A Sign and a Controversy Dialogue Leading to a Monologue (5:1–47)


Setting of the Dialogue

At the outset, the narrator describes a religious and architectural setting with a purpose in mind. The setting is described at the beginning of the narrative in detail, near the Sheep Gate pool in Jerusalem (vv. 1–6a). The terrain of setting and dialogue mutually complement each other. Stibbe (1993: 74) says that, “The narrator’s statement in 5:1 that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews is of symbolic importance. It announces the intention of the storyteller to show Jesus as one who replaces existing religious feasts with his own person.” But as the dialogue advances, the exact setting changes to the temple premises. This is a literary tactic of the narrator to show the vibrant movement and the dramatic activity of the characters. After narrating the physical setting of the story in v. 3, the narrator addresses the kind of people attached to the story, generally called ἀσθενούντων (see Brown, 1966: 207). He brings three

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1 While the Sabbath context adds a religious setting for the story, the pool and the temple add architectural setting. The general setting is both architectural and religious as the story moves from the mystical Sheep Gate pool which has five porticoes to the religio-political headquarters at the temple in Jerusalem. Refer to Resseguie, 2005: 88.


3 Brown (1966: 206; cf. Fenton, 1970: 67) points out that, “Codex Sinaiticus reads ‘the feast,’ which would probably be a reference either to Tabernacles or to Passover; but the evidence for the omission of the article is overwhelming.” See Neyrey, 2007: 102; Guilding, 1960: 69–91.
specific groups of people to the notice of the reader, τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, and ξηρῶν. In vv. 5–6a, the narrator narrows down the details to direct the reader to the specific interlocutor of the story. Here, Jesus’ attention falls on a person “who had been ill for thirty-eight years” and there begins the dialogue.

The narrative as a whole begins in v. 1 with the sequential phrase Μετὰ ταῦτα (‘after this’). Chap. 5 inaugurates the trend of the Sabbath conflicts and the growing oppositions of the Jews in the gospel. Resseguie (2005: 88) says that, “When Jesus heals on the Sabbath, the highly charged religious setting is essential to the plot and point of view.” The narrator is very specific in explaining the aspects of the entire chapter in the following sequence: first, connection verse between chaps. 4 and 5 (v. 1); second, setting description of the narrative (vv. 2–6a); third, first exchange of the story: dialogue between Jesus and the invalid man (vv. 6b-9a); fourth, second exchange: dialogue between Jews and the healed man (vv. 9b-13); fifth, third exchange: Jesus’ dialogue with the healed man in the temple (v. 14); sixth, fourth exchange: the healed man discloses the identity of the healer to the Jews (v. 15); seventh, fifth exchange:

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4 Neyrey (2007: 101) comments that, “The story opens at a pool where many ‘unwhole’ people are gathered (invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed), but switches to the Temple, where observant Judeans confront the invalid man (5:10–13). These places correspond to the persons in them; at the pool are people who are unwhole and thus unclean, but in the Temple, all persons must be whole and clean.”


6 Newman and Nida (1980: 141) say that, “In his dialogue with the Samaritan woman Jesus declared that he had the power to give life-giving water; now, by healing the lame man, Jesus reveals his life-giving power (vv. 1–9a). This healing takes place on a Sabbath day and so leads to a conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities (vv. 9b–15).”


8 In vv. 2–6a the following things are described: first, where the event happens? (in Jerusalem); second, the specific location (by the Sheep Gate, beside the pool); third, descriptions about the pool (name, “Beth-zatha”; which has five porticoes); fourth, the kind of people by the pool area (many invalids: blind, lame, and paralyzed); and fifth, about the man (ill for 38 years).

9 Jesus’ two utterances and the invalid’s one utterance together make the exchange an action-oriented one.

10 This is the second exchange within the episode, between the Jews and the invalid person. Cf. Carson, 1991: 244–5.

11 The third exchange has a single utterance of Jesus in v. 14. But it has dialogic effects as the healed person goes and reports to the Jews.

12 Westcott (1958: 83) says that, “It is difficult to understand the motive of the man in conveying this information to the Jews, since he knew the holistic spirit in which they regarded the cure.”