

THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 10

THE FINAL JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

I. The Healing of the Possessed Son (Mark 9:14-29)

A. Mark describes this event at length, focusing heavily on Jesus' confrontation of evil.

B. Even as the Transfiguration was occurring, chaos was breaking out among the people in the form of a possessed man whom the apostles could not cure.

- There is a possible connection to Moses' forty days on the mountain, during which the people turned to idolatry. See Ex. 32:21-24.

C. Mark emphasizes the muteness and the convulsions.

1. The son cannot explain what the problems are. Others must bring him to Jesus.

2. St. Thomas says that the convulsions are symbolic of the inability to control passions that results from sin generally.

D. The apostles cannot drive the demon out, apparently because it requires greater prayer and, according to some manuscripts, fasting. They were able to drive out demons before, see 6:13, but they are unable here either because it is a more entrenched case, or because they have become lax with their success.

- Jesus is angry and laments the lack of faith in the whole generation. Moses spoke a similar lament even as he, in his final song, exulted in God's providence. Duet. 32:ff.

E. By contrast, the father has faith but knows it is weak, saying, "I believe; help my unbelief." Even with the virtue of faith, one must continue to grow.

F. Mark describes the exorcism in dramatic detail. There is first a withdrawal of all energy, indicating death to sin, then a

restoration to new life. Compare with Romans 6:1-6.

II. The Second Passion Prediction and Related Discussions of Humility, Children, and Temptation (Mark 9:30-50)

A. Jesus is now clearly on His journey toward Jerusalem and thus to His death. He apparently does not want large crowds with Him.

B. As with the first passion prediction, the Apostles clearly do not understand Him, and they thus begin arguing about greatness.

- When Jesus asks about their conversation, they realize that it was a foolish dispute. This event reminds people of the importance of keeping Jesus in mind.

C. Jesus then begins the first of three instructions dealing with children. He uses the child to indicate that willingness to consider any task important is the key to greatness.

D. Jesus then tells the Apostles to accept goodness wherever it is found. There is an irony in that the exorcist outside of the Apostles' company could do what they had just failed to do.

- St. Gregory draws an analogy between the outside exorcist and those outside the Church who can still do good works.

- Jesus then switches back to telling them about the importance of seemingly minor good works.

E. Jesus then begins His second comment on children, this time focusing on the other side of the coin, the need to avoid any temptations.

- He begins by condemning scandal as a sin worse than death.

- He then describes need to avoid personal temptations. He combining the dramatic images of Gehenna and a wisdom literature type of reasoning.

- Gehenna, the Valley of Hinnom, had been used for child sacrifices and was, at the time of Jesus, used to burn rubbish continually. See 2 Kings 23:10ff.; Jeremiah 7:31 ff

- The reference to the worm not dying and the fire never being quenched refers to the end of the prophecies of Isaiah, regarding those excluded from the new heavens and new earth.

F. Mark ends with an analogy between the grace and words of God and salt.

1. Salt had three uses in ancient Israel. It preserved food from corruption; it made food taste better; and it was used made food sacred and able to be used in sacrifices. See Lev. 2:13. It was thus an image of the indestructible covenant between God and His people, as well as an image of graciousness. See Num. 18:19 (referring to the covenant as "a covenant in salt"); Matt 5:13; Col. 4:6.

2. Mark adds that everyone "will be salted with fire." The idea seems to be that there will be a sometimes painful purification from sin and even persecution.

III. Discourse on Marriage and Children (Mark 10:1-16)

A. Jesus has crossed the Jordan and is approaching Jerusalem from the east, as the Chosen People did long ago. He is also fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel that the glory of God would return to the Temple from the east. Ez. 43:1 ff.

B. Jesus goes back and forth between discussions of marriage and children. The two ideas were inexorably intertwined in ancient Jewish thought.

C. Jesus refers back to the state before the Fall to restore marriage to its original indissolubility. He is implicitly claiming both to be greater than Moses, who had to accommodate human weakness, and the ability personally to overcome that weakness, something neither Moses nor any prophet had.

D. Those around Jesus clearly consider the absolute command against divorce to be quite literal and Jesus accepts that assumption.

- If Jesus only meant that divorce was to be strongly discouraged, that would be nothing new. Many Jews, and especially the school of Shammai said the same thing.

E. When children come to Jesus, the Apostles probably thought that Jesus had more important things to do. Jesus instead brings them into His instruction, now in even stronger terms saying one must have their innocence, eagerness, trust, etc. to enter the kingdom of God.

IV. The Account of the Rich Young Man and Related Discussions on Wealth (Mark 10:17-31)

A. The rich man, whom Matthew describes as young, would be considered a model person. He had followed the commandments, an assertion not disputed by Jesus, and was apparently blessed by God. Even Jesus loved him, knowing his goodness and desire to be perfect.

B. Jesus teaches in two parts. First, He indicates the importance of the commandments. Then He indicates that, once one has followed that level of morality, one is called to a higher perfection.

- The rich man succeeded in the first, but failed in the second. Ironically, wealth here reduces freedom and brings sadness.

- Jesus thus builds on Jewish thought, but takes it even higher.

- The Old Testament certainly warned about an excessive desire for wealth. See, e.g., Ps. 49:17ff, Prov. 28:20-22; Job 20:20. And the commandments were central in Jewish thought. See Ps. 119. But the Old Testament does not really portray a call to give up wealth to such a heroic degree, except perhaps in the case of some of the prophets because of the practical requirements of the calling.

C. Jesus does not indicate that wealth in itself is evil, for He calls upon the man to give his wealth to the poor. Rather, He is issuing the greater call to perfection.

D. The Apostles demonstrate an understandable, but erroneous humility, believing that the rich young man is better than they are.

- Jesus does not refute their belief that it is humanly impossible to enter heaven, but directs their attention to assistance

from God. Jesus does not expressly use the term grace, for He rarely spoke in abstract terms, but He refers to the idea here.

E. Peter, again speaking for the Apostles, refers to the professions, families, and homes they gave up. Except Matthew none were wealthy, but they generally had respectable positions.

- Jesus does not refute the fact that they have made sacrifices, but indicates that they should be experiencing part of their reward, even now. He also says that persecutions will go along with the reward, perhaps referring back to the idea of being salted with fire.

V. The Third Passion Prediction and Controversy on Greatness.(Mark 10:32-45)

A. Jesus seems eager to get to Jerusalem. The Apostles know of the danger and are amazed that He is confronting it so directly. Once again, He predicts His passion, death, and resurrection, this time in more detailed terms. But again they do not understand Him, and once again turn to arguing over greatness.

B. Jesus describes in detail His passion. The Gospel will in chapter 14 narrate the fulfillment of each detail.

C. James and John (and their mother, as described by Matthew) ask to sit at Jesus' left and right hand. This request likely refers to having high places in the rule of His kingdom. See, e.g., Ps. 16:11; 110:1.

D. Jesus uses the cup and baptism to symbolize His suffering.

1. In the Old Testament, the cup most often means suffering because of God's punishments. See, e.g., Ps. 11:6; 60:3; 75:8ff; Isaiah 11:17, 21; 51:17ff; Jer. 25:15.

2. There was also an image of the cup as a blessing. See Ps. 23

3. Sharing a cup with someone also indicated sharing their life, whether for good or ill. See 2 Sam. 12:3; Jer. 51:17; Ps. 116:13; 1 Cor. 10:16, 21.

4. All three ideas are present. Jesus is calling on James and John, and by extension all people, to join His life, and suffer with Him so as to receive the blessings of His resurrection.

5. Baptism means being immersed. The symbol was used at the time of Jesus for repentance from sins, leading to forgiveness. But, as Jesus is probably also referring to being immersed in struggles that only God can solve. See Ps. 42:7; 124:2-4.

E. James and John exhibit a naive confidence in their ability to endure whatever it takes, as Peter does at the Last Supper.

F. Jesus uses the occasion for a third lesson in humility.

- The contrast with the Gentiles is particularly poignant given His prediction that the Gentiles would be involved in His death. One irony is that their behavior is the same as the behavior the Apostles and almost every else in Israel is also exhibiting.

- Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man again, this time apparently bringing in the glory of the Son of Man prophesy of Daniel, but combining it with service.

VI. Cure of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)

A. This cure with the first cure of a blind man at Bethsaida is symbolic of the gradual revelation of Jesus' ministry.

B. The irony is that the blind, and largely ignored, Bartimaeus knows Jesus is the messianic Son of David and one who could cure his blindness.

C. Jesus' question about what he wants is not simply rhetorical. The obvious answer of a beggar would be money. Bartimaeus must show faith to ask for sight, and must have courage to set out on his new life.