

THE GOSPEL OF MARK - PRESENTATION 3

THE BEGINNING OF THE MIRACLES AND CONTROVERSY IN JESUS' MINISTRY

I. Beginning of Jesus's Ministry and Call of the First Disciples

A. Typical for Mark, the account moves quickly past John's arrest to the call of the first disciples.

B. There is a notion of crisis and the decisive repentance that is called for.

1. The time of fulfillment likely refers to the end of Israel's chastisement and beginning of a new era. See Isaiah 40:2, Lamentation 4:22.

2. The word for repentance (metanoia) involves a radical change in direction.

C. The reference to the Kingdom of God recalls prophecies that the line of David would again be restored after seeming destruction, and the kingdom would now extend to all ages and peoples. See Isaiah 7:1-6; Ezekiel 37:23-24; Daniel 2:44.

- The Vatican II Council described the Church as the kingdom of God on earth, awaiting the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in heaven. Lumen Gentium (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 5.

D. Jesus calls His first disciples with simply a word.

1. The power of the words and deeds of Jesus is a common theme of Mark. The power of prophets' words and deeds were also emphasized often in the Old Testament. See, e.g., Ezekiel 37:4, 11, 2 Kings 19:19.

2. There is an immediate, radical response, demonstrating the radical nature of following Jesus.

E. The disciples being fishermen may fulfill a prophecy about a great gathering of nations, see Jeremiah 16:16, or reflect the virtues needed to evangelize (e.g., patience, perseverance, courage, flexibility, humility.)

F. Galilee may have been chosen as the starting place because of the presence of fishermen, or to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah

about a child king coming to bring about a great age of light. Isaiah 8:23-9:6.

G. Mark refers to Simon Peter primarily as Simon before his famous profession of faith (Mark 8:29), and Peter after then, reflecting the change wrought by recognizing Jesus.

II. Cure of the Demoniac, Simon's Mother-In-Law, and many others

A. This episode begins an extraordinarily active day. Mark is going to emphasize continually the rapid change wrought by Christ.

B. The people recognize Jesus as having authority, which can mean His own words had great persuasive force, and that His words had the power to bring about change in people's lives.

C. Immediately, the demons show up. This conflict with the demons is a constant theme of Mark.

1. The demons panic because they know who Jesus is.

2. Jesus is demonstrating divine power here. For even the prophets did not expel demons. The closest things to exorcisms in the Old Testament are the archangel Raphael binding the demon Azmodeus and David calming Saul's tormented soul with his music. 1 Sam. 15:14-23; Tobit 8:1ff. However, even these scenes are not as dramatic as this exorcism.

D. With the cure of Simon' mother-in-law, Mark switches to a more ordinary situation.

1. The passage here indicates that Simon was at least at one time married. It is not clear whether his wife was still living. One the one hand, there is no mention of her. But 1 Cor. 9:5 may indicate he still had a wife.

- Celibacy would become a discipline of the priesthood because of the example of Christ, and His preaching about heaven and about the Church as His spouse. Before Jesus' time, celibacy was not a part of Jewish devotion, except among a few groups such as the Essenes.

2. Here it is the gestures of Jesus that save.

3. The mother-in-law's response shows discipleship.

E. Then, Jesus performs healings and exorcisms in great number after sundown.

1. People may have waited until after sundown because it was the Sabbath.

2. Miraculous healings had occurred in the Old Testament, see, e.g., Isaiah 38:1, 2 Kings 5, but the rapidity here is unique. Again, Mark brings out the fact that Jesus is above all the kings and prophets of old.

3. But Jesus at the time concealed His identity by refusing to let the demons speak.

III. Cure of the Leper

A. Leprosy was a term for any severe skin condition. Thus, in general it could be of a temporary or permanent variety. The fact that this miracle made the crowds come in great numbers indicates that it was probably a permanent type.

B. The Old Law provided for a physical separation of lepers from the people (but not a total exclusion) until and unless the leprosy went away, as confirmed by a priest. Leviticus 13-14.

C. The Old Testament described cures of leprosy as indicating God overcoming the distance between Him and His human representatives (see Exodus 4:6), as forgiveness of sins (see Numbers 12:10), or as simply a show of God's mercy for His Chosen People and others (see 1 Kings 5). This cure seems more to be in the latter category.

D. The account here also emphasizes Jesus' emotion of pity and sternness of command.

E. The warning not to tell anyone is in part an attempt to avoid an overemphasis on physical cures, such that people would ignore Christ's more important mission.

IV. Cure of the Paralytic

A. Here Jesus more explicitly connects forgiveness of sins and physical healing. The latter is a sign of the ability to do the former.

- The physical is subordinate to the spiritual, but both are connected. There is a continuing message for the Church.

B. The man's friends bring him to Christ for healing. Many theologians, such as The Venerable Bede and St. Thomas Aquinas, have drawn an analogy to the faith of one person bringing another to conversion.

C. Jesus' divinity is indicated by His forgiveness of sins. The prophets could announce God's forgiveness, but would not forgive sins on their own. See, e.g., 2 Sam. 14:13-14, Isaiah 4:22. Jesus, however, claims this power as the Son of Man.

- The reference to the Son of Man adds an element of forgiveness to the idea of an eschatological judge described in Daniel.

D. The conflict with the scribes over Jesus' ability to forgive sins begins a series of five conflicts with various groups over Jesus' authority and mission.

V. Call of Levi

A. Levi the tax collector is identified with Matthew in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 9:9. In the list of the Twelve, Mark refers to him as Matthew. Mark 3:17. It seems that there was a name change with his conversion and new mission.

B. Mark once again emphasizes the radical and decisive nature of following Jesus, as well as the power of Jesus' call. Levi made a particularly dramatic sacrifice here. For, having left his office, he could neither return to it, nor shake off the negative reputation it would have given him.

C. Levi witnesses to others, not by words, but by his actions and example. This emphasis on action is a theme of Mark. This response contrasts with the cured leper.

D. Jesus' response to the scribes of the Pharisees contains some sarcasm, for the Pharisees would have recited psalms reflecting the sinfulness of all of the people of Israel, (e.g., Psalm 51, 130), but by their attitudes exempted themselves.