that in this passage there is any difference between **of̄nma** and **of̄qal moj** which occurs in vs 25. See Bauer³ 565b.

⁴¹ The verb of perception **bl epw** takes the **of̄ti** clause following. What is confusing is that the clause itself contains a verb of perception **of̄w=** I have tried to flag this incongruity with the double dash here. See Smyth §2110.

⁴² Those who bring the blind man to Jesus in Mark 8:22 also do not have to overcome obstacles like a crowd and a roof as the pallet bearers must in Mark 2:4.

⁴³ See the study of E. S. Johnson, "Mark 8:22-26: The Blind Man From Bethsaida," *NTS* 25 (April, 1979): 370-383. The metaphorical meaning of the healing, i. e. that a second sight in the form of a revelation of the risen Jesus, is somewhat forced. R. Bultmann, *Geschichte* 228, considered the story a healing story of the same type as we find in Mark 7:31-37 and, indeed, called one a "variant" of the other. C. S. Mann, *Mark* 335-336, believes that the story of the blind man from Bethsaida is a doublet of the story of the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7:31-37. The parallels are very interesting, but Taylor, *Mark* 369, held that the differences between the two narratives were more important than their similarities. Taylor believed that the blind man's assertion that he saw people who looked like trees walking was an acute historical reminiscence that lent a strong sense of historical probability to the Bethsaida narrative. Hooker,

In every case where subjects act on audacious faith, the healings occur without further instrumentality. In two cases, Mark 5:36 and 9:24, passages that are also parallel because a child's father is interceding for his child, the father's faith is in some doubt and Jesus must invoke an Aramaic incantation in the first case and give a command of exorcism in the second.

Where faith is totally lacking Jesus own power to do wonders is not eliminated, but that power is of lesser import than otherwise, as Mark tells us in the editorial ending of the apophthegm about the rejection in Jesus' home town:

And he was not able to do any miracle there except that when he laid his hands on a few sick people he cured them. And he was astounded at their lack of faith. (Mark 6:5-6)

There is, as one might expect, some literature on the subject of the "contradiction" in verse 5. If Jesus could do **ouḏemian duhamin** (*oudemian dynamin*, "no miracle," 5a), then what does the rest of the verse mean when it says, "Except that when he laid his hands on a few sick people he cured them," in verse 5b. Taylor denies that there is a contradiction but claims that 5b "modifies the rigour" of the first part of the verse.⁴⁴ Johnson warns against taking 5a too far.⁴⁵ Hooker ascribes the few healings Jesus did as reflecting the faith of a few.⁴⁶ France believes that the tension amounts to an irony and that the few healings that do occur are not sufficient to amount to a *dynamis*.⁴⁷ But there is a similarity between the structure of verse 4b and verse 5 that argues against seeing verse 5 as composite in any sense. Both sentences begin with a negation (**ouk**), indeed, a double negative in each sentence. This double negative is followed by "except" (**ei mh**).⁴⁸ This formal parallelism demands that one read verse 5 as a whole just as one reads verse 4b.

The meaning of the suspect verse, however, emerges from this comparison. Verse 4b has Jesus saying that a prophet is—or, at least, could be—dishonored in his own home town, among his family members, and in his own house. Applying that interpretation to verse 5, that verse would maintain that Jesus could do a wonderful work there for a few people by laying hands on them. The emphasis, then, would not be on **eduhato** (*edunato*, "he was able") but upon **ol igoiḡ** (*holigois*, "a few"). The reason he did only a few wonderful works, apparently, was because of the lack of faith in that place.

Mark 197-198, on the other hand, sees the parallel between the two without calling them doublets. She also deals with the important relationship to Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Mark* 301.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Mark* 114.

⁴⁶ Hooker, *Mark* 154.

⁴⁷ France, *Mark* 244.

⁴⁸ On the syntax of **ei mh**/see BI-D §376.

<p>Οὐκ ἐστὶν προφήτης ἀτιμῶς ἐν οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατριῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει αὐτοῦ.</p>	<p>καὶ οὐκ ἐδύνατο ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδέμιαν δὴμιαν, ἐν οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ πατριῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει αὐτοῦ ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἔμελλεν ἐκεῖ ποιῆσαι οὐδέμιαν δὴμιαν.</p>
<p>A prophet is not dishonored except in his home town and among his relatives and in his house. (Mark 6:4)</p>	<p>And he was not able to do any miracle there except that when he laid his hands on a few sick people he cured them. (Mark 6:5)</p>

Figure 3-1

Comparison of Mark 6:4b and 6:5

So there is no “contradiction” in verse 5, and the logic of that verse is essentially the same as the logic of the focal saying in the apophthegm contained in verse 4b. Jesus’ ministry ordinarily involves healing many people, and those who desire his healing touch crowd about to ask for it. Not so in his home town. The crowd, such as it is, gathers to criticize, to debate, and Mark ends the story with the summary of verse 6: “And he was astounded at their lack of faith.”

Of course, Jesus is perfectly capable of doing great works in the absence of faith, but to what effect? Mark is being dismissive when he writes, “When he laid his hands on a few sick people he cured them.” Miracles without faith mean little or nothing by themselves.

Mark 11:20-25 is not providing us with the secret of how to do magic tricks with mountains. Rather, it is summarizing the power that “holy faith” has to access the power of God. The “faith of God” is the energy of the Gospel.