

Gospel of Mark 4:- Opposition! - Chapter 2, verses 1 – 22

In this second chapter of Mark's Gospel, he introduces the first instances of official opposition to the teaching and practice of the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been suggested that Mark used some of the dramatic effects from the Greek plays of the era. The scribes and Pharisees form a "Greek chorus" in the background with their provocative questions about the authority of the Lord Jesus – chapter 2, verses 7; 16; 18 and 24. The section on opposition runs from chapter 2, verse 1 to chapter 3, verse 6. These five incidents are selected and described in detail because:-

- (i) They show that opposition to the Lord Jesus came not from the ordinary Jewish people but from authorities who had religious vested interests to maintain.
- (ii) They make clear the true character and grounds of the opposition, showing that it arose entirely from misunderstanding and shortcoming on the part of the authorities and not from any fault at all on the part of the Lord Jesus. We will look at it over two weeks.

Chapter 2, verses 1 – 12 – The healing of the paralysed man:-

Jesus is back in Capernaum "*at home*", most likely the house of Simon and Andrew (Chapter 1, verse 29). So many people had gathered to hear him as he was "*preaching the word*" (note that this is the same phrase used in chapter 1, verse 45) that the house was crowded and the doorway blocked. It was impossible to carry a paralysed man into the presence of the Lord Jesus. His friends must have been determined because they went up the outside steps and broke through the lath, plaster and tile roof! It would cause some consternation to those underneath with bits falling on their heads! The words of the Lord Jesus "*Son, your sins are forgiven you*" provoke the key question. - "*Why does this man talk like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" With his reply Jesus declares himself Divine. He has the authority from his Father to forgive sins as he does to heal the sick. Note that the title "*the Son of Man*" is taken from the Book of Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 – 14 (compare with Matthew chapter 24, verse 30) and refers to the Messiah. The healing of the sick man should have been proof that Jesus was the long expected Christ. Note that the healing was immediate and total.

Verses 13 – 17 – the calling of Levi :-

This incident comes immediately after the healing of the paralysed man in the first three Gospels. In the Gospel of Matthew he is named as "*Matthew*" (Matthew chapter 9, verse 9) so it is reasonable to suppose Levi and Matthew were the same person. He was a tax-collector / customs officer and as such regarded as a collaborator with the despised Roman overlords. Capernaum would have been an obvious place for a toll house, being on the north/south highway, near the junction with the main road to Damascus and a landing place for the crossing of the Sea of Galilee.

There is probably a space of at least a few days before the meal given by Matthew in his house. He had time to invite a number of his friends and colleagues as well as the disciples of Jesus – it reads as though it was a large gathering implying that Matthew / Levi was a man of some wealth (ill-gotten gains!). The Scribes and Pharisees present were unhappy in the company of 'sinners'! This is the context of their next question "*Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?*" (verse 16). Notice that the reply of the Lord Jesus echoes that of chapter 1, verse 38. The reason the Lord Jesus Christ came (to earth) was to offer the means of repentance and the way back to the Lord God to sinners and outcasts.

Verses 18 – 22 – the contrast between the old and new teaching:-

Perhaps the very time of Levi's feast was a fast day, since it was the practice of the Pharisees to fast twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays - see Luke chapter 18, verses 11 – 12. This brings out another question - "*Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?*" (verse 18). The nature of John the Baptist's ministry "*preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Mark 1, verse 4) was in harmony with the observance of fasting. In contrast Jesus came to announce 'Good News' and "*the friends of the bridegroom (the wedding guests)*" rejoiced while he was with them. There would be a time when the bridegroom was taken away – that would be the time for fasting. In verses 21 – 22, the examples of not using new cloth to patch old, and not putting new wine (still fermenting) into old hard wineskins, are used to contrast the old hard legalism with the new experience produced by faith in Christ. The vitality of new life in the power of the Holy Spirit could not be contained and restricted within the hard requirements of the Law as it was interpreted by Pharisees at the time.