

Home Study

Mark's Epiphany



MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard this saying? “If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck.” That’s an example of abductive reasoning, which is a fancy term for making logical conclusions from what we know.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day, particularly the Pharisees, were apparently not very good at abductive reasoning. They saw Jesus perform miracle after miracle. They listened to his authoritative, highly-effective teaching and preaching. They saw the people responding to Jesus in dramatic, unusual ways. They had the opportunity to see and hear, first-hand, God’s Son in human flesh here on this earth. And, yet, they absolutely refused to concede that Jesus could possibly be for real.

We are living right now in a time of conflict and division in our land. Let’s read as Mark tells us more about the growing dispute between Jesus and the religious leaders.

TODAY’S READING

In your Bible, read Mark 3:1-12. As you are reading this section, make a note of any items that surprise you, or jump out at you in some way.

Let’s assume that the Pharisees who were watching Jesus in the synagogue are the same ones who questioned Jesus in Mark 2:23-28. Re-read that story, if you don’t remember its details.

Notice how the Pharisees “watched Jesus” (verse 2), once they saw a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. It’s interesting that they were immediately assuming that Jesus would heal this man. It’s almost as if Christ’s healing power was, by now, a given – even for his enemies! Without saying so, they were admitting that Jesus possessed divine authority and power.

They were hoping, though, that Jesus would perform this healing on the Sabbath Day, so that they could accuse him, again, of breaking God’s Law. God had commanded his people to rest on the Sabbath Day, but the religious teachers of Jesus’ day were taking this restriction to the extreme.

Do you think that the main purpose of God’s Law is to catch people, and to ensnare them in guilt? Or do you think that God gave laws, such as the Sabbath law, to help his people stay in a healthy relationship with him?

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In verse 3, Jesus called the withered man to come over to him. Imagine a scene like this, in the crowded synagogue. A hush probably fell over the room. What do you suppose the man with the withered hand was feeling, as he walked over to where Jesus was? Was he hopeful? Eager? Nervous? Wary of the spotlight? Concerned about the reaction of the Pharisees?

Before he healed the man, Jesus turned to the Pharisees. He wasn't avoiding the conflict that they were seeking. Christ courageously confronted their hypocrisy. Read verse 4 again. This is a rhetorical question, obviously. Anyone who knows the heart of God – and even those who were familiar with the Jewish legal traditions – would have admitted that the Sabbath laws could be broken in order to save a life.

The Pharisees remained silent. They knew the answer to Jesus' question, but refused to say it aloud. Are there times in your life when stubbornness can be a sin? Have you ever sinned by remaining silent?

Mark tells us a lot, in verse 5, about who Jesus really is. What do you think was the reason for his "anger" toward the Pharisees? What caused him to be "grieved at their hardness of heart?" Do you think that if these Pharisees had suddenly seen the light, and had begun to recognize Jesus' authority and divinity, then Jesus would have been happy or sad?

Unfortunately, the miracle that Jesus performed that day only pushed the Pharisees farther away. They now joined forces with their natural political opponents, the Herodians (the political followers of the Roman puppet king of their land, Herod), to conspire against Jesus.

Why did they want to destroy Jesus, in your view? Why not just speak against him, or taunt him? Why destroy him?

Take a few minutes to review the five conflicts recorded by Mark in 2:1-3:6. Can you see how quickly the opposition to Jesus has grown?

Verses 7-12 tell us that great crowds were now following Jesus, clamoring around him. Take a minute to find a *map of the Holy Land in Jesus' day* (Google search). The areas listed in verses 7-8 cover a wide range of territory, don't they? The Lord's popularity with the people was in startling contrast to his unpopularity with the religious officials. What did the common people see in Jesus that their leaders did not?

How deep do you think was the commitment level for most of the crowd? How deep has your commitment to Christ been, during the past year? Room for improvement?

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, please help me/us to have a clear, accurate view of who you really are, in my/our mind and in my/our heart. And help my/our everyday actions to be consistent with my/our beliefs. Help me/us to accept you as my/our God, Savior, and King. Amen.