

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK – PRESENTATION 6

TRIUMPH OVER CHAOS, EVIL AND DEATH.

I. The Walking on Water (Mark 4:35-41)

A. The Old Testament often describes God's triumph over evil by an analogy to calming the sea. See, e.g., Psalms 65:9, 89:9, 124:1-5; Is. 51:9-10.

1. Sometimes God is described as causing a storm and then calming it to bring about repentance. See, e.g., Psam 107:23ff.; Job 1.

2. No prophet, however, had ever calmed storms himself, although Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha had parted the waters of a sea or river.

3. Mark uses the same word for Jesus rebuking the storm as he does for Jesus rebuking the demon, emphasizing the connection between the two events. See Mark 1:25.

B. The sleep of Jesus may reflect His calmness in the face of crises, or a foreshadowing of His death.

C. There is a common analogy between Christ's guidance of the apostles' boat through this storm and His guidance of the Church through the storms of history.

D. Mark again emphasizes that the Messianic secret is unknown even to the disciples.

II. The Cure of the Geresene Demonic (Mark 5:-20)

A. Like the calming of the sea, this miracle shows Jesus' power over chaos. And here also, Mark describes the miracle at greater length than the longer Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The conflict between good and evil is a particularly strong theme of Mark.

B. The scene is the territory of the Geresenes, and area to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee in the area called the Decapolis, so named because of the ten major cities in the region. This area had been given to the Chosen People, and in particular to the tribe of Manassah, by Moses, but was no longer under Jewish control.

- Matthew says that the miracle occurred at Gadara, which was the largest large town, and thus better known

- Luke and Matthew describe two possessed men. Mark focuses more on the conflict than the numbers.

C. The conflict between Jesus and the demons is dramatic.

1. In language to that used in Mark 1:24 and 3:11, Mark says the demons recognize Jesus and here plead for mercy.

2. Jesus demonstrates power over demons by forcing themselves to reveal their name. The demons identify themselves as "legion," emphasizing the incredible number of demons involved.

- Legion was the term for a Roman army of 6000 soldiers. Thus, there were vast numbers of demons, who are here helpless. There may have also been a subtle hint that the worldly power of the Romans could do nothing against this evil power; only Jesus is the answer.

- Naming a demon indicates power over it. Evil loses much of its power when its identity is known.

E. The demons beg not to be sent back into hell and, perhaps surprisingly, Jesus agrees and lets them enter the swine instead.

1. He may have been giving them what little mercy they could accept.

2. In any case, this event shows the self-destructiveness of evil.

3. The event may also show the need for a sacrifice demanded for such a conquest over evil. It is not that material sacrifices purchase such a triumph, but that evil has its effects in the world, and is often torn out with great struggle.

E. People of the region react with fear.

1. Fear at divine power in itself a understandable reaction, as with Peter's reaction "Depart from me, for I am an unclean man." Luke 5:8, see also Isaiah 6:5.

2. But the odd thing in that they did not seem greatly relieved. They seem to have grown comfortable with the evil, and would rather their lives not be shaken up. Complacency in the midst of evil was common then, as now.

3. Jesus grants their request and leave, for His mission is for now to the Chosen People. But Jesus does send the cured man as a first missionary to Gentile territory, a down payment on the spread of the Gospel to the nations.

III. The raising of Jarius's Daughter and the Cure of the Woman with Hemorrhage. (Mark 5:21-42.)

A. Here Mark clearly uses the "sandwich technique" of combining two events that comment on each other. In particular, Christ cures the daughter of a prominent leader who willing to voice his request and also answers the prayer of an outcast woman just the same. In both cases, He takes on popular misperceptions and emphasizes the power of faith. There are two connections that make this connection even more clear: (1) the girl cured was about 12 years old and the woman had been afflicted for 12 years; and (2) both the synagogue official and the woman fall down at Jesus' feet, a sign of great reverence at least. (Matthew and Luke use this technique here, but not elsewhere. Mark especially wants to emphasize the connection.)

B. The Prayer of Jarius verses 21-24)

1. Jarius was a synagogue official, and most likely the one who kept the local synagogue in good order, conducted the Sabbath services, and chose who gave the commentary on Scripture. He was taking a large risk in coming to one who was considered an upstart. Mark specifically names him, possibly because his faith gives him more of an identity and possibly simply to give verification of the event.

2. Matthew and Luke present Jarius as saying that she was dead, whereas Mark presents him as saying she is near death. It is likely that he was in such distress that he said one thing, while meaning another, or gave a confused account. There is the overall picture of one who is desperate.

3. Jarius asks Jesus to lay His hands upon her. This gesture was used in the Old Testament for blessings and consecrating priests. See Gen. 48:14 (blessing by Jacob); Num 27:19 (the consecration of Levitical priests.) But it may have been a rising custom that Christ took up. After Pentecost, Christians would take up the practice for both healing and consecration. See, e.g., Acts 8:17, 9:17; 1 Tim. 4:14. Now the Church uses this gesture in sacraments for both consecrations, as in baptism, confirmations, and Holy Orders, and for healing, as with anointing of the sick.

C. The Woman with Hemorrhage

1. The hemorrhage rendered her and anything she touched unclean. See Lev 15:25 ff. She also took a great risk in touching Jesus, for such an action by an unclean person was absolutely forbidden.

2. Mark's negative comment on doctors indicates her desperate condition and the miraculousness of the cure. Cf. Tobit 2:10. The Talmud had listed 11 cures, including some that seem to work as medicines, but here none of them was successful. Luke, a physician, excludes this comment.

3. She believes that touching His garment may work a miracle. The idea was that touching something holy would effect the cure. Thus Elijah's mantle parted the Jordan and the Ark had brought blessings (or curses if misused.) Here it works, but Jesus wants to emphasize importance of faith.

4. The cure was immediate and total. Christ knows of cure but, at least apparently did not know who was cured. He may not have known in human knowledge, but knows that someone has been physically cured. He now wants to cure her at a deeper level.

5. The woman is afraid because touching Jesus was illegal. (She had also probably touched others in the process). Now she would also be morally guilty in the eyes of the people if it were not for the cure. But she does answer and Jesus emphasizes her faith (and by extension faith in general) as salvific.

D. Raising of Jarius' daughter

1. The people from the house seem almost anxious for Jesus to leave. Ordinarily, they would still want Him there for comfort, but perhaps they are afraid of daring to hope in Him, or of being seen to place hope in this upstart preacher. The event contrasts fear (especially of human opinion) and faith
2. Jesus allows only Peter, James, John inside with Him. They were also with Him at the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden.
 - He does not seem to want a dramatic show of power, but rather simply has the two or three witnesses needed to establish an important fact. See, e.g., Duet. 19:15; Matt 8:17.
 - Here, as elsewhere, Jesus is giving them a leadership role in the early church.
4. Jesus describes the girl as asleep. That was a common term for physical death, both as used in the Old Testament and by early Christians. See, e.g., 1 King 2:10, 11:43; 1 Cor. 15:6; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; John 11:11. Christ would often describe those who are really dead for those who were out of God's grace, as in the parable of the Prodigal Son, See Luke 15:32; see also Matt 10:28.
5. The crowd's opposition and ridicule simply set aside, as Jarius shows even more courage here.
6. As he often does, Mark records exact words. And he then brings a sense of earthly reality by Jesus' command that she be given something to eat.
7. Old Testament prophets had raised a few people from the dead, but they had called upon God to show this power. See 1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34. Jesus, by contrast, raises her by His own command, hinting at His divinity.