

THE CONSPIRACY IS SET

Mark 2:23-3:6

Intro: It is not information that any of you do not know when I tell you that the Gospel of Mark is an account of the coming into the world of Jesus Christ the Son of God. This was an event of such tremendous importance that the Spirit of God not only led John Mark to write about the earthly ministry of our Lord, but He led four other men to do the same. And, of course, I am referring to the Gospel book written by Matthew, and the Gospel book written by Luke, and the Gospel book written by the Apostle John. These details alone speak of the unique importance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

But as we get better acquainted with the Bible, we learn that Jesus Christ is not just the subject of these four books at the beginning of our NT, but He is the subject, the main subject, of all of the OT, as well as the remainder of the NT from the book of Acts to the book of the Revelation. No one can really understand the Bible unless the Holy Spirit, Who is the Third Person of the Godhead, and the Author of Scripture, opens our understanding to understand this.

Luke is one who tells us in some detail about an event which took place in the life of our Lord following His resurrection from the dead. Two of His disciples were leaving Jerusalem and headed for a village a short distance from Jerusalem, a village called Emmaus, and they were talking together about what had happened in those days after Jesus had been crucified. They like many of the Jews had hoped that the Lord was going to liberate the Jews from Rome, but instead He had been crucified. However, what confused them even more was the report that they had heard about the women who had gone to the tomb to anoint the body of the Lord, but they found the tomb empty. An angel was there, and he had told the women that the Lord was alive! They were kept from recognizing the Lord as He joined them. But the Lord did a very wonderful thing. What He did is recorded for us in Luke 24:27:

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

And then a little later our Lord did the same with His eleven apostles. In explaining what had happened to Him, He said “that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me” (Luke 24:44).

The whole Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ, but people can read the Bible and not realize this until the Holy Spirit enables them to understand this great truth.

Yesterday morning I read Psalm 95 to the men at our prayer meeting. It tells us that the Lord is a great God, greater than all other gods. And then it says this:

4 In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also.

5 The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land (Psa. 95:4-5).

And then the Psalmist followed those words with these:

6 O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

7 For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (Psa. 95:6-7a).

The Psalmist could have been talking about God the Father, but the words apply just as much to the Lord Jesus because He is our Lord, and there wasn't anything made in creation but what He was involved in bringing it into existence.

But why am I reviewing all of this for you today? It is because if you know Who Jesus Christ was, you would expect that His coming into the world would have created the greatest excitement of anything that had ever taken place! And it would have caused universal worship of our Lord. Everybody would have wanted to bow down to worship Him.

But is that what happened? No, it didn't! Instead, as Mark so vividly presents the situation, it didn't take long at all before there was a conspiracy between the Herodians and the Pharisees, to kill the Lord. Why would they plan to do such a terrible thing to the Lord from heaven? It was because they were spiritually blind. Those of us who are thoroughly convinced that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and that He still is, have had the Holy Spirit teach us this from the Bible. And if you don't understand this wonderful truth, pray that the Holy Spirit will enable you to understand it. Ask Him to open your mind and your heart to the Scriptures. Then you will understand why the Biblical teaching about Christ is called the Gospel.

The attitude of the scribes and Pharisees toward our Lord indicates that you can be a religious leader, but not be a Christian. Even many so-called

Christian churches do not understand Who Jesus Christ is, nor do they understand the meaning of the Gospel. The religions of the world tell people what they need to do to please their god. But Christianity is not a religion; it is a revelation from God. And it tells us that Jesus Christ came to do for us sinners what we could never do for ourselves. He died for us, taking upon Himself the penalty for our sins, that we might have full and eternal acceptance with God.

The Jewish leaders, the scribes, did not understand this. They did not know that their Bible predicted the coming of a Savior to save them from their sins. They looked upon Jesus as a threat to the control that they had over the people, and it should startle us that these religious men were not only willing to have Christ murdered, *but they were intent on doing that very thing!*

Now I want you to see the case that the scribes (and the Pharisees) had against our Lord that led them to the wicked conclusion that He had to go!

Their case against the Lord was built on five main points:

- 1) The healing of the man who was sick of the palsy. This is in 2:1-12.
- 2) The Lord eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. This is the aftermath of the Lord calling Levi, a publican, to follow Him. This is in 2:13-17.
- 3) Criticism because the Lord's disciples did not fast, thus blaming the Lord because He did not make His disciples fast like the disciples of John the Baptist did, and like the Pharisees did. This is in 2:18-22.
- 4) The disciples plucking and eating corn on the Sabbath Day. Again their point was to blame the Lord for allowing His disciples to do what they did. This is in 2:23-28.
- 5) The healing on the Sabbath Day of the man with a withered hand. And this is in 3:1-5).

So if a lawyer had been preparing his brief against our Lord on behalf of the Pharisees and the Herodians, this is what it would have looked like.

We have already considered the first three, but I want you to see all of them together so you can see the case that the scribes brought against our Lord. But reading through the record given here by Mark, as well as the parallel passages found in Matthew and Luke, it is apparent that the opposition to the Lord involved the Pharisees as well as the scribes. They comprised the highest authority among the Jews during our Lord's ministry on earth although they really had no Biblical authority for the power

that they wielded over the Jewish people. But I want to take each of these points, incident by incident, as we examine the case that the scribes and Pharisees had against the Lord.

I. WHEN THE MAN WITH PALSIED WAS HEALED BY OUR LORD (Mark 2:1-12).

It seems that what the scribes and Pharisees feared the most about our Lord, was His teaching. That is what the Lord was doing on this occasion when four men brought their friend to the Lord. He was so paralyzed that he could not walk, and so there was no possibility that he could have come on his own. But apparently both he and his friends were sure that if they brought him to the Lord, the Lord would heal him. But the big issue here was the forgiveness of sins, which may have been what the Lord was teaching to the people.

It seems that this man's illness has been brought on by sin, and the Lord knew it. And so to heal him, the Lord said, "Son," or better, *born one*, "thy sins be forgiven thee." We can understand why the scribes would think that a mere man did not have the authority to forgive sins, but the way the Lord handled this, should have raised the possibility in their minds that the Lord was more than a mere man. The Lord gave further evidence when He referred to Himself as "the Son of man," a Messianic term. The Lord gave positive proof of His Deity by proving that He had the authority to forgive sins by telling the man to take up his bed and walk. The light of the truth was shining all over that house on that day, but the scribes were so blinded by their opposition to the Lord that they could not profit from what He was saying to them. They should have pursued the possible Deity of our Lord, and it would have led them to understand that He, and He alone, of all men on earth had the power, the authority, to forgive sins. To the scribes and Pharisees the forgiveness of sins was a matter of works, not faith.

So this was a false charge.

II. THE LORD EATING WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS (Mark 2:13-17).

This was at a dinner given by Levi, a publican, after the Lord had called him to follow Him. Publicans were Jews who were employed by the Roman government to collect taxes from their own people. The trouble

was that all of them collected more than they were required by the Romans to collect, which they were allowed to keep for themselves. They, and probably others as well, were classified as “sinners” because they really had no respect for God or His Word. They lived however they wanted to live.

But Levi evidently knew that many of them were unhappy doing what they were doing. The people who do whatever they want to do, are usually unhappy people. Money and pleasure and sin never produce happiness. Levi knew this, and certainly the Lord knew this. He knew that they had a sickness of the soul which only could be healed by the Gospel. And so the Lord didn't consider it a risk to His reputation to be with Levi's former crowd to minister to them because that is why He came into the world – “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). This is why the Lord came to earth, to die for sinners. The publicans and sinners were sinners, and so that is where He wanted to be to tell them about forgiveness. Sometimes the people who seem the farthest away, are the people who are most willing to listen to the Gospel.

So there was nothing to this charge.

III. CRITICISM OF THE LORD BECAUSE HIS DISCIPLES DID NOT FAST (Mark 2:18-22).

In our Lord's Sermon on the Mount He condemned the Pharisees and scribes as “hypocrites” because they looked sad, disfigured their faces, so that people would think that they were fasting. But it was all a show, so that men would praise them for being so religious. See Matt. 6:16.

And later in Matthew 23 the Lord condemned the scribes and Pharisees because they appeared clean on outside, but inside they were full of extortion and excess” (Matt. 23:25). Then He told them to clean up the inside so that the outside would be clean also. Man tries to clean up the heart by ceremonies and rituals observed outwardly, but that never works. God starts with the heart, and then the life is changed.

The Lord told the scribes and Pharisees that His disciples would not fast while He was with them, but the day was coming when would be “taken away,” and then they would fast. “Taken away” can mean *taken away to die*. The Lord was ever making remarks that indicate that He never for a moment lost sight of His reason for coming to earth as a Man. And His

talk about a garment and wine bottles indicated that He had come, not to patch up human lives, but to make them completely new.

So there was nothing to this charge.

IV. THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES BLAMED THE LORD BECAUSE HIS DISCIPLES PLUCKED CORN AND ATE IT ON THE SABBATH DAY (Mark 2:23-28).

Here we come to new territory in our study of Mark's Gospel.

The Jews through the years had added a lot of things to the Law which had been given by God to Moses. Plucking corn to eat it was considered by the scribes and Pharisees to be work, and so they were judging the disciples for working. The Jewish people were still under the Law in those days, and it would have been a violation of the Law to harvest a crop on the Sabbath Day. But this was not a harvest. The disciples were hungry and plucked corn and ate it to satisfy their hunger.

To rebuke them the Lord cited an example from the life of David. This incident is recorded for us in 1 Samuel 21. Mark said here that it was in the days of Abiathar the high priest. The record in 1 Samuel 21 says that it was in the days when Ahimelech was the priest. Actually Ahimelech was the father of Abiathar. No one really knows the reason for this apparent conflict. It may be that this was in a time when father and son were actually working together. Ahimelech is simply called "the priest" in 1 Samuel 21, while Mark called Abiathar "the high priest." So it probably was when Abiathar had taken over from his father, but his father was the one who actually gave the showbread to David.

But the point seems to be that the Lord never intended that the rules of the Sabbath or of the Temple worship were never meant to overrule the needs of the Lord's people. But the bread which was given to David was bread, as it seems, which had been removed from the table of showbread to make room for the hot, fresh bread. And it was the bread that was taken away, five loaves of them, that the priest gave to David. So the Lord was mindful of the needs of His people, and did not intend for the rules of the Sabbath to keep His people from satisfying legitimate needs on the Sabbath Day.

So the charge brought against our Lord in this matter, was thrown out.

V. THE HEALING OF THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND ON THE SABBATH DAY (Mark 3:1-6).

Here we are back with our Lord in the synagogue, and it is the Sabbath Day. The Lord is present, and there is also a man there with a withered hand. But those hypocrites, the scribes and Pharisees, are there also, and they are watching the Lord to see if He would heal the man. There is the suggestion here that they believe the Lord could heal him, and they are hoping that He will so that they could bring charges against Him.

The Lord said to the man with the crippled hand, “Stand forth.” The NASB translates it, “Rise, and come forward.” The Lord was not about to try to hide what He was doing from His enemies, but He wanted everyone in the synagogue to see Him heal the man.

But before He did anything, He addressed “them,” that is, the scribes and the Pharisees, and He asked them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath Day to do good,” that is, to heal the man with the withered hand, “or to do evil,” which would mean not doing anything to help him. I have been reading the epistle of James in preparation for the Tuesday class, and as I read this question I was reminded of James 4:17 where James wrote,

17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

We know that our Lord would not, and could not, sin, and so He could not let that man go away with his hand still withered and useless. But when the scribes and Pharisees refused to answer this question which had a very obvious answer, the Lord became angry. He was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. They would rather support their own man-made regulations, than to see that man healed.

What did the Lord do? He told the man to stretch out his hand, the very thing that he had not been able to do. But the Lord enabled him to do what he couldn't do for himself, “and his hand was restored whole as the other” (Mark 2:5).

Did the scribes and Pharisees rejoice with the man who had been healed? No! They headed for the door and immediately met with the political Herodians to make plans as to how they were going to kill our Lord.

Concl: When our beliefs make us hard toward people in need, whether it

is in plucking corn on the Sabbath Day, or happy to leave someone in physical trouble because we think it is not the right time to help them, there is something terrible wrong with our theology. I'll tell you what was wrong with the scribes and Pharisees: they were just as unregenerate as those publicans and sinners whom they despised so much. The Lord did not give the Law to Israel to make them hard and lacking in compassion. He gave them the Law to teach them what sin was, so that they would look to Him for the forgiveness of their sins.

Beware of the person, even though he might wear clerical robes and stand in a pulpit somewhere, who can't see anything good about Jesus Christ, or who finds fault with Him. There is nothing bad at all about our Lord. He is the essence of goodness and of righteousness. And we are to be like Him. If there is any hardness in our hearts, let's ask the Lord to take it away. And let us give ourselves more and more to the Word of God, asking the Holy Spirit to conform us more and more to our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.