

OUTLINE - THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 12

CONTROVERSIES AND PROPHECIES OF PERSECUTION AND FULFILLMENT

I. Controversy over the Resurrection (Mark 12:18-27)

A. The Saducees, who generally consisted of the upper class and priestly class of the Jews, believed that only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was the inspired word of God, and that all things of religious significance were contained therein. Because they did not believe that the Pentateuch spoke of the resurrection of the dead, they rejected this belief. Jesus argues that even Genesis does indicate the resurrection by referring the Yahweh as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

B. Other Jewish texts, especially those written in the last two centuries before Christ, imply that there is a resurrection. See 2 Macc. 7; Wisdom 3; see also Isaiah 25:7ff. However, other texts reflect doubt what happened to the dead. See, e.g., Eccl.2:16-17, 3:21-22. The Jews had not yet agreed on which books were inspired.

C. The Saducees refer back to the Deuteronomic law that, if a man dies married, but without children, his brother should take the wife and beget children on the dead brother's behalf. See Duet. 25:5-10. The idea was that legal heredity was crucial to the Jews. The account of the seven martyr sons in 2 Maccabees 7 may have been in the background of their objection.

D. Jesus avoids the more obvious answer that the woman was still primarily the wife of the first brother and that the others were merely substitutes. Instead He indicates that the dead will be in an exalted state above human imagining. Apocalyptic literature of the time had similar views. E.g., Second Apoc. Of Baruch 1; 1 Enoch.

II. Question about the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-34)

A. Here, another question arises, but this time apparently in good faith. The parallel account in Matthew indicates that the scribe did have some doubts about Jesus.

B. There was a large amount of debate at the time over which was the greatest commandment. There was a desire to grasp the essence of the law. Even in Scripture, there are some summaries of the law, indicating how one can be certain to please God.

E.g., Ps. 15; Isaiah 33:15.

C. Apparently because of the good faith, Jesus answers the question directly, and adds to it the second greatest commandment. Part of the idea is that one cannot fulfill one without fulfilling the other. See 1 John 4:20-21.

D. The first part of the response is straight from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, which sums up the Ten Commandments. This response should not have been a surprise, for the text was central to Jewish thought. Jesus was indicating that, in adhering to the specific laws, the faithful must remember the fidelity behind all of them.

E. The second half of the response was not as obvious. Leviticus 19:18 gives a similar command, but it was one among many. Jesus makes its importance clear.

F. The scribe apparently accepts Jesus' authority, and then applies His observation by recalling the words of Scripture that obedience to God is more important than the ritual sacrifices, although neither he nor the Scriptures said that the sacrifices were worthless. See 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 40:7-9; Hosea 6:6. The scribe equates the obedience called for in those passages with the love of God and neighbor.

III. Question about David's Son (Mark 12:35-37)

A. Jesus now begins asking His own questions. The question described here is probably an example of many that Jesus asked.

B. Jesus is referring to Psalm 110, which prophesies about a future king who will conquer the enemies of God and restore the kingdom. This prophecy was more in line with what people wanted from Jesus.

C. Jesus indicates that they have not thought enough about it. For the psalm indicates that the future king was already David's lord at the time of David. Later the psalm also says that the king was begotten before the creation of the day-star.

D. Jesus does not provide the answer, which would indicate His divinity, but is rather encouraging the people to think more carefully about their expectations regarding the Messiah.

IV. Criticism of the Scribes and Compliment of the Poor Widow (Mark 12:28-44)

A. Mark emphasizes Jesus' criticism of the scribes, who were both religious and governmental officials; some of them would have been Pharisees. Matthew records more of Jesus' direct criticism of the Pharisees. Mark's audience, closer to the center of the empire, would have appreciated more the criticism of government officials. Mark also focuses more on Jesus' criticism of a desire for worldly honor in general, not just honor from external religious practices.

B. The long tassels and long flowing robes would be indicative of the privileged class who did not have to walk as much or do manual labor.

C. The reference to using long prayers as a pretext for devouring the houses of widows could mean either: (1) demanding large amounts of money from the poor for spiritual advice; or (2) using the law to get money unjustly from the poor, and then reciting long prayers as though that would make up for it.

D. Jesus then contrasts the poor widow with the scribes. He indicates that the Temple officials should accept her generosity, while never demanding it, and should pay attention to her. The reference to giving all of her means may refer back to Peter's statement that the Apostles had given up everything and indicate that she has an honor equal to them.

V. Discourse on Destruction, Persecution, and Fulfillment (Mark 13:1-27)

A. Jesus finishes this day with a prediction about several things together: (1) the destruction of the Temple; (2) persecutions and false messiahs; and (3) the end of all things on earth and the final judgment.

B. The prediction begins at the temple, but is mostly given on the Mount of Olives, where Zechariah prophesied the final battle would occur. See Zech 14:4ff.

C. The prophets had once foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, see Jer. 26:18; Micah 3:12, and it had been destroyed in 587 B.C. by the Babylonians. The Jews returning from exile rebuilt a small version in 515 B.C. Herod then restored it to its former glory (externally at least), starting about 19 B.C..

1. In 41 B.C. Caligula placed a statue of Zeus in the Temple and began pagan practices there. He was assassinated (for different reasons) and the abomination ceased. In the following year, Herod Agrippa martyred James and a persecution of Christians began. See Acts 12:2.

2. In 66 A.D. a full revolt broke out among the Jews. The Romans suppressed it, and in the process destroyed the Temple and slaughtered the people of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

3. Meanwhile, in 64 A.D., Nero began a brutal persecution of the Christians throughout the Empire. His rule was a leading example of the political chaos and corruption at the upper ranks of the Roman Empire. See Seutonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.

D. Jesus gives these predictions to Peter, James, John, Andrew, and possibly other apostles. But the general public is not present. Their role in teaching future Christians is implicit, as it was in the explanation of the parables only to them.

E. In response to their questions about the time of the destruction of the Temple, Jesus does not give a direct answer but instead warns repeatedly against false prophets and messiahs. The expectations of a messiah were running high. Shortly after (and possibly before) Jesus there were several false claimants. See Acts 5. In addition, when there are massive problems in the world, and when God's people are being persecuted, it is only natural to want to see Jesus come again to restore justice. See Rev. 6:10. St. Paul's First and Second letters to Thessalonians deal in part with erroneous expectations of the end.

- Jesus presents the world as like a mother, pregnant with the eternal kingdom, and indicates that the final birth will consist of the most difficult times. See also Romans 8:22.

- Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit inspiring His people does not mean that people should not prepare what they will say, but only that they should not worry about it. Especially in this Gospel there is a connection to the baptism and temptation of Jesus in the desert, which was the last time Mark referred to God's spirit.

- The Old Testament had numerous prophesies of the pouring forth of the spirit at a time when the Lord would come to establish His kingdom. See, e.g., Isaiah 32:14, 10, 60:21-22; Joel 3:1-2.

F. Jesus does not tell the time of the destruction of the Temple or His return, but instead focuses on an issue that they need to be

more immediately concerned about, the persecutions that will soon come as a result of the spread of the gospel to all nations.

- The reference to the abomination of desolation and to the people fleeing to the mountains would remind the Apostles of the persecution of the Jews that occurred under Antiochus IV and led to the Maccabean revolt, which established Jewish independence from 134-63 B.C. See Daniel 9:24-27, 11:31, 12:11; 1 Macc. 2:27ff. Jesus is telling the Apostles to expect even more persecution in the future, especially after the placement of the statue of Zeus in the Temple.

G. The time of unsurpassed distress would recall the prophesy of Daniel 12:1 ff, which predicted the great restoration of God's people after such distress. That prophesy directly referred to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and probably the spread of the Church throughout the world, but Jesus says that there will again be such distress when He is about to return.

H. Jesus then combines the dramatic prophesies of Joel 3:3ff., and to a lesser degree Isaiah 13:10ff, Ezekiel 33:3-8, and Haggai 2:22-23 about an era of tribulation with the prophesies of Daniel 7 regarding the final coming of one like a Son of Man coming to judge all nations. The idea, common in Mark, is that a time of suffering and tribulation is necessary for a renewal; and this rule is especially applicable to the final renewal of the whole world.

I. Another implication is that, when Jesus returns again, it will be obvious. There is no need to wonder whether a person is the Messiah, or whether it is the end.

J. Jesus concludes with the observation that we must be ever watchful, for not even the angels or Himself (in His human nature) can know what time Jesus will come again.