

Date: February 23, 2010

Reading: Mark 1-2

The gospel of Mark begins with an affirmation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Observe some witnesses for that statement in the first chapter.

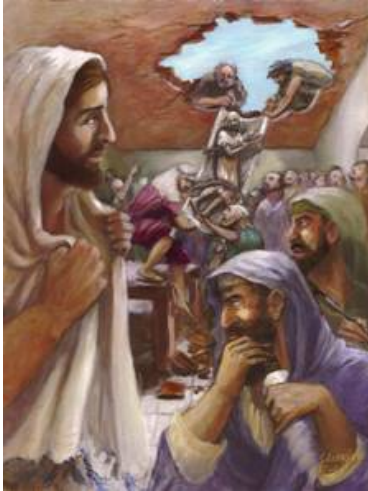
- 1) The testimony of prophecy (vs. 2-3). The forerunner to Jesus was heralded by Isaiah and Malachi and identified in this text as John the Baptist.
- 2) The testimony of John the Baptist (vs. 7-8). John testified that One was coming after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. We see him identifying Jesus as the One in John 1.
- 3) The testimony of the Holy Spirit (vs. 10). The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove after His baptism.
- 4) The testimony of God the Father (vs. 11). God spoke from heaven, identifying Jesus as His Son in Whom He was well pleased.
- 5) The testimony generated by His teaching (vs. 22). Jesus astonished the people with His teaching, for He taught as One having authority and not as the scribes.
- 6) The testimony of demons (vs. 24). When Jesus was preparing to remove the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue, the spirit identified Jesus as the Holy One of God.
- 7) The testimony based on His miraculous deeds (vs. 27). Jesus demonstrated throughout the chapter that He had power not seen before by the people. They were amazed that He had authority to command the unclean spirits, who would obey Him.

Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the foundation of our faith. May the reading bolster your faith!

Tim

Reading: Mark 1-3

Why did Jesus forgive the sins of the paralytic?



Mark records that Jesus was preaching in a house (2:1ff). The house was so crowded that no one else could even get close to the door. Four men carried a paralytic to the house but could not gain entrance. They got on top of the house, uncovered a portion of the roof and lowered the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

“When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’” (2:5).

Jesus was accustomed to having sick people brought to Him. When the paralytic man was lowered before Jesus, it would have been obvious what He needed.

Instead of healing the paralytic, Jesus forgave his sins. Some scribes present were critical of Jesus, reasoning that for Jesus to pronounce another man’s sins forgiven amounted to blasphemy. Jesus, of course, knew what they were thinking and asked them which was easier: to say that the paralytic’s sin were forgiven or to command him to take up his bed and walk (vs. 9).

Did Jesus forgive the man’s sins, anticipating the criticism of the scribes? Perhaps. On other occasions, Jesus taught that repentance was a condition for forgiveness (Luke 17:3-4). We can be certain that the paralytic was repentant or Jesus wouldn’t have forgiven his sins.

The view that physical suffering was the result of personal sin was apparently widespread among the Jews (e.g., John 9:1-2). It may be that, as many times as I have read this passage, I have pictured this scene incorrectly. Could it be that the paralytic man, believing that his physical condition was the result of sins he had committed, was consumed with sorrow for his sins and repentant. Although Jesus could have known anyway (the same way He knew what the scribes were thinking), the paralytic’s sorrow may have been evident.

Although we might think that the paralytic’s greatest need was obvious, i.e., healing, perhaps the paralytic came for a different purpose – perhaps he came to be forgiven!

It may be that I owe the paralytic man an apology. I have always reasoned that the man came for the purpose of being healed, but he may have instead recognized that he had a greater need – the need to be forgiven.

Hopefully we will also recognize the extreme importance of being “sin-free.”

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: February 24, 2010

Reading: Mark 3-4

How are you listening? Are you listening at all?

Jesus taught the multitudes parables in our reading in the fourth chapter of Mark. According to W. E. Vine, a parable denotes "a placing of one thing beside another" with a view to comparison. Jesus taught the multitudes many things in parables (vs.2) as they were able to hear it (vs. 33) and without a parable He did not speak to them (vs. 34). What was required for them to benefit was their effort to listen and make application of the spiritual principle. Jesus indicated no fewer than three times that they needed to listen (vs. 3, 9, 23). He also told them that they needed to be careful of what they hear (vs. 24). However, they were mostly unreceptive to the message Jesus was presenting. Unfortunately, they were like their ancestors in the time of Isaiah, who didn't listen and turn from their sins so that God could heal them (vs. 12).

Contrast the Jews with another audience in this chapter. Jesus was awakened from a deep sleep in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. He opened His mouth and rebuked wind and spoke to the sea. The winds and the waves listened, because the wind ceased and there was a great calm!

The disciples were privy to two things in this chapter – the explanation of the parables and witnessing the obedience of the winds and the sea to Jesus' command. We are privy to both of these things as well as we read and understand.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Are you listening to the Savior?

Tim

Date: October 2, 2009
Reading: Mark 4-6

When people heard about the miraculous healing that Jesus did, they speculated about His identity. Some thought He was Elijah, who had been taken to heaven without dying (Mark 6:15; Malachi 4:5). Others thought He was “the Prophet” (see Deuteronomy 18:18-19; John 1:21) or “one of the prophets,” probably a reference to some of the well-known literary prophets of the Old Testament (see Matthew 16:14).

Herod Antipas (“King Herod”) had also heard about Jesus, but he had a slightly different idea about His identity. Like others, the king attributed Jesus’ power to the fact that He was a resurrected person, but Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Mark 6:14, 16).

That must have been a scary thought for Herod – that John the Baptist had risen from the dead – because it was Herod who had executed him!



Herod was married to Herodias (the Herodian family didn't have much imagination when it came to names!). It wasn't his first marriage; he had previously been married to the daughter of Aretas, a Nabatean king. It wasn't Herodias' first marriage either. She had married Herod Philip, who was, in fact, also a son of Herod the Great (like Antipas) and thus the half-brother of Herod Antipas. While on a trip to Rome (c. A.D. 29), Herod Antipas had stayed with his half-brother Philip, who was a private citizen.

Antipas became enamored with Philip's wife, Herodias, and she left Philip to become Antipas' wife (after Antipas divorced the daughter of Aretas!).

At the time of John's preaching, Herodias had a living (former) husband, Herod Philip. John condemned Antipas' marriage to her as “unlawful” because she was the (former) wife of Antipas' brother, a relationship condemned by the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 18:16). Some would even argue that Antipas and Herodias should not have been married because they were uncle and niece!

Herod had John imprisoned for his wife's sake, but that wasn't good enough for Herodias. When her daughter Salome (by Philip) danced for Herod and his distinguished guests on the occasion of Herod's birthday, Herod was so “pleased” that he offered Salome “whatever you ask me...up to half my kingdom” (Mark 6:23). Must have been some dance!

Salome consulted with her mother Herodias who did not miss the opportunity to take vengeance on John. She instructed her daughter to request the head of John on a platter.

What a sad story! Rather than repent at the rebuke of John, Herod and Herodias decided to silence the preacher. Herodias was apparently motivated by hatred or malice and schemed to have John killed. Herod backed himself into a foolish vow and then didn't have the moral courage to refuse to grant the unholy request of Salome (Mark 6:26). John became the victim of his cowardice.

Jesus later defended John, noting his courage in preaching.

Cowardice or courage? Which will it be for us?

Happy reading,
Allen

Date: February 25, 2010

Reading: Mark 5-6

The account of the demon-possessed man in the region of the Gadarenes is fascinating on a number of levels. One particularly noteworthy thing is the contrasting reactions to Jesus from the man and the people of the region.

The man's reaction to Jesus is impressive. He met Jesus immediately when Jesus entered the region (vs. 2). He came up to Jesus and began to worship Him (vs. 6). It is unclear whether the man or the spirits (probably the latter) knew who Jesus was and begged Him not to torment him (vs. 7). The spirits then begged Jesus to not send them out of the country, but rather into the swine nearby (vs. 10-12). After being healed of the unclean spirits, the man (now in his right mind) clothed himself and was apparently sitting and listening to Jesus (vs. 15). When Jesus departed from the region by boat, the man begged to go with Jesus (vs. 18). Jesus instructed him to go home and tell what had happened to him (vs. 18). He went throughout the region of Decapolis proclaiming all that Jesus had done for him (vs. 20).

The people of the region were afraid of the demon-possessed man. Some of them witnessed the swine running down a steep embankment and drowning in the sea (vs. 13). This group brought the people in the city out to see what had happened (vs. 14). They came and saw the demon-possessed man healed and were told how it had happened by the keepers of the swine (vs. 15-16). Their response was to ask Jesus to leave their region.

What a contrast in reaction to the Savior! The one who was outcast and a misfit in society worshiped Him. The rest of the region saw what had been done and understood Who had done it and STILL rejected the Savior. Why? Might it be that the demon-possessed man understood he needed a Savior while the rest either didn't understand or didn't want this type of Savior?

How about us? Do we come to Jesus on our own terms or on His? He is the Great Physician and He can heal our souls, but we need to acknowledge we need to be healed and come to Him on His terms.

Tim

Date: February 26, 2010

Reading: Mark 7-8

Too often we don't have the faith we need in our Savior even though all we have seen from Him is love, even when we were unlovable and His enemies (Romans 5:6-10). What would our response to Him be if He pushed us away?

Consider the Syro-Phoenician woman. Jesus was seeking to be incognito when He entered the region of Tyre and Sidon, but He was found by this woman. She had a young daughter who was demon-possessed and she came begging Jesus to cast out the demon. The account in Matthew indicates that to get to Jesus she initially had to get past His disciples and then to even get Jesus to acknowledge her. But here she was – at Jesus' feet. Surely Jesus would grant her request!

Jesus told her that she and her daughter were undeserving (not good to feed the children's bread to the dogs). How would she respond? She responded in humility, pleading for the crumbs from the children's plate. Jesus was impressed with her response and granted her request. He remarked (in the account in Luke 7) that He had not found faith like this in Israel.

What can we learn? We must humble ourselves before the Lord. Adversity may be what we need to truly demonstrate our faith. People who you may not expect may be willing to submit to the Lord. Will you have great faith today?

Tim

Date: February 27, 2010

Reading: Mark 9-10

They still didn't get it! They had been with Jesus nearly three years and had heard Him teach and seen His example.

What was Jesus telling them? He was telling them to receive little children in His name. He was telling them to determine who was on His side by what they did, and not if they were one of the twelve. He was telling them to receive the kingdom of God as a little child.

What was Jesus showing them? He took a little child in their midst and took him in His arms. He rebuked the disciples for forbidding the little children to come to Him, and then took them in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

What were the disciples doing and saying? They were disputing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom while they were on the road. They were forbidding those who cast out demons in Jesus' name to continue because they weren't following them. They were rebuking the ones who brought the little children to be blessed by Jesus. They were asking Jesus for positions of prominence in the kingdom.

Yet Jesus continued to teach and to demonstrate and bear with them. They would finally "get it" when He was no longer in their midst; they would remember and imitate because of faith in a risen and living Lord. Let's seek to learn the lessons that took the disciples so long to learn!

Tim

Date: October 5, 2009

Reading: Mark 10-13

You have undoubtedly heard someone say that he would like to be saved like the thief on the cross. Have you ever heard someone say they would like to be saved like the rich young ruler?

Consider these observations:

- 1) He went looking for Jesus.
- 2) He asked the eternal life question of the One who could provide the answer: the Good Teacher.
- 3) He knew the commandments and had kept them from his youth.
- 4) He only lacked one thing.

So what did the young man lack? He was told to sell whatever he had and give it to the poor, and then he would have treasure in heaven. (10:21)

Why then does no one want to be saved (receive eternal life) like the rich young ruler? Maybe it is because the answer he received to his question was an answer that required sacrifice – selling all he had and giving it to the poor, coupled with an instruction to take up his cross and follow Jesus. The rich man went away sorrowful because of his “great possessions.” He was unwilling to give them up even if it meant his spiritual demise.

What about you and me? Do we want to be saved on our terms, or are we willing to listen to the terms of Jesus and do what He bids us? “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)

Coincidentally, people who want to be saved like the thief on the cross don’t seem to be willing to be crucified to imitate him...

Enjoy the reading,

Tim

We got to see a two-day-old baby yesterday. Bekah held her. She weighed under 8lb. So tiny. So precious. So much potential. So innocent. It almost gave us the bug again...almost...

As children grow they develop quirks and issues. After all, they are born into a sinful society and are taught by sinful parents. We try hard to limit their problems. We want healthy kids. But our sinful examples, no matter how hard we try, will eventually seep into our precious children. One day they will need to call on the name of the Lord to save them from their own sins.



While they are still children, however, they are good. Their hearts can be molded and shaped. They have a certain humility about them. They are completely dependent upon their parents or guardians. They are beautiful!

So when the disciples rebuked those who would bring the children to Jesus, Jesus became indignant. He said...

Mark 10:14-15

"Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."

Do not hinder the children. **How can I hinder a child?** In this case, the disciples were hindering them from coming to Jesus. Is it because they thought Jesus was too important for children...or that children were not important enough to be with Him? Either way, Jesus dashed those thoughts. I wonder sometimes when we have Bible studies and send the kids off to another room to play...are we hindering them from seeing Jesus? *But they get in the way of our own concentration on the word. But they don't listen anyway.* When we don't spend the time to teach them about our Lord, are we hindering them?

And how do I receive the kingdom of God like a child? How does a child receive it? A child understands he does not own anything. He is at the mercy of his elders. He is completely dependent upon them. As we come into the kingdom, might we get the idea that it is somehow our RIGHT to be in the kingdom? Like maybe we own a part of it? No matter how long a man is in the kingdom of heaven, no matter how many years of service he puts in, he will still be a lowly servant. He still serves God. He doesn't deserve to be there; he's only there by the grace of God. If we can capture the humility, the innocence, the complete dependence, and the awestruck wonder of a child, then we will have a heart for the kingdom of heaven.

God bless,
Nathan