

Christology – Life of Christ

Mark Chapter 2 – Part 2

REVIEW

Mark begins with “the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” As was expressed by Luther, this is the topic of the entire account of the life of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is too often limited to “Jesus Christ died, buried, and rose again.” However, the gospel in the four accounts must be taken as the good news of the activity and the message of the Messiah, culminating in the sacrificial atonement of the death, burial, and resurrection (and ascension) of the Messiah.

The message in Mark is the good news of the Messiah to national Israel. Remember the target audience is Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews in the Diaspora so that they would have a record of the words and works of Jesus the Christ.

Mark 1:9-2:28 is about Jesus becoming active in His ministry. After going about and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, Jesus demonstrates His authority and the validity of His message through the works He performs. The works that Jesus has done so far are:

Jesus demonstrates authority over the unclean spirits (1:23-27)

Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law (1:29-31)

Jesus heals many who come to Him (1:32-33)

Cleansing a leper (1:40-44)

A paralytic has his sins forgiven and is healed (2:1-13)

Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) and has dinner with tax collectors and sinners (2:14-17)

MARK CHAPTER 2 - CONCLUSION

Mark 2:18-22

Jesus is confronted about fasting. In our study in Matthew, we covered fasting in Matthew 6:16-18. We will not readdress the entire study; we will simply review some of the conclusions we made.

Fasting was not prescribed in the Torah, but it became part of the Israeli culture. The point of fasting was not an act of righteousness to the Lord alone, but it was a community, a national call to return to the Lord and prepare for the Messianic period.

Fasting was not a simple prohibition against eating but was also a call to care for the poor and share provisions.

Fasting was an act of national mourning or done in sadness for national sin.

Within Pharisee Judaism, fasting became an act of self-abasement to be seen as pious.

In Mark, Jesus answers the question about fasting with a metaphor. “No one fasts while the bridegroom is present, but while he is away (mourning).”

This metaphor does not really make sense to most of us because we do not have a cultural or historical understanding. We do not have a culture where the two betrothed individuals are separated while the

Christology – Life of Christ Mark Chapter 2 – Part 2

groom goes to prepare for their lives. But we can understand how that circumstance would cause the betrothed to be sorrowful and, in their culture, fasting was often performed as a sign of mourning.

Jesus then is recorded as saying two hard-to-understand statements.

1. No one sews a new cloth on old garments
2. No one puts new wine into old wineskins

On the surface, we can look at the nature of patching and how wineskins were used.

Older clothes had already shrunk from washing. If you put on a new patch on old clothes, then when the new cloth shrinks, it would tear away from the old garment and make the tear worse.

In ancient times, wine was kept in animal skins. New skins were soft and pliable and would stretch when wine that had not yet completed fermentation was put in them. However, old wineskins that had been stretched would become brittle and consequently, being no longer pliable, unable to stretch. When the wine would ferment in old skins, the skins would burst open, destroying both wine and wineskins.

But this does not tell us what this means.

Is this about fasting? Not sure. The typical interpretation of these two verses is that what Jesus is bringing is something new for a new age and is not compatible with the old.

As we have explained, Jesus is not bringing a new understanding but a proper one. Jesus is not telling them to put aside the Mosaic Law. Jesus came and fulfilled the Law. He kept the Law but kept it as it was intended.

Therefore, Jesus is not telling them to take on this new teaching and forsake their Mosaic Law, rather He is challenging them to understand the true intent of the Law. They needed to put aside their old misconceptions about the Law and adjust to the truth.

If they wanted to understand and follow Jesus in the principle of fasting, they needed to match their understanding with the true nature of the Law and the Prophets.

This is somewhat difficult because Scripture does not explain these metaphors for us. The other two references (Matthew and Luke) do not add any insights except for the final verse in Luke 5 (v. 39). In this verse, Jesus states that it is hard for someone to get away from an old way of thinking. They become complacent and do not desire the new (to them) way of thinking.

This is not about the old and new covenants; this is not a new interpretation of the Law. This was a counter to what the Law had become in Israel, and to Israel, it was new.

Mark 2:23-28

In the Law, it was an ordinance to permit someone to pick grain as they walked, even if the field was not theirs. This was not harvesting but gleaning. It was a sign of grace and mercy. However, this act was observed on a Sabbath. Just as Jesus challenged their views on eating with sinners and fasting, Jesus was now going to challenge their views about the Sabbath.

Christology – Life of Christ Mark Chapter 2 – Part 2

Before we look at this passage, we must again remember that Jesus was not altering or changing the Law, He was giving a proper understanding of it.

The Pharisaical Law was that absolutely no work was permitted on the Sabbath. This understanding was so well known that this rigged sense of the prohibition how Jews and Christians today typically understand the Law. In other words, we think that the Law states that any work is disapproved on the Sabbath.

In the Law, sowing and reaping were not permitted on a Sabbath. Is picking a strand of wheat reaping? To the Pharisee it was. But what about in the home? Is lifting a spoon working? The Pharisaical argument falls apart under scrutiny and is often impractical.

The Sabbath was a day of rest, not a day of heavy scrutiny. If the prohibition becomes unreasonable, it is tyrannical. The Pharisees were not concerned with God, His love, or His mercy. They used a form of the Law and twisted it for their own devices to control and persecute.

To rebut this improper use of the Law, Jesus brings up the account of David eating what was, in the Law, provided for the priests and the priests alone (1 Samuel 21:1-6). The point is obvious—the Law is given with an intent. If there are circumstances that demand it, mercy triumphs over judgment.

This is abundantly clear when we read the parallel passage in Matthew 12:1-8.

In Mark, the point is made that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

Since the sabbath was made for man, then the Son of Man has authority over the Sabbath. Since the priests in service to God work on the Sabbath and are guiltless, then work performed in honor to the Son of Man is good, even on a Sabbath.

CONCLUSION

Remember, the accounts are interesting, but this study in Mark is designed to give us information regarding Christology. What do these first two chapters tell us about Christ? Jesus, in His humanity, is humble, but clear. He is demonstrating that He is the Messiah. But instead of just telling everybody who He is, He gives tremendous proof so that His identity is clear to all who are paying attention.

Jesus does not glorify Himself but permits people to discover Him for themselves.

Jesus demonstrates His identity through:

1. His teaching
2. His miraculous works
3. His authority