

THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD

Mark 3:7-12

October 29, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

The last Sunday of October is celebrated as “Reformation Sunday,” marking the anniversary of the protestant Reformation. The Reformers protested the abuses of the Church and, more importantly, the abuse of the gospel. The Church had turned salvation into something that could be gained by works. But even the works had been watered down to the point that forgiveness for sins could be purchased through indulgences. The Church had taken the merits of Christ and His purchase of atonement for sins completely out of the picture in both word and practice. The Reformers had had enough.

Out of this important period in church history came the fivefold battle cry of the Reformation that we hold near and dear. These phrases set forth the purity of the gospel as set forth by God in His Word over against a gospel that leaves man dead in trespasses and sins. The gospel is *sola Scriptura* (“according to Scripture alone,” not commingled with the tradition of men), *sola gratia* (“by grace alone,” not by the works of men), *sola fide* (“through faith alone,” not by reason), *solus Christus* (“in Christ alone,” His person and His work), and *solus deo Gloria* (“for the glory of God alone,” not the glory of men).

However, the anathemic gospel as set forth by the Church in Luther’s day did not originate with them. The Bible is replete with man’s attempts to twist and distort God’s Word to try to fit their own interpretation and framework. This was the fault of the Pharisees, that group of religious leaders who sought to gain salvation through the keeping of the Law, by works, rather than by grace. They were the forerunners of a gospel that leaves man in bondage to sin rather than in the freedom from the power and penalty of sin that comes through trusting in Christ alone, who purchased a people for Himself through His finished work of atonement at Calvary. However, in a twist of what some would call irony and what we would call the sovereignty of God, it was at the hands of these sinful and obstinate Jews that the road to Golgotha was paved. What we see in our text this morning is the simple truth *that what man meant for evil, God meant for good in order to preserve many people alive.*

I. A Tragedy and a Triumph (3:7-8)

We last saw the Pharisees conspiring with the Herodians as to how they might destroy Jesus (3:6). As we noted then, the Herodians were a most unlikely group for the Pharisees to identify with in any way. Their jealousy of Jesus had caused them to turn to anyone anywhere that would listen to them and help them bring this man down.

1. The departure of Jesus (v. 7a)

The first two words of our text are some of the most sobering in all of Scripture, “**Jesus withdrew.**” Here we see the implications of v. 6. Matthew tells us that Jesus was aware of the plot of the Pharisees, along with the Herodians, to destroy Him (12:15). So Jesus departs from them. One writer grasps the magnitude of His departure, “These verses seem to mark the first decisive breach between Jesus and organized Judaism... Jesus now moved away from those who had become His enemies, *by a deliberate act of separation.*”¹ The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, which erupted from the hard hearts of the Pharisees, has now come to a head.

¹ R. Alan Cole, *TNTC: Mark*, 133-4, emphasis mine.

The more Jesus sought to do the will of the Father, the more antagonistic these religious leaders became toward Him. The obstacle to them following Jesus was in them. As Sinclair Ferguson rightly notes, there error was twofold. They had a wrong view of God, and consequently an inadequate view of sin.² Their entire theological system was skewed by their misinterpretation and misuse of the law. The law was given to expose their sin and drive them to Christ. Instead, because of the hardness of their hearts, their interpretation of God's Word kept them from knowing Christ. So Jesus, knowing their callousness and their plot against Him, leaves the synagogue, the place of God, the house of prayer, and the religious scholars of that place, and goes to where the ordinary people, those who had not been brainwashed by these religious zealots, would gladly receive Him and be enriched by His words and His deeds.³

It is a tragic scene when the glory of the Lord departs from His people. In 1 Samuel 4 we read of the ark of the covenant taken by the Philistines. Eli's son Phineas was killed in that battle and his wife gave birth to a son and named him Ichabod, which means, "the glory has departed from Israel." The ark of God, which represented God's presence with His people, had departed because of Israel's unfaithfulness.

The prophet Hosea also spoke of the presence of God withdrawing from His people. Notice the similarities in Hosea's prophecy between the Israelites and the Pharisaical Judaism that Jesus encountered.

Hosea 10:1-5 – Israel is a luxuriant vine; He produces fruit for himself. The more his fruit, The more altars he made; The richer his land, The better he made the *sacred* pillars. ² Their heart is faithless; Now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars *And* destroy their *sacred* pillars. ³ Surely now they will say, "We have no king, For we do not revere the LORD. As for the king, what can he do for us?" ⁴ They speak *mere* words, With worthless oaths they make covenants; And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field. ⁵ The inhabitants of Samaria will fear For the calf of Beth-aven. Indeed, its people will mourn for it, And its idolatrous priests will cry out over it, Over its glory, since it has departed from it.

"Jesus withdrew" from the Pharisees. These words should strike fear in the hearts of those who simply give lip service to serving Christ but in who there is no reality of Christ in their life. These words should terrify those who have the privilege of sitting under the preaching and teaching of the gospel week in and week out and continue to exalt themselves rather than Christ, denying their sinfulness and their need for a Savior. They should hear that while God is a patient God, this privilege might be taken from them. Dear friends, heed this warning! **"Jesus withdrew"** and the possibility of knowing God aright went with Him. The just judgment of the Pharisees was at hand for their denial of the Savior.

2. The response of the crowds (vv. 7b-8)

It has always fascinated me how the gospel often spreads farther and faster in times of severe persecution. Joseph Tson tells the story of how he was hunted down in Romania for preaching the gospel. With a government official's gun held to his head, Tson told him that it would be a mistake to kill him because his sermons would be in greater demand if he were dead than if he were alive. In other words, the gospel would spread faster and farther through his death than through his life. The man spared Tson's life.

² Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Let's Study Mark*, 38.

³ Donald English, *BST: The Message of Mark*, 81.

We see this born out in Scripture as well. The persecution of Paul and the death of Stephen caused the Christians to flee into the furthest regions. In their fleeing, the gospel was taken far and abroad. We see the same thing in this text. Notice what happens. Jesus withdraws along with His disciples, and people come from everywhere to hear Him. Mark is careful to note the broad area in and around Palestine that Jesus now reaches. People came from Jerusalem, Judea, Idumea and beyond the Jordan, from Tyre and Sidon. Many of those beyond the Jordan would have been Gentiles. And yet, they came. The common people, those who knew they were sick and needed a doctor, came. The religious elite, the “upper class sinners” as Sinclair Ferguson calls them,⁴ did not come to Jesus. As one writer stated, “It is as if the sabbath healing by Jesus in the synagogue was being vindicated by the common people though official Judaism repudiated it.”⁵

There are two things we notice here. First, the region itself. People from Jerusalem and Judea and the uttermost parts of the Roman world came to Jesus. Does that sound at all familiar? The last words of Jesus on this earth before His ascension were, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus tells His disciples to maintain His witness in the very regions that we see coming to Him on this occasion, the exception being the Samaritans who at this point remained distant from the religious interests of the Jews because of the prejudice that existed between them. So what we see here is a bit of foreshadowing. Jesus own outreach within and beyond Palestine anticipates and authenticates the Church’s mission to the world.⁶

But second, notice the response of the people. **“A great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him.”** They heard and they came. Granted, they came because they heard what Jesus was doing. They heard how He had healed many and how He had cast out demons. Some, if not most, were more concerned about His miracles than His message. But they came, nonetheless, trusting that Jesus was the only one who could meet their need. He was their only hope. And, as we will see, He responded to their faithfulness. The miracles He performed affirmed His message. Some would heed the message and follow Christ by faith, receiving salvation, and some of these would accept their healing and never recognize their greatest need, which was to have their sins forgiven in Christ alone.

Their response serves as a picture of one who truly comes to Christ by faith. In Romans 10:17 Paul wrote, “So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” These people heard about Christ, and they came *to Him*. Although many came simply for physical healing, they came nevertheless to the One whom they heard could heal them of their diseases when no one else could. When a person comes to faith in Christ spiritually, it is no different. They realize that they are sick, desperately and incurably sick in sin and that Christ and Christ alone is the remedy. They hear the message of the gospel because they have been given ears to hear. They cast themselves upon Christ because they hear and trust that forgiveness of sins is *solus Christus* and they cry out to God for His mercy through Jesus Christ. “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). These heard, and they came to Him.

⁴ Ferguson, 39.

⁵ Cole, 134.

⁶ William L. Lane, *NICNT: The Gospel of Mark*, 130.

II. Christ's Compassion and Authority (3:9-12)

This section serves as both a conclusion to the “conflict” narratives that precede it as well as an introduction to what follows. It serves as sort of a bridge from one set of narratives to the next. Mark inserts this to remind us of how he has set out to present Christ as both the compassionate Servant and the authoritative King, the importance of both His works and His words.

1. His healing of the multitudes (vv. 9-10)

Mark is the only of the gospels to mention that Jesus asked His disciples to have a small boat ready in order to prevent the purposeful if not unruly crowds from crushing Him. The little boat provided a means of escape from the throngs. At other times it served as a pulpit for Jesus preaching and teaching the crowd as He would push off from the shore a bit to address the crowd. So the crowd provided both an impediment and an opportunity to Jesus' ministry.

We are not told whether Jesus uses the boat on this occasion. What we do know is that in spite of the overwhelming numbers of people pressing in around Him, **“He had healed many.”** Matthew says, “He healed them all” (12:15). They did not wait for Jesus to touch them. Mark says, **“Those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him.”** Luke says, “And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing *them* all” (6:19). We see the compassion that Jesus had for these people. He certainly knew that many of them were there only for physical healing. He knew they were more concerned for His work than His word. But He healed them, healed them all. John MacArthur notes the great compassion of Christ on this occasion:

Jesus' miracles of healing demonstrated His divine power, but they also demonstrated His divine love and compassion for suffering people. He healed in order to reveal the loving heart of God, which continually goes out to those who are hurting, burdened, and persecuted. The people Jesus healed were despised and neglected by the scribes and Pharisees... The religious leaders were interested in the rich and influential, not the sick, the poor, and the outcast... Jesus, on the other hand, always had time for those who were suffering and in need.

Later in Mark we will see that Jesus looks upon one of these large crowds and feels “compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34). They were beaten down and oppressed not only by the Romans but by their religious leaders as well, those who should have been their shepherds. Again, they were more interested in the “upper class sinners” than the downtrodden.

There is a particularly revealing scene in the movie *Luther*. Martin Luther is sent to Rome from Erfurt with an edit for the Pope. While in Rome, Luther is caught up in a crowd of people buying indulgences. Luther purchases one for his grandfather and we can see Luther's expression change as he climbs the steps in the bustle of the crowd. As we were watching the movie yesterday, I commented to Steve to notice the crowd. They were all peasants. There was no royalty there. There were no bishops or cardinals there. Only peasants, who had been sold a lie in the form of an indulgence by the religious authorities. As Luther would tell Hannah later in the movie after she purchases an indulgence, the indulgence was nothing but a piece of paper and advised her to keep her money and by her daughter some food. The indulgence was a scam perpetrated by the Church to line the pockets of the rich.

Luther had compassion for a people, a passion for the truth. He stood against the religious elite of his day, the “sheep in wolves clothing.” That describes the scene here. Jesus had great

compassion for these who had been so misled by the Pharisees. He lovingly healed them all of every disease and affliction. Benjamin Warfield noted, “For a time disease and death must have been almost banished from the land.”⁷ Notice Jesus does not make them pass a theology quiz or give an account of what had put them in this position. He simply heals them, demonstrating His love and compassion for these desperate people.

2. His warning to the demonic (vv. 11-12)

Here again Jesus comes into conflict with the demonic. As we have noted before, there was an abnormal amount of demonic activity during the ministry of Christ. We also noted that is interesting that Scripture does not speak much about evil spirits or demonic possession prior to Jesus’ ministry nor is it mentioned much after the Cross and His resurrection. The book of Revelation indicates that this activity will increase again prior to the Lord’s return. Of course, that would be expected because the demons know that when Christ comes again, it will be the final judgment for them. You remember the question of the demon in Jesus’ initial encounter with them in Mark 1:24, “Have you come to destroy us?” is really a statement of fact. Their destruction was accomplished in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, which they attempt to thwart while He is on this earth by this increased activity, and will be fully realized when He returns, which they will again attempt to somehow distort by their increased activity.

Notice the reaction of the demons on this occasion. **“They”** (that being the people that these unclean spirits had polluted, possessed, and controlled) **“fall down before Him and shout, ‘You are the Son of God!’”** There is great irony in their statement. The demons knew who Jesus was when the Pharisees denied Him and some in the crowd did not. Their testimony and posture are what we would expect from those who truly know God and Christ. But their testimony is not one of submission. Sinclair Ferguson describes their deceptive appearance, “The cry of the demons was a cry of despair, not of faith. It was uttered with malevolence and antagonism, not joy and loyalty. It was calculated to destroy Jesus’ influence by suggesting that there was an association between him and those who recognized his identity.”⁸ So their testimony is not one of submission, but antagonism and an attempt to destroy his influence. Does that sound at all familiar? Who else do we encounter in the life of Christ, in this text, that are antagonizers? The scribes, Pharisees, and the religious elite. Ferguson concludes, “What Satan could not do through the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus’ claims, he would try to do through the demons’ recognition of them. But both men and demons are to be judged by their fruits—and the fruits of both were obvious and profoundly evil.”⁹

Conclusion

- 1. Have you come to Christ? Have you come to Him?**
- 2. Do you recognize the schemes and ploys of the adversary?**
- 3. What men meant for evil, God meant for good in order to preserve a people alive.**

⁷ Benjamin Warfield, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 175.

⁸ Ferguson, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*