

THE APPROACHING STORM

Mark 2:13-22

Intro: When Isaiah, the prophet, predicted the coming of the Messiah, although he wrote of the eventual glory of the Messiah, yet He also predicted the terrible rejection He would experience. The Apostle Peter referred to this apparent confusion in the predictions of the Old Testament prophets, and even of what many felt even involved the Holy Spirit Who had sovereignly enabled them to write what they wrote about the Messiah when He, the Holy Spirit, “testified” to them “beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet. 1:11). We can see by reading through the Gospels that the apostles themselves did not understand our Lord when He taught them about His death. The prevailing view of the Messiah’s work when our Lord came to earth, was that the Messiah would come, overthrow Rome and all other nations, so that He could establish His kingdom on earth. They did not know that He was coming the first time to die for sinners, and that He would return later to reign upon the earth. And so from their experience as being the subjects of the Roman government and the suffering that they had experienced under Roman rule, the prevailing idea about the OT was that the sufferings had to do with Israel, but that the glory had to do with Christ, or the Messiah.

For them to come to that conclusion was evidence of their spiritual blindness, just like non-Christians are today who read the Bible. When the Apostle Paul was saved, the truth of the Old Testament suddenly came to life for Him, and he understood them that Christ, the Messiah, of Israel, did come to die. He had to die or there would have been no salvation for anyone, Jew or Gentile. But even those who believed on the Lord, did not understand this basic truth. They believed the sufferings belonged to them, but the glory belonged to the Lord. And all of this was in spite of Isaiah’s words in Isaiah 53:3:

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.

I have entitled my message, The Approaching Storm, not thinking of a hurricane, or any other natural disaster, but I am thinking about the rise of opposition toward our Lord which would eventually lead to His death. In chapter 1 of Mark, verse 22, we are told that the people recognized that there was an authority about our Lord’s teaching that they did not see in

the teaching of the scribes. The roots of future trouble were right there. The scribes did not like to think that there were any better teachers than they were. But an even more ominous statement is found in Mark 2, verse 6, where among the people who were in the house when the man with palsy was healed, it is said that “there were certain of the scribes sitting there.” What were they doing there? These were the teachers of the Jews, and they had probably been alerted to what was going on in the ministry of our Lord by the man who was cured of leprosy in chapter 1. I am not saying that that was the reason, but there is a strong possibility that this is what brought the scribes there to hear this Teacher Who was having a profound influence upon the Jewish people.

But after this you will find representatives of the Jewish leaders again in chapter 2, then in chapters 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15 – in ten of the sixteen chapters in Mark! The scribes and the Pharisees are very prominent in the verses we are considering together this morning. The Lord knew why they were there. He knew that it was not why the people generally were there. They wanted to hear what our Lord was teaching, but, as they heard, then they began to listen for anything that the Lord might be saying, or anything that He might do, which would be the basis for bringing a charge against Him. See Mark 3:2 and 6.

So the storm clouds were already taking shape in a strong way over our Lord and His ministry.

But let me begin today with verse 13 of chapter 2, to see how the opposition begins to take shape. The first thing that we read follows the healing of the palsied man.

I. THE LORD ON THE SHORE OF THE SEA OF GALILEE (Mark 2:13).

There were two places where the Lord loved to go. One was by the sea of Galilee, or out in a boat, and the other was the mountains. He loved His own creation. He sought rest in both places, relaxation from the work of healing and from the work of preaching. While we know that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God, yet we must not forget that He was also a true human being. He got weary and tired. He got hungry. And he needed the solitude that both the Sea of Galilee and the mountains provided for Him. But in this instance, as tired as He was, when the people followed Him in great numbers, He did not rebuke them, telling them to

go home, but *He taught them!* The Lord knew how to redeem the time. He knew how terribly ignorant they were of the truth of God, even though they have been subjected to much teaching by the scribes. And so we read over and over again in the Gospel how He taught the people, and, in some cases, what He taught them. He loved to teach. He believed that was a major part of His ministry. And it didn't make any difference to the Lord as to whether it was one person who came to Him, or hundreds, He loved to teach. He knew that the only way to dispel the darkness under which they lived was to give them light from the Word. May we all seek to capture His zeal for spreading the truth of God's Word. Don't you envy the people who had the privilege of hearing Him?

But there is a second point in verse 14:

II. THE CALL OF MATTHEW (Mark 2:14).

The name that his parents gave to him was Levi. It is interesting to speculate as to why his parents gave him that name. Maybe he was of the tribe of Levi. Or possibly it was because his parents had hoped that he would become a man of God like Levi was. They must have had some strong hope for their son for them to give him that name. Later he was named Matthew. He is the one who wrote the record of the life of our Lord which stands first in our Bibles.

However, instead of becoming a man of God, he became a man of the world. He was more interested in money than he was in godliness. He seems to have been a man like Zacchaeus who was chief among the publicans. Very likely he was the chief official for the Capernaum district.

But why do I say that he was more interested in money than anything else? It was because he became a publican. The publicans were Jews who agreed to collect taxes for Caesar from their own people. They had a certain amount that the Roman government required of them, but anything that they could collect over and above what Rome wanted, they were allowed to keep for themselves. And they were known to take all that they could get. Therefore, their fellow-Jews hated them. They were considered traitors, taking sides with Rome against the Jews.

Now we don't know from any of the Gospels (although this event is recorded also in Matthew and Luke) what contact Levi had with the Lord before this time when the Lord called him into service. Some expositors

believe that this was the first real contact that Levi had with our Lord. They may be right, but I am more inclined to believe that the Lord and Levi knew each other, just as I believe that the Lord knew Andrew and Simon (or Peter), and James and John before He called them. But whatever the situation may have been, here the Lord was calling a wealthy, Jewish publican, to join four common fishermen, to do one thing: to follow the Lord. There may have been a great difference between Levi and the other men, but they were all called to serve on the same level, and to live their lives following the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't think that Levi knew what was ahead for him, but he dropped everything and followed the Lord. Mark expressed it this way: "and he arose and followed Him."

Now what I am about to say, is not in the Bible, and I want you to understand this, but I like to think that when the Lord called Levi, and Levi followed the Lord, never to turn away, the Levi's parents who hearts had probably been broken when their son decided to go with Rome, had their prayers answered when Levi gave us his lucrative joy to follow our Lord. So if any of us have a child who has gone with the world instead of with the Lord, please take heart and keep praying. I think it was Matthew Henry who called Matthew's call, an effectual call. When the Lord calls us to come to Him, we come, just like Levi did.

Now as we move on to verse 15, we do not leave Levi behind. Everything that we read about in verses 15 through 22 took place in Levi's home. I think you will agree with me when I say that when a person truly comes to the Lord, one of the first things that you see in his life is that he, or she, wants all of his, or her, friends to know the Lord.

III. THE DINNER LEVI GAVE IN HONOR OF THE LORD (Mark 2:15-22).

The list of dinner guests was headed by our Lord. Next came "many publicans and sinners. And finally our Lord's disciples. So Andrew and Simon, and James and John were there too. Now we are inclined to think of the publicans and sinners as bunch of renegades, turncoats, and traitors – which they really were – but actually this was probably high society for that time in the Roman Empire. But somehow lit. *the scribes of the Pharisees* were there. I don't think that they were guests, but they were at least where they could see what was going on, and they were astounded

that the Lord would have anything to do with such a crowd. After all they had put Rome before Jerusalem, and money before God! So, somehow, they got to the disciples, and asked them, “How is it that He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” (Mark 2:16b). The scribes would never think of doing such a thing!

Perhaps the best way to understand what the scribes meant by sinners is defined by one of the Greek lexicons as *a person who is devoted to sin*. By this we mean a person who has little or no moral standards. He is a person who does not give God a thought. He tries to convince himself that there is no such a distinction as right and wrong, which is determined by a sovereign, holy God. These are the kind of people that the publicans would attract, because this was really how the publicans lived. They had thrown off the Law of God, and were doing their own thing.

The Lord knew what they were asking, and He had a great answer for them. You find his answer in verse 17. He said in effect that when you are healthy, you don't make an appointment with your doctor, but when you are sick you get to your doctor as fast as you can. Or that is what you should do. And then the Lord added: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

He did not mean that the scribes were righteous, but they thought that they were. They did not sense any need for God; they were those who were in a position to help others. But when people realize that they are sinners, under judgment before a holy God, then they begin to look for a physician of the soul. And that is what the Lord Jesus is. He heals bodies, but He heals souls, and He is the only One Who can.

And by the way, will you notice that the Lord Jesus did not hesitate to talk to sinners about sin? How else will salvation make any sense? What are we saved from? It is doubtful if people will ever see their true need for Christ if they do not realize that they are sinners. The scribes sought after Jesus, but not because they wanted their sins forgiven. They had convinced themselves that they were already acceptable to God, and so there was no need to talk to them about sin and repentance.

But then the scribes brought up the question of fasting.

You can easily see that the religion of the scribes was not the Gospel that they had found in the Old Testament – because it is there! Their religion

was a religion of doing this, and doing that, of observing days of fasting, and of keeping the Sabbath. The sacrifices of the OT did not speak to them of a coming Savior, but they were just works by which a person makes himself his own Savior, acceptable to God.

It is tragic that we see in verse 18 that the disciples of John the Baptist (at least some of them) had joined with the disciples of the Pharisees as to the merit a person receives by fasting when that was never in the mind of God. Again you can see that salvation to the scribes was by works, and the disciples of John the Baptist had been corrupted so that that was what they believed too!

The Lord told those scribes that you do not fast when the Bridegroom is with you, speaking of Himself as the Bridegroom (perhaps anticipating the beginning of the Church which is the Bride of Christ). But then when the Bridegroom is taken away, the Lord said, was the time for fasting. Matthew in his Gospel speaks of fasting as mourning. The Christian faith is a relationship with a Person, our Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. We have never seen the Lord on earth and so we don't know how blessed, how happy, His disciples were when they were with Him. But now that He is not here physically where we can see Him, we long for that day when we, too, shall see Him face to face. But the scribes knew nothing about what it meant even then to know the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 21 and 22 are not easy verses to explain, but it is clear that they belong with verses 19 and 20. I'll tell you what I think that they mean, and you can decide if you believe that my interpretation is true.

I think that when the Lord spoke of "an old garment" and old "wine bottles," He was speaking of the Judaism of that day. It was so far gone that there is no way that it could be restored. To put a new patch on an old garment would only make the tear worse. And no one would in those days ever have thought of putting fresh wine in old bottles. The fresh wine would require new bottles.

Judaism of our Lord's day carried only a faint resemblance to the revelation which God had given to the prophets of the OT. The Lord did not come as a reformer. So much had been added to the Word of God that probably not even the scribes could distinguish between what God had given and what their leaders had added. Salvation is not what man does

for himself, nor is it a combination of what God does and what man does. Salvation is totally, from start throughout all eternity a work of God, based not at all on our works, but on the sovereign grace of Almighty God.

The original hope of the Reformers was just that, not to break with the Catholic church, but to reform it from within. But that did not work.

There are good men in certain denominations today, denominations which have departed from Scripture, and these men are trying to patch up an old garment. But it does not work. A lot of churches have had to close their doors, and it is good that they have. It would be good if a lot more would cease to exist.

The Lord Jesus went to the synagogues in His day because that was where the people were. But He made no attempt to become a scribe or a Pharisee so as to correct the evils of the Judaism of His day. The Lord's work needed to be started all over again in accord with Scripture, and only Scripture.

This does not mean that the Lord is going to forget any of His promises to His people in the past. But it does mean that His work is not going to fail. Some day He will make all things new.\

Concl: So you can see what we need today is what the Lord came to do, to preach the Word of God, trusting the Spirit of God to draw people to Christ, and having church which exist for the edification of the people of God, that their lives might bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, which, in turn, would cause people in the world to ask us for a reason for the hope that we have within us, in our hearts.