

Appropriate Response to the Prevailing Condition
Mark 2:18-22

URGING APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO THE PREVAILING CONDITIONS

If you take the time to survey the digital output coming from the church today, if you scan Facebook, YouTube, various websites and podcasts online blogs of preachers known and unknown, you will find men and women earnestly working to mold and shape Christian thinking and Christian believing and Christian behavior toward the prevailing conditions of the day.

Black Lives Matter

I watched one such offering yesterday as a pastor strove to help his people know how to respond to the phrased “Black Lives Matter” opposed to “All Lives Matter.” Using Jesus’ words in the sermon on the mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom on heaven,” this pastor pointed out to his people that there are times when a general truth, in this case “blessedness,” can be applied specially to one part of a whole population in order to focus on their experience of blessedness compared to the experience of others. The pastor wanted his people to understand that “All Lives Matter,” is a general truth not to be denied, but that this was a time when the prevailing condition of culture called for a special focus on one part of the whole population in order to better understand their experience. The pastor purposed in that message to prepare his people to make an appropriate response to the prevailing condition.

John Piper, *Coronavirus and Christ*

John Piper, a pastor and church leader from Minneapolis many of your are familiar with released a new little book a few weeks ago called, *Coronavirus and Christ*. In this little book, that you can download for free online, Piper invites readers around the world to stand on the solid Rock, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One in whom our souls can be sustained by the sovereign God who ordains, governs, and reigns over all things, including coronavirus, to accomplish his wise and good purposes for those who trust in him. Piper offers six biblical answers to the question, What is God doing through the coronavirus? He reminds us that God is at work in this moment in history. Piper writes to assist believers to make an appropriate response to the prevailing condition in our day.

Dave Rosenthal, *Zion’s Fire*

I have intermittently followed Marvin Rosenthal’s teaching on biblical prophecy for more than thirty years, ever since I first encountered his book on the rapture, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. Rosenthal’s son is the editor of their ministry magazine called, *Zion’s Fire*. This month Dave Rosenthal departed from discussion of their scheduled passage in Revelation to ask, *Is this the dawn of a new world “disorder?”* in an article subtitled, *The global reset of planet earth and the coming technocratic tyranny*. Rosenthal warns the church that the prophecies of Scripture relative to one world government and one world religion seems closer to fulfilment than ever before. He points to the pandemic, the role Bill Gates is assuming in global healthcare structuring, the crippled global economy, and the word of God relating to the rise of lawlessness. He urges the church, he urges every Christian to respond appropriately, biblically, faithfully to the prevailing conditions of the day.

JESUS AND THE THIRD CONTROVERSY

We know that Mark 2:18-22 is one part of a five part series here in the gospel of Mark characterized by controversy, by a dispute over truth.

The First Controversy: Permission

The first was a controversy over permission, does Jesus have permission, does He have the authority of God to forgive sins. Jesus not only proves that He is God and therefore has the authority to forgive sins, He also demonstrates that forgiving sins is the priority of His mission. His words to the paralytic are not first, “Be healed,” but “Be forgiven.” Jesus actions teach us that healing of the body is incidental to healing of the soul.

The Second Controversy: People

The second dispute was a controversy about people: The question is essentially who can be included in God’s grace, to which Jesus responds that the mercy of God focuses on those who need grace the most, sinners, and that every human being is one who needs grace the most. Jesus’ response to this controversy is hope for all of us, that no matter who we are or what we have done, or even what we think about God and about Christ, God’s mercy and forgiveness are available to us, that Jesus will reject no one who comes to Him in faith.

The Third Controversy: Protocols and Procedures

This third dispute is a controversy over procedures and protocols.

The people have a question

Some people come to Jesus with a question. The identity of these seekers is vague and ambiguous. The Greek word is simply the pronoun, “they.” They could be observers from the crowd. They could be more of the scribes and Pharisees. They could be people genuinely seeking to understand Jesus, His teaching, His perspective on life in the Spirit in the world. Who they are is less important than the question they bring.

The validity of their question: disciples should be like their teacher

People come to Jesus with a question about the conduct of His disciples. They ask Jesus about His disciples because they assume the disciples are acting in accordance with the will and teaching of the Master. They assume that since the point of being a disciples is to take on the teaching and life practice of the teacher, that the behavior of Jesus’ disciples is a direct correlation to the teaching and practice of Jesus.

Folks, don’t forget this correlation, because the people who come to Jesus are correct. The observable life practice of a disciple of Jesus ought to conform to the life and teaching of Jesus Himself. Many in the world today have a false understanding of Jesus because they assume the disciples of Jesus live and act like Jesus, and some who call themselves disciples of Jesus live lives that look more like the world than like Jesus. This leaves people like these in our passage ever more confused and ever more resistant to grace and vulnerable to deception.

Fasting and the Pharisees

Jesus never challenges or disputes the people’s assumption. He simply responds to the question

as to whether what the disciples are doing or not doing is right in and of itself. The Pharisees and the disciples of John were fasting and Jesus' disciples were not. The people want to know what's up. The only required fast in the Old Testament was on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies on the temple and offer a sacrifice for himself and for the entire people of Israel. The Pharisees, seeing fasting as an expression of humility and repentance had prescribed that people would not only fast on the Day of Atonement, but if you really wanted to be holy, you should fast twice a week. They set the fast days as Mondays and Thursdays.

The controversy question

It is on one of these weekdays the people come to Jesus and point out the practice of other holy people and wonder why Jesus and His disciples do not follow suit. Why do these holy people fast your disciples do not?

The purpose of fasting

Now, in order to appreciate Jesus' answer and the proverbs He uses to illustrate the validity of His answer, keep in mind the purpose of fasting. Fasting is the practice of doing without food for a period of time in order to pray, seek the Lord, confess sin, and repent. It is a means by which people actively prepare their hearts and lives for the presence of God by purposefully removing spiritual obstacles and physical distractions and focusing on God with a desire for Him to fulfill His promises in their lives. For many in Jesus' day, fasting was an occasion to call on God to send the Messiah, the One who would deliver the nation from sin and from subjection to other human powers (especially the Romans.) Fasting is basically a intense request for God to show up in a person's life. Now you can begin to understand Jesus' response to the controversy.

Jesus' Response to the Controversy

Jesus turns to the familiar practice of weddings as He responds to the question.

Mark 2:19 (ESV) *And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.*

According to a rabbinical ruling, all the guests at a wedding are exempted from all fasting. The ruling states, "All in attendance on the bridegroom are relieved of all religious observances which would lessen their joy." Why are the guests at a wedding exempted from fasting? Because their source of joy is present. If fasting is basically a request for someone to be present, and that person's presence would contribute to the joy of the person fasting, then there is no need for fasting when the person desired is present.

When the source of joy is present then fasting is an inappropriate response to the prevailing condition. Since fasting is an intense request for God to show up, when God shows up, there is no further need for fasting. In fact, to continue to fast when God is present is to deny God's presence! Jesus says the reason His disciples do not fast is because His disciples realize they have what the others are fasting for. God has shown up. Jesus is the answer to the fasting of the Pharisees and John's disciples. So, instead of fasting, there should be celebrating and rejoicing, just as there is among the wedding guests when the Bridegroom is present.

Jesus resolves the controversy by pointing to His presence

Jesus responds to the question, “Why do your disciples not fast?” by saying, “Because they have with them the joy they would ask for.” “Fasting is an intense request for God to show up and here I am. When I am taken away from them, they will fast and seek my return, but until then, they are responding appropriately to the prevailing condition. I am the prevailing condition. I am present with them and they are thinking and acting appropriately.

Jesus supports His resolution with two illustrative proverbs

Jesus then follows up His response, that His disciples are responding appropriately to the prevailing condition of His presence, with two illustrative proverbs.

Mark 2:21-22 (ESV) ²¹ *No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.* ²² *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.”*

New patches in old garments

Before we try to take these verses apart and identify spiritual garments and wineskins, old and new, let’s take a step back and simply understand what these two verses teach at face value. The lesson is simple common sense: act appropriately for the prevailing condition. It makes no sense to patch an old garment with a new piece of fabric. When the garment is washed the new patch will shrink and make a bigger tear. Putting a new patch in an old garment makes no sense. That behavior fails to act appropriately for the prevailing condition.

New wine in old wineskins

It is the same with wine and wineskins. Common sense tells you that old wineskins have lost their elasticity and that if you put new wine, still fermenting and producing carbon dioxide gas, the gas will force the old, brittle, non-elastic skin to burst, ruining both the wineskin and the wine. That would be dumb. Who would do that? New wine in old wineskins fails to act appropriately for the prevailing condition. To act appropriately for the prevailing condition (the gaseous expansion of fermenting new wine) place the wine in a new, still expandable wineskin. Respond appropriately to the prevailing condition.

THE MESSAGE FOR US AND OUR PREVAILING CONDITION

So, what does the lesson of this controversy mean for us? How might Christians today, you and me, respond appropriately to the prevailing condition of our day?

The Prevailing Condition Relative to Christ

There are three truths we have to keep in mind as we consider the answer to that question.

Truth #1: Keep in mind that Christ has come

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Deliverer, the Rescuer, the One appointed by God to save His people from the peril of death and judgment presented by sin has already come into the world.

We are no longer waiting for God to speak redemptively in the world.

Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV) ¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

Christ has come, born of a virgin, laid in a manger, worshiped by angels and shepherds. He grew in stature with God and man. At His baptism by John in the Jordan River, the Spirit descended upon Him and God spoke His approval, anointing Him for His divine mission as the Christ. He gathered disciples; He healed the lame; He gave sight to the blind; He reconciled lepers; He cast out demons; He forgave sins; He fed thousands. He proved time and again that He was the Christ, the Son of God, and then, at the hands of plotting leaders and an angry mob, he was handed over to uncaring Romans and crucified on a cross on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem.

Two of his disciples took His body and laid it in a new tomb, cut out of the rock, that no one had been buried in. They rolled a stone across the entrance and went home. Three days later God raised Him from the tomb, the reward for an innocent life and a substitutionary death. He ascended to heaven where He ever lives, seated at the right hand of God, making intercession for us.

Jesus is not a wish or a hope for the future. Jesus is the Christ who has come and lived and died on the cross in our place on our behalf for our sins. Jesus is the word of God come from heaven who dwelt among us full of grace and truth, who sent the promised Spirit to us, and who now invites sinners everyone to put their faith in Him and receive forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and a new transformed life of grace and power in the Spirit.

Keep in mind, Christian, as you seek an answer to how you might respond appropriately to the prevailing condition of your life that Jesus Christ has already come in the flesh, died on the cross, been raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven.

Truth #2: Keep in mind that though we live in the world, we are of Christ and not of the world.

When you put your faith in Jesus and committed your life to Him you accepted that from that moment forward Jesus Christ would be the prevailing condition of your life. You live in the world, but you no longer belong to the world. You belong to Jesus. He is your joy. He is your satisfaction. He is your contentment. He is your pleasure and your delight. He is the reason you live differently than the world lives. He is the reason you take a different stand on procedures and protocols than the world does, on positions and politics than the world does, on issues and information than the world does, on plans and outcomes than the world does.

The prevailing condition in your life is not the state of the world around you, but the state of the Spirit of Christ within you. Peter declares in the Spirit,

1 Peter 1:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ *knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Remember what Paul declares of you,

Ephesians 2:12-13 (ESV) ¹² *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

The prevailing condition of your life, dear Christian, is not the situation and circumstances that fill the world, the person and power and presence of Christ that fills your heart.

Truth #3: Keep in mind that Christ is coming again.

Jesus described in detail that characteristics of the world as it comes to its end,

Matthew 24:3-13 (ESV) ³ *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"*

⁴ *And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray.⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

⁹ *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

Jesus Christ who was taken up into heaven will return. He returns not as the Lamb but as the Lion, not as the sacrifice but as the King, not a babe laying in a manger, but as the victorious,

sovereign God riding upon the white horse of battle who will fell the armies of the world and the minions of the devil with a single word from His mouth.

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV) *¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

Christian, this is the prevailing condition to which you must respond appropriately in this day: Christ has come, you belong to Christ, Christ is coming again. How then, in our day of trouble, uproar, lawlessness, and uncertainty should we respond?

Respond Appropriately to the Prevailing Condition in Our Day

Let me close this morning with the admonitions Paul gave the Thessalonian church when he dealt with them on this same issue. They, too, lived in tumultuous times in anticipation of the return of Jesus.

Paul's first admonition

First, Paul warns them, and I warn you, do not be deceived.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 (ESV) *¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way.*

The primary weapon the enemy uses in the last days is deceit. He will make evil look good, wickedness look holy; unrighteousness look pleasurable. He will convince the world their only true pleasure comes in rejecting God and the things of God and embracing the world and the things of the world.

Many Christians today already flounder on this slippery slope of deception as they reject the word of God and lean heavily on the philosophies of culture for their moral guidance. Let none of you be so deceived.

Paul's second admonition

To that end, Paul advises them, and I advise you

2 Thessalonians 2:15 (ESV) *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the*

traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Do not abandon the truth, the word of God you have been taught, that you have learned, that you have embraced. The Scriptures extend the mind and heart of God, His revelation of His own nature and will. Do not trade His word for the words of men who do not know Him.

The apostasy and deception will happen because people will feel more pleasure in unrighteousness than in truth. It all comes down to 2 Thessalonians 2:10 and 12, which get at the same thing in two different ways. Verse 10: People are deceived and will perish “because they refused to love [love, cherish, treasure, embrace, kiss, enjoy, find pleasure in!] the truth.” Verse 12: They will be condemned “who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Believing involves having more pleasure in the truth (loving it [verse 10]) than in unrighteousness.

There are many today who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction. Do not be among them. Know the word. Love the word. Live the word.

Paul’s final admonition

I want to leave you with this word this morning, and then share Paul’s benediction with you. Paul admonished the Thessalonians,

2 Thessalonians 3:13 (ESV) *As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.*

Paul encouraged them to not be weary in well doing because trying to keep doing good in a world going to hell in a handbasket can be wearisome. Think of the energy expended by a salmon swimming upstream against the raging currents. Think of turning around in the middle of a packed escalator and making your way against the crowd back to the top.

Call on the Spirit, trust in the Lord, and keep doing what is right and good as God reveals it in His word.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

The Lord be with you all.