

The
MARK
of a True Disciple

Shelby and Elisabeth Pritchard

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The
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of a True Disciple

Shelby and Elisabeth Pritchard

Preface

There were several reasons behind the compiling of this volume. First, I wanted a handy and convenient way of storing these lessons, as a full set, for the next time we teach through the book. Most important, however, is a desire to freely share the truths we've found with anyone willing to give us their ear. Christ's truth is so very important, but it does us no good to keep it to ourselves.

I'm well aware that many, many others have put their pens to far more scholarly, and far more eloquent, books on the Gospel of Mark. I'm also aware that this volume isn't even a commentary at all. It's simply a humble compilation of lessons given to a group of teens in the small town of Altus, Oklahoma, lightly edited for print.

So, why publish them? Because I want the world to know more about Jesus. I want to be a part of equipping leaders, inspiring preachers, and enabling discussions that help spread biblical literacy. And more, I don't want money to be a factor between those teachers, and a solid theology. That's why this material (at least the eBook) is, and forever will be, free.

When reviewing possible curriculum choices for our youth group, I kept finding lessons that fell into one (or both!) of two fatal errors. First, far more commonly, anything remotely aimed at teenagers was biblical deficient and utterly disregarding context and deeper interpretive accuracy. This grieves me, but it's true. Filled with silly stories and a light, goofy tone, they had the spiritual value of a tub of Cool Whip.

Second, the curriculum sets that did offer more sensitive dealings with the text were often priced exorbitantly. While claiming to be made with a heart for ministry,

these publishers locked their work behind high paywalls and often locked churches from easily distributing the material among other teachers, even within the same class. In short, they weren't ministries fully dedicated to spreading biblical literacy. They were companies trying to make a buck off their product.

Now, this isn't the place to declare my entire philosophy about the commercialization of Christianity, but I'm not sure I can agree with how it's often handled. There are plenty of funding models that make it possible to pay your bills while also making your material widely, and easily, available and at no cost, or at least low cost. Plus, there's that whole, approaching stuff as a ministry and not a business, thing. But that's a book for another time.

These were written and delivered from October 2022 to May 2023, at a church in Altus, OK, where I all too briefly served as the youth pastor. My wife, Beth, and I traded-off teaching nights, so you'll notice a style difference between the lessons. Perhaps one style will speak more clearly to you, or perhaps not. Our teens found both to be helpful.

Following the 25 lessons comes a section on Textual criticism, and some extra resources to help in your study. Using this in a weekly Bible study would supply 6 months of lessons, and we hope, plenty of insights and opportunities for spiritual growth.

Our goal with these was to do nothing more, and nothing less, than the glorious command that Paul gave Timothy:

“Preach the Word”

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Introduction to Mark

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Hearers would gain an appreciation for the authenticity of Mark's Gospel, not only understanding its historical reliability, but its theological integrity and purpose for exalting the Son of God.

I. Introduction

- A External Evidence
- B Internal Evidence
- C Beginning the Gospel Story

What does it mean to be a disciple?

Why do I ask? We're launching into a series looking in detail at the Gospel of Mark. It's the second book in the New Testament and one of the four books that detail the ministry of Jesus here on Earth. It tackles themes of discipleship, who Jesus is, why people should follow him, and what following him will look like. It's awesome.

Mark is also a rapid-fire dash through the story. It is by far the shortest Gospel account with only 16 chapters. It's a cornerstone of the Christian faith. It's stuffed full of incredible truths for us to learn.

Introduction to Mark

Or is it? Is it truth?

Depending on who you ask, it may be nothing more than a collection of incoherent fables. So, I want to start our time together looking through this account of Jesus' life, but before we can even get to the text, I want to back up and ask the biggest question that can be asked of the Bible. Can this be trusted?

There is some serious opposition.

As Christians, we're kinda tempted just to brush past this question with a few pat answers or not even bother with it at all. But this is important. If we cannot trust the records of our faith to be true, we cannot trust the beliefs of our faith to be true. If we cannot trust the Gospels, we have no way of verifying so many important facts about Jesus. If we can't know what Jesus taught, how can we be his disciples?

How can we follow a man we know nothing about?

If we don't have a sure and certain foundation, there is no point in pretending to have one at all. There are men who would make just such a claim. Not only about Christianity as a whole, but the Gospels specifically.

Bart Ehrman wrote: "Some books, such as the Gospels... had been written anonymously, only later to be ascribed to certain authors who probably did not write them (apostles and friends of the apostles¹)" He's saying the names attached to the Gospels are lies, that,

¹ Ehrman, Bart D.. *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)*. United States, HarperCollins, 2009. pp. 101-02

probably, no apostles or friends of the apostles penned these accounts. Instead, they were written many years later by people not directly connected to Jesus' ministry. Richard Dawkins continues that theme by saying: "Nobody knows who the four evangelists were, but they almost certainly never met Jesus personally."² Richard Dawkins and Bart Ehrman are educated and popular scholars. Their claims are repeated all around the globe. And here's the thing: If they are correct, they would have delivered a deathblow to the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Think about it. If the Gospels were written decades or even centuries after Jesus, by people that never met him, and perhaps never met anyone who met him, how could we trust those writings to be true? These are the earliest Christian writings and the foundation for all Christian beliefs. The Gospel of Luke briefly mentions that others had written about Jesus' life, but Luke also came after Mark and Matthew, so for those two, whichever one came first, there wasn't much to go on.

Imagine, for a moment, that I was going to write a book on World War II. But imagine that I never talk to anybody who fought in WWII. (There are a handful still around not many though!) But I never spoke to anybody who had ever spoken to anybody who had fought in the war. And I had no systematic written records to go on. You'd be right to have concerns about the accuracy of my book. Much of what we know about Jesus rests on the four Gospels. Do we have good

² Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. United Kingdom, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.

Introduction to Mark

reason to trust them? If not, we're in major trouble! So, is there any evidence for the authenticity of the Gospel of Mark? Is there proof that Mark wrote it? And while we're on the subject, who is this Mark guy anyway?

I want to bring in two different forms of evidence: External, and Internal. External evidence will be stuff like historical accounts, the stories of others, and stuff outside (external to) the text itself. Internal evidence contains hints and clues within the actual text of Mark.

External Evidence

The Gospel of Mark, besides the opening title, doesn't give us a lot of details. Some hints that we'll look at later, but not a lot of detail. We'll need to turn to other sources. And, surprisingly, there are a lot. This is great because people who don't like the Bible don't tend to trust what the Bible says about the Bible. So, it's really nice to have outside corroboration.

Tertullian of Carthage (c.207)

He was an early Christian Theologian writing about 170-180 years after Jesus. "While that [gospel] which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's whose interpreter Mark was.³" The word, "interpreter" is important. We don't have time to get into it, but Dr.

³ Tertullian. "The Five Books against Marcion." Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian. Ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Trans. Peter Holmes. Vol. 3. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885. 350. Print. The Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Stephen Boyce has a great podcast looking into this.⁴ Probably Peter told this account orally in Aramaic, then Mark translated it into Greek and wrote that translation down. While impressive, this account is from nearly 200 years later. Do we have something closer? Oh yes!

Clement of Alexandria (c. 180)

He claims that Mark wrote his Gospel, by request, from his knowledge of Peter's preaching in Rome.

Ecclesiastical History Book 2 Chapter 15 "And so great a joy of light shone upon the minds of the hearers of Peter that they were not satisfied with merely a single hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine gospel, but with all sorts of entreaties they besought Mark, who was a follower of Peter and whose gospel is extant, to leave behind with them in writing a record of the teaching passed on to them orally; and they did not cease until they had prevailed upon the man and so became responsible for the Scripture for reading in the churches⁵." In this ancient book, Clement refers to this as a tradition handed down from the "elders from the beginning." But he wasn't the only one to write at this time.

⁴ Boyce, Stephen, "Mark, the Gospel of Peter?!", *FACTS*, YouTube, June 14, 2021,

<https://www.youtube.com/live/HykkgMOng00?feature=share>

⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea. *Ecclesiastical History*, Books 1–5. Ed. & trans. by Roy Joseph Deferrari. Vol. 19. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953. Print. *The Fathers of the Church*.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180)

This early Bishop in France wrote “...Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple, and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.”⁶

Justin Martyr (c. 150)

In his Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 103.8, he wrote: “For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them, [it is recorded] that His sweat fell like drops of blood while He was praying, and saying, ‘If it be possible, let this cup pass.’” Later, in 106.3 he calls them the “memoirs of Peter” And he quotes one of these memoirs specifically “It is said that he [Jesus] changed the name of one of the apostles to Peter; and it is written in his memoirs that he changed the names of others, two brothers, the sons of Zebedee, to Boanerges, which means ‘sons of thunder’....”⁷ Only Mark has this information about James and John. Whose memoirs? Peter, the one that Mark got his information from directly. But wait, there’s more.

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons. “Irenæus against Heresies.” The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Vol. 1. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885. 414. Print. The Ante-Nicene Fathers.

⁷ Justin Martyr. “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew.” The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. Vol. 1. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885. 251. Print. The Ante-Nicene Fathers.

Papias of Hierapolis (c. 125)

He worked to gather information about Jesus and make sure it was accurate by tracing it back to apostolic sources. In particular, he got some stuff from John the Elder, who was a disciple of Christ. He wrote about 125AD but was gathering his knowledge in earlier years (perhaps 85AD) Which would be about 50 years after Jesus rose from the dead. This dude is awesome because he hung out with several people mentioned in the Bible. He studied with Polycarp at the feet of John and lived in the same town as Phillip's daughters, who themselves had met with Paul and Luke in Acts 21:8-9. Here's what he tells us: The Gospel was penned by a guy named Mark. Not only is it Mark, but it's also the Mark who traveled with Peter.⁸

There are more, of course, these are only some of the earliest. The church father, Origin, in 185-253AD, The anti-Marcionite prologue (late 2nd century) Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate, (342-420), and more.

What about the people who said someone other than Mark wrote the gospel? What historical figures, from that time period denied that Mark wrote this and got his information from Peter?

Here's the list:

-

⁸ Eusebius of Caesarea. Ecclesiastical History, Books 1–5. Ed. & trans. by Roy Joseph Deferrari. Vol. 19. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953. Print. The Fathers of the Church.

That's right. No early sources whatsoever give any support to any other writer.

But where did those skeptics get this claim from?

There is a guy, Faustus, in about 400AD, who was a skeptic of Christianity. He was the earliest source we have of anybody even trying to bring this into question. And his question was quickly shot down because Augustine replied that there is a succession of testimonies that stretched all the way back to the beginning. Even Celsus⁹, who hated Christianity and attacked it vigorously in the 2nd century, quoted Mark as one of the treasured Christian writings¹⁰. There's no doubt, historically speaking, that it's authentic and trustworthy and was seen as that from the very beginning.

With that established, what does the Book of Mark reveal about itself?

Internal Evidence

The manuscript tradition shows it. One clear indicator even within the text is the heading. Every single manuscript of Mark with an intact beginning or ending where somebody could find it has a note pointing to Mark as the author. Every single one.

⁹ While Celsus' original writings are now lost, they were quoted and refuted by Origin in the 3rd Century in his work: *Against Celsus*.

¹⁰ As cited in Winger, Mark, "Who Wrote Mark's Gospel?" *Mark Series*, YouTube, April 2019

The content even has some hints of it.

There are signs that Peter was the key eyewitness for Mark's material. Peter is mentioned by name more in Mark than in any other Gospel. Many stories show Peter asking for the group, giving him more focus, like those in Mark 1, 9, and 11. In some passages, like Matt 21:20, the writer just mentions that the group of disciples asked Jesus something. The Gospel of Mark specifies Peter, bringing out that detail and that focus on him.

We've seen Peter's eyewitness influence confirmed. This book is an authentic account of Peter's time with Jesus, written by Mark. We can trust this record to be from a reliable first-hand witness who saw this, heard this, lived this, and passed it all on honestly. But who is this Mark fellow after all?

Who is Mark?

John Mark is mentioned in the Bible. Mark is the son of Mary (Acts 12:12) cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10) and journeyed a bit with Paul and Silas (Acts 12:25 and 13:5) He leaves Paul's team (Acts 13:5) But is later labeled a co-laborer (Col 4:10-11) and called to join Paul again many years later. (II Tim 4:11) John Mark, however, wasn't an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Unless he is the mysterious cameo, the strange figure robbed of his robes near the end of the book, Mark never shows up in his Gospel or any other. So, he himself may have never met Jesus. Now, that's not a problem because he got his information directly from Peter, a man who lived and breathed in Jesus' presence for over 3 years. But it seems like God brought Mark

along and gave him a special writing talent, which, when paired with Peter's experiences and great preaching and teaching ability, created the perfect team to record the story of Jesus. It is his story being told after all.

More than Mark or Peter, Jesus is the main character from beginning to end. In fact, Mark even begins with the word, "beginning." But there's another funny word you don't hear outside of church. "Gospel."

What is the Gospel?

That Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah is here. This is actually an amazing opening line that tells us a lot about what's going down in this book. "The Beginning" things are only getting started, and this isn't a story confined to just this book it's an ongoing account, with repercussions that continue on. It's an account that directly impacts us even 2,000 years later.

What kind of story? One regarding the Gospel.

Beginning the Gospel Story

"The Gospel"

We often define this word as "good news." The Greek word is one that we get our term evangelist, or evangelism, from. "Euangelos" referred to "one who bears good news," a messenger of joy. When transmitting oracles, this sacred messenger could announce the future or bring salvation (sōtēria) and success (eutychia, eutychēma) and thus was considered a divine being (theios anthrōpos) whose coming stirred joy; his announcements were full of promise.

Theologically, it's used in the NT for "a message preached to all people concerning the person, the public life, and the teaching of Jesus, Son of God; i.e., a blessed event and a new doctrine concerning salvation, both expressed and realized in the advent of the Messiah-King¹¹."

Messiah-King? What's up with that title?

Mark explains that in a word: Christ. Look at who this good news is all about Jesus is the name of, well, Jesus. It's the Greek version of the Hebrew Joshua, which means "Yahweh is salvation." Or "The LORD is salvation." Giving Salvation and rescue and restoration. These are exactly why the LORD sent Jesus.

Christ

Christ is not actually a last name like Jones, Smith, or Pritchard. It's a title. Almost like saying "King James" or "Queen Elizabeth" or "Doctor Stephen Boyce." Now, this was a loaded term. Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah, a term rich in meaning. For centuries, the Jewish people had been looking for this deliverer, and for hundreds of years, God himself had dropped hints that he was coming, and what he would do. Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible wrote: "It signifies his office as anointed Savior and alludes to his spiritual qualifications for the task of saving his people. The word derives from Greek Christos, which translates Hebrew Messiah (John 1:41). Both terms come from verbs meaning "to anoint with

¹¹ Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, CESLAS SPICQ, O.P. Translated and Edited by JAMES D. ERNEST, 1994

sacred oil;” hence as titles, they mean “the anointed one.” Applied to Jesus, they express the conviction that he had a divine appointment for his office and function.¹²”

In other words, Jesus was specially appointed to a very, very special task. Some OT prophecies show the Messiah as the powerful warrior-king that will rid Israel of its oppressors, bring mighty victory, and rule the entire Earth with unrivaled power and goodness. That was first in the minds of every Israelite at this time. However, even before those prophets, God promised a deliverer that would break the power, not of evil nations, but of evil itself. He would provide salvation, rescue, from sin, from wrongdoing, from evil, and set all things new and right and to offer people the opportunity to be reconciled and forgiven for all the wrong they had done.

But what kind of person could do that?

Well, Jesus was no ordinary person.

“The Son of God”

This isn’t just another fancy title many kings have claimed, in a ceremonial sense, that they were a son of the gods. About five times in the Old Testament, “Sons of God” was used for angelic beings, supernatural powers that were as powerful and ancient as they were mysterious. Yet, Mark means so much more than that in his Gospel.

¹² Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. “Christ.” Baker encyclopedia of the Bible 1988: 431. Print.

Introduction to Mark

Mark will continue to drop more hints throughout his book, making Jesus' identity quite clear as the Divine God the Son, sent from the Divine God, part of what we call today, the Trinity. One God, one being, yet three-in-one, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Part of the Nicene Creed, an ancient Christian confession of faith, put it this way: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made."¹³

In other words, this Jesus was, and is, God. God, God the Son, is proclaiming good news, and this book is only the beginning. But what will happen next? How will the people who claim to worship God react to Jesus, who is God, walking in their midst? What's our part in this? Hang on, those answers are coming.

¹³ Schaff, Philip. *The Creeds of Christendom*. United States, Cosimo, Incorporated, 2007.

Study Questions:

1. What objections have you heard concerning the historical reliability of the Gospels? How have you responded to those?
2. We trust the Bible because it comes from God, but do you think it's valuable to have other historical sources confirming what God's Word tells us?
3. What came to mind when you heard that Jesus' name carries the meaning "Yahweh is salvation"?
4. Can you think of an Old Testament prophecy that mentions deliverance, or a deliverer? How do you think the readers would have felt when they heard this title used for Jesus?
5. Many other cultures claimed various figures were sons of the gods. What made Jesus different?

Mark 1:1-20

Beginning the Journey of Discipleship

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Following King Jesus' call leads us through sacrifice and suffering.

Context:

This passage shows the rejection and hardship faced by the Called, which echoes the next pericope's focus on our call to serve even without personal gain. However, it's not without incredible hope, with the wonder of God's message quickly being shown by the following section with its message of the healing nature of God's commands.

II. Beginning the Journey of Discipleship (1-20)

- A The Beginning of the Story (1:1)
- B John continued in the line of prophets preparing for Jesus (1:2-8)
- C God commissioned Jesus and his mission (1:9-11)
- D A Wilderness, the World's opposition, and a wonderful message (1:12-15)
- E Jesus began calling his disciples to continue the pattern (1:16-20)

In all the chaos of a youth camp, or even the regular ruckus around your house, have you ever been woken

up by somebody splashing cold water on your face? You're all peaceful and asleep when BAM! Freezing water comes barging in and engulfs you and your bed, and all the warmth and comfort you felt just a moment before has been violently drowned!

That sounds like a terrible, terrible way to wake up!

One website made this blunt observation. An article touting the best ways to wake somebody up over the weekend was this line: "The most common technique is pouring water on a sleeping person. This technique works in waking them up, but that doesn't necessarily mean they will be happy with you."¹⁴

Honestly, that sounds like an understatement.

It's never happened to me, but if it did, if I was sleeping soundly and someone tossed a bucket of cold water on my head, I'd probably want to hurt them! That doesn't sound fun at all!

That's a great way to NOT make friends. When all that comfort, all those warm-fuzzy feelings are dramatically splattered into pieces. Yet, sometimes, sometimes, that is exactly what needs to be done. Sometimes, we've created a warm and fuzzy environment that keeps us from what is best, and what we need.

¹⁴ Rose, G. R. "The Best Ways to Wake Someone up over the Weekend." Weekend Notes, 2 Apr. 2014, <https://www.weekendnotes.com/best-ways-wake-someone-up-weekend/>.

In this passage, we're looking at a pair of guys who did just that, one figuratively, and in the case of one, quite literally!

The Gospel of Mark is just getting started, and it begins with a bang.

1:1 The Beginning of the Story

Jesus' story starts with a bang. We learn that Jesus is Christ. That title, Christ, means he is the anointed deliverer, the one promised to be the hope and help and healing, the one that prophets have predicted for many, many years. We learn that he is the Son of God. He is divine, he is God himself. He is no ordinary man, and Mark's gospel makes that clear. "Jesus is often identified as God's Son in Mark: at his baptism (v. 11), by demons (3:11; 5:7), at the transfiguration (9:7), at his trial (14:61), and by the centurion's confession (15:39)¹⁵." All these times we learn that God's Son has come, and that's awesome! That's good news. And finally, we learn this Good News has just begun. This Gospel, which means Good News, is just getting started! And what a start it is!

Mark has a powerful punch of an opening that knocks itself into our attention in very dramatic ways. First, the declaration that Jesus is the Deliverer. Here we see a prophecy, a prediction, a promise of things to come. Some Bibles may have this in bold print or all caps or something. But it doesn't come from just one source.

¹⁵ McLaren, Ross H. "Mark." CSB Study Bible: Notes. Ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017. 1558. Print.

“The first phrase is verbatim from Exod. 23:20a in the LXX, combined with Mal. 3:1 and finally Isa. 40:3.¹⁶”
Let’s take a moment and read those now!

Also, you probably noticed that these quotes come from more than just Isaiah. In the ancient world, it was common practice for writers to combine quotes and credit only the most prominent author.¹⁷ Much like today, if a book is written by several people, but you casually mention just one of the names for short. Side note, but the majority of later Greek texts have smoothed this over by substituting “Isaiah” with “the Prophets” (Seen today in translations like the NKJV and KJV.) Either way, this composite quote carries quite a punch!

This is awesome because these stretch from all over Israel’s history. This overriding hope, these enduring promises, all come together in the person of Jesus. When was Exodus written? Exodus was penned by Moses, at the very beginning of the nation of Israel. What about Malachi? Malachi was the last prophet sent to Israel, before the 400-year silence before John’s coming. Anybody know about Isaiah? Isaiah lands very nearly in the middle of that time, being one of the most prominent and influential prophets of Israel. From the beginning, the middle, and to the very end, God’s

¹⁶ Witherington, Ben, III. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Print.

¹⁷ Carson, D. A., Beale, G. K. “Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.” United Kingdom, Baker Publishing Group, 2007. Page 114

enduring promise of a deliverer is finally coming true! This theme of a messenger leading the way for God himself to visit his people!

Also, this kicks off the incredible theme of Mark's use of the Old Testament. He directly references the Old Testament sixty-nine times,¹⁸ but other resources are known to add indirect allusions and reach figures of 110.¹⁹ As we'll see through this study, Mark constantly draws on the Old Testament with regards to Jesus' mission and identity. This is no exception.

Who, then, is this messenger? Verse 4 answers that right off the bat: John.

1:2-8 John Preparing for Jesus

John the Baptizer (John the Baptist) then makes his dramatic entrance on the scene. If anybody's life echoes that idea of tossing cold water on comfortable sleeping people, it would be John's. Because John, like the prophets that came before him, had more important things on his mind than simply comfort. He was in the rough wilderness, the untamed barren, desolate place. Even his clothing was rough camelhair, not anything soft or comfy. Moreover, he didn't get nice food or scrumptious desserts, he quite literally ate bugs. He was sent by God, he was in the wilderness, the

¹⁸ Carson, D. A., Beale, G. K. "Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament." United Kingdom, Baker Publishing Group, 2007.

¹⁹ Brannan, Rick, and Jeffrey, Glen Jackson. "New Testament Use of the Old Testament." Logos Bible Software, 2015.

desert. God's prophet was called but called to suffer and to live a harder life than those around him. All for the mission of God.

What was that mission?

John was there for two things: baptizing and preaching. Baptism is an immersion, a dipping, a plunging, a dunking into, and out of, water. Like Oreos in your milk or chips into that delightful bowl of salsa. But John wasn't dipping food, he was dipping people. It was a baptism of repentance. They would come, confess their sins, and be baptized. John wanted to call them from their comfort and apathy and begin again to follow God.

But why in the wilderness?

When the nation of Israel was first formed, they journeyed out of Egypt, right through the wilderness, then through the Jordan River, and into all the promises and blessings of God. The way to enjoy their covenant relationship was through the wilderness, over the Jordan, and then into God's Promises. The wilderness, while not comfortable, while a place of suffering, was also the place of hope, the place right before all the incredible blessings to come. Think of it, perhaps, like a long parking lot. It's hot, it's boring, it's uncomfortable and annoying. But it's only a short trip to that marvelous mall, or stupendous store, or outstanding outlet. The parking lot isn't fun, but it is the place we must pass through to reach all the incredible things ahead. For all its discomfort, it's still a place of hope. John was calling people to relive their

national history. They were called to come to the wilderness, repent, and prepare their hearts to follow God. Almost like they were called out of the building they were in, back outside to the hot, annoying parking lot, so they could see that they were in the wrong building, they had gone in the wrong door, and only now can they go to the right place to worship God. Their hearts needed adjustment! John was calling them to prepare the way for the coming LORD.

Following him was going to call for some discomfort. Not just going into the wilderness, but the discomfort of admitting you need repentance! It's not easy to admit you are wrong! It's not comfortable to repent. But God's call doesn't always involve comfort. It calls us to truth, and to sacrifice, and to hope in him. That's the path of following Jesus. John even mentions, in a bit, his own humility and unworthiness.

He isn't worthy to even untie Jesus' shoe. Now, in his culture, that was the ultimately insulting and nasty job that nobody wanted. You made the lowest, humblest servant do that! Almost like if somebody threw up at school and you're like "I ain't cleaning that up!" That backing away, that "somebody else handle it" attitude, that revolting disgust, was the attitude they had. Yet, John saw Jesus as being so much better, so much higher, so much greater, that John knew he wasn't even worthy of serving him in the lowest possible way.

But God has a way of using the unworthy and use him God did!

John was doing a great job of preparing people to meet Jesus. In verse 7 we get a glimpse of his preaching. He's doing exactly what he was called to do. Pointing people to the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Pointing people to God. Dramatically splashing water on their warm and fuzzy religious activity and waking them to the far more important and real need to get things ready.

John was pointing people to Jesus in a way he never imagined would be possible. Now remember, the prophecy about John, the messenger in the wilderness, was that he prepares the way for someone. He prepares the way for the Lord. It's capitalized here, and in Isaiah, it is all caps, it's that symbol for God's personal name: Yahweh. So that messenger would prepare the way, not just for a noble, not just for a king or a prince or a governor, he is preparing the way for God himself. Somebody truly worth following!

As John keeps preaching, and lives keep changing, Jesus shows up. To them, he was just another man coming to be baptized, but we already know he was so much more than that.

And, as expected, something extraordinary happens.

1:9-11 God Commissioning Jesus

Jesus was baptized. With the other baptisms, we got a note about confession, not so with Jesus. Instead, we get several very, very special verses. Jesus' baptism was unlike any other. Jesus was approved by God and anointed by his Spirit. This is an amazing moment!

Notice, the Heavens were “torn open” that’s a keyword that will show up near the end of the Gospel. Here, God the Father and God the Spirit are all bearing witness to Jesus, who is God the Son. The entire Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit are present for the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Even more, we get God’s personal commentary on Jesus’ life. Jesus is beloved by his father! Jesus is getting an approval that nobody else has! Again, we hear the declaration that Jesus is God’s Son, now from the very lips of God the Father.

We also see the Spirit coming down and landing on him. Often in the OT, we see the Spirit of the Lord coming on people and empowering them for special service. Yet even then it wasn’t in a visible form. Something incredibly special and utterly unique is going on here. Because Jesus is incredibly special and utterly unique.

But Jesus doesn’t head straight for the capital to take over and live a life of power and luxury. He doesn’t strut in demanding all the authority and privilege he no doubt deserves. What does he do? Let’s take a look.

1:12-15 A Wilderness, the World’s Opposition, and a Wonderful Message

Jesus then took his own trip into the wilderness (12-13) Immediately, just as the Holy Spirit descended on him, he told Jesus to go off for 40 days. He faced temptation, opposition, and the direct attacks of Satan himself! Sometimes the wild beasts of the wilderness are mentioned in the Bible as harsh, harmful, and hateful. Not your cuddly house cat or a cute puppy. Though it doesn’t specify what exactly they were, they are clearly

not making things safer or comfortable. Thankfully, Jesus is not alone.

While Satan is there to tempt him, and the other Gospel writers give us more detail about that temptation, Mark also records the hope that came. Angels (heavenly messengers) are there to provide help in his suffering. Not everyone gets angelic protection! Jesus is somebody special, indeed!

Now that Jesus has been empowered and endured his own suffering and wilderness experience, it's time for him to begin preaching and teaching!

But even before we hear from him, we hear about old John.

Jesus begins his ministry just as John's is silenced (14-15)

John's path began by being the empowered preacher, but following God led him to suffer serious opposition. This is a pattern found all through the book. Jesus followed only a few steps behind. He was empowered and commissioned by God, led into the wilderness suffering, and will soon face opposition.

But the pattern doesn't stop there. Now, Jesus is about to call and empower people, people who will, in time, face their own suffering and opposition. That's the pattern set by Jesus. That's often the pattern his followers walk as well.

1:16-20 Jesus Calling his Disciples to Continue the Pattern

This is actually really special. Normally Rabbis, the Jewish word for religious teachers, wouldn't go out and pick random people. They would sit back, and wait, and when people came begging to study under them, they would subject these students to a lot of tests to see if they qualify, if they pass the standard, if they are good enough, smart enough, cool enough. Then, the rabbi would select the ones he wanted.

Instead, Jesus comes and calls...fishermen. These guys weren't the nerds winning spelling bees, the educated, the wealthy elite, or the highly qualified religious masters. They were ordinary. Jesus called them and offered to make them into what he needed. He would empower and train them. They didn't need to be the best of the best, the greatest of all time, or the super-ultra special. Because it was Jesus' power, his freely offered power, that would make the difference and equip them to serve him.

That's a comfort!

Whenever we are tempted, we can't do anything for God, that we don't have the talent or the ability, or the skills to serve God, we can remember! We can remember that it is Jesus who empowers the ordinary, the unremarkable, the plain, and the boring people. It's his strength that enables us to serve him, no matter who we are! And we get to follow in his steps, in his power.

Jesus is calling these disciples to begin the cycle once again. With both groups, we hear where they are, we see Jesus call them to follow him, and we see them sacrifice something, give up something valuable to follow Jesus.

Already, they are sacrificing, giving up something, to follow Jesus. Twice that word shows up: “Follow” Once in Jesus’ command, and once in their obedience. That following, that coming behind, that walking in the steps of another will launch them into this pattern already being set.

We see two sets of brothers

Their names are Simon and Andrew, and then James and John. Simon was also known as Peter, the very Peter who relayed this story to Mark. John would later write his own Gospel. James would become one of the first Christian martyrs, killed for preaching about Jesus. Church history records that Peter would be killed later, as was Andrew. Even John was exiled for a time. We will follow them on their journey of following Jesus. It’ll be a journey of hardship and suffering.

That’s the pattern set by Jesus. That doesn’t sound super pleasant, but trust me, he is worth following! His pattern is worth continuing. Follow, even in suffering!

The Christian life is a call to suffering and sacrifice

We see something different in Jesus and his call. Jesus is a deliverer who refuses to offer a perfect, no-problems life. Jesus is a savior who refuses to sugar-coat his plan for your life. Following him means following him into sacrifice. It means giving up a lot of

our time every Sunday. It means giving up some of our dreams and ambitions. It means giving up those entangling habits that threaten our relationship with God and others. It means giving up, probably, the wealth and fame and power that could otherwise be ours. It means giving up our personal rules and preferences for God's. It means giving up quite a bit.

But it's not a loss, it's an investment.

The Christian life is worth it because of our hope in Jesus

Jesus is, after all, the Son of God, the promised Savior, the long-predicted Christ. Incredible things are ahead for him in the Gospel. He is worth following. The fishermen saw that, I hope you do as well. They knew the sacrifices were well worth it. You must make that choice as well.

Mark is clear from the very start: The Christian life takes sacrifice, but it is worth it! Would you consider making a sacrifice this week? Would you consider, for one day, giving up something you love and instead using that time for prayer and Bible reading? Perhaps it's social media. Could you give it up, not check it at all, nor scroll there at all, nor answer any comments, nor check for any messages, for a whole day? Instead, when you want to scroll, when you want to post, set the phone down and pick up a Bible. It would be really hard, and I'm not saying you have to do it, but I think it's a good idea for us to practice, from time to time, making a sacrifice for God.

Setting that pattern, setting those mental habits, and living them out, will help us when we're forced into that choice. The more we practice giving up our desires to follow him now, the easier it will be when temptation hits us, and circumstances try us.

TV, social media, video games, and listening to music are all impactful in your life, but would you consider giving that up for a day, and training yourself to say yes to Jesus, even when it means sacrifice and suffering? Sometimes we can let our own actions lull us into a warm, comfy state of contentment. We've settled into casually coasting through life, enjoying this, enjoying that, and being thoroughly comfortable. Sliding through the motions, but not serving God. And we need that awakening splash of God's Word!

We need to step out of our comfort zone and see that following God requires some sacrifice and some discomfort. And when we do, we'll see Jesus as we never have before! We'll be able to follow him closer than ever before, and we'll know him like we never did before! Are you ready for that?

Study Questions:

1. Why do you think Mark begins his Gospel so abruptly?
2. John's baptism was described as one of "repentance" and signaled a major life change. Later Christian baptism also signals a major life change in dedicating oneself to follow Jesus. Do you think we emphasize that enough and take it seriously, or are we too lax and lazy with baptisms and commitments to Jesus today?
3. At Jesus' baptism, we see a very clear picture of the Trinity. What other passages come to mind that speak of all three members of the Godhead? Why do you think this unity of purpose was emphasized so clearly at this point in Jesus' life?
4. This passage begins the pattern that often includes rejection and suffering for followers of Jesus. How does that truth contrast with prosperity preachers today who seem to equate following God with good fortune, wealth, and health?
5. God often asks his people to leave their comfort zone for him and it's always worth it. What are some ways you've left your comfort zone for God, and how did he use you for that? If you haven't, what are some areas that you've been scared to follow him in?

Mark 1:21-45

Seeking Service, not a Salary

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea:

Disciples are called to serve, even in the face of opposition, rather than follow simply for personal gain.

Context:

The last pericope showed the rejection and hardship that sometimes come with following Christ. This week looks at the Christian calling to serve others and face that opposition, even when we aren't promised personal gain from this selfless service. However, following Christ isn't without reward, as the next section highlights the personal peace and refreshment that comes from Jesus.

III Seeking Service, not a Salary (1:21-45)

- A Jesus confronted the demon in the Synagogue and gained great fame from that victory (1:21-28)
- B Jesus healed many and was served by Simon's mother-in-law after she was healed (1:29-34)
- C Jesus left the crowds, preferring to preach to other cities in accordance with his mission (1:35-39)
- D The leper was healed, yet neglected to obey Jesus, bringing hardship to Jesus' ministry (1:40-45)

In 1998, NASA launched the Mars Climate Orbiter, a small, unmanned spacecraft that was designed to float around Mars for a bit and gather data on stuff like any water on Mars, past climate change, temperature data, and other cool stuff. The mission cost nearly 330 million dollars. Nearly a year later, NASA released the first report detailing the utter failure of the mission. Why? What happened?

Apparently, the spacecraft got way off course, and while its fate is still unknown, it probably became a giant fireball in the Martian atmosphere before it could collect any useful data. ²⁰

Why? Because of a devastating misunderstanding.

Two pieces of software controlled and reported the position of the spacecraft. However, one operated in Imperial units, inches and feet, and miles, while the other worked in Metric measurements, with meters and centimeters kilometers. So, to simplify, when one program was saying, “Move a foot, move a foot,” the other was chanting “Move a meter, move a meter.” (which is closer to three feet) They were not on the same page, there was a fundamental misunderstanding. And that misunderstanding caused some major problems.

It’s important to be on the same page, wouldn’t you say? Important to use the same standards and measure

²⁰ Dodd, Tim. “Metric vs Imperial Units: How NASA Lost a 327 Million Dollar Mission to Mars.” *Everyday Astronaut*, 23 Nov. 2020, everydayastronaut.com/mars-climate-orbiter/.

things the same way. We're looking at a story where some folks had a fundamental misunderstanding, and what happened because of that.

1:21-28 Jesus confronted the demon in the Synagogue and gained great fame from that victory

One thing is clear here: Jesus' teaching was astonishing. We've seen Jesus calling disciples and doing a bit of teaching, but now he's kicking that into high gear! And it's already making some waves! So, verse 21 has Jesus doing...what? Teaching! Where? In the synagogue.

What's that? What's a synagogue? A synagogue was the Jewish gathering place for a time of Bible reading, teaching, and prayer. Kinda like a church, I suppose, but they met on the Sabbath, on Saturday, not Sunday. One notable thing is that synagogue leaders would look for any visiting Rabbis, and visiting teachers, and would allow them to select the reading and speak on it. Later on, the Apostle Paul would take advantage of this a lot. But this Saturday, Jesus stood up and began teaching. We don't know what he taught but look at the crowd's reaction. What did they think? They were amazed! The first big impression is that Jesus is highlighting his teaching, his ministry begins and is based on his teaching. But that contrast is because he teaches with authority, not like the scribes.

The scribes were not just secretaries, they were scholars, the teachers of God's Law, the Bible college professors of their day. "The people referred to here

were recognized experts in the law of Moses and traditional laws and regulations.”²¹ But Jesus came in, and immediately, from his teaching, they saw that he was higher, he was greater than even these experts and scholars. That would have been remarkable enough, but then, something utterly wild begins to go down. Let’s read on!

In verse 23 Jesus overcame the demon but demanded silence from it. It began with Jesus in a Synagogue when a man stood up and began making a ruckus. This fellow had an “unclean spirit.” This isn’t to say he was messy and dirty, though he may have been. It’s not to say he was holding a bottle of spirits or some alcoholic beverage. What does this phrase mean? What was up with this guy?

In our terms, this dude was possessed by a demon. Of all supernatural creatures, our culture today seems to be fascinated by these guys. They are spirits, corrupt and evil beings that work to tempt, test, defile and destroy anything good and right. In some cases, especially when they are invited in, they can take control of humans, tormenting them and using them for their purposes. One writer explained their role in the New Testament like this:

“In the New Testament, the term demon is used to describe wicked demonic spirits. These entities defile

²¹ Biblical Studies Press. The NET Bible First Edition Notes. Biblical Studies Press, 2006. Print.

and bring evil to human subjects. Their intent seems to be physical affliction more than moral persuasion.”²²

People of all sorts of cultures have noticed these evil spirits and come up with elaborate ways to drive them out and away. Jesus, however, didn't need any ceremonies, rituals, special equipment, or ingredients. He said, “Come out” and the demon obeyed just like that. But Jesus also said something else too. “Be quiet.”

The demon hadn't simply stood up or stood by passively. Look what he cried out in V. 24. He cried: “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” It's an idiom, stemming from Hebrew, and in this case, the demon is basically saying: “Mind your own business!” or “Get out of my face!”²³ He also asks, “Have you come to destroy us?” and mentions who Jesus is with the phrase: “The Holy One of God.”

First, the term “destroying” brings to mind the severe angelic punishments mentioned in Jude 6 and II Peter 2:4 regarding certain rebellious spiritual powers. While those specific beings were the “Sons the God” mentioned in the opening of Genesis 6, their punishment set the precedent that God could, and would, bind up and punish spiritual beings if he willed. These demons obviously knew exactly who they were dealing with and what he could accomplish. They knew there was no escaping Jesus' power, so they could only

²² Seal, David. “Demon.” Ed. John D. Barry et al. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* 2016: n. pag. Print.”

²³ Strauss, Mark L. *Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

beg for mercy. However, it is important to note that the beings punished in those passages are not quite the same beings that Jesus is speaking to in this passage.

“It is sufficient here to note the problem: LXX translators used *daimonion* [Transliterated to demon, in our English Bibles.] in certain passages that speak of the sons of God allotted to the nations, and later New Testament authors use the same term for spirit entities that harm people. Consequently, two groups of sinister divine beings that have completely different origins in Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish thought get lumped together.²⁴

Regardless of that distinction, vile powers of any sort were, of course, still subject to Jesus’ authority, leaving that particular point still standing.

They also knew he was the “Holy One of God.” This was a title used for a special task executed by the authority of God, but it also echoes the very name of God. In short, Jesus is acting with the power and authority of God, with a hint that the demon knows Jesus is, in fact, God. Now, this sounds like great free advertising, right? Boom, crazy wild dude known to be out of his mind and possessed by a vile spirit... Ok, you know what, maybe he wasn’t the best person to have as Jesus’ marketing director. As we’ll see, Jesus is hesitant to accept extra advertising from demons, (Something Paul would echo in the book of Acts), and he didn’t like

²⁴ Heiser, Michael S. *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. Print.”

advertising from those who don't understand his mission. We'll see that more in just a minute.

Anyway, the man was free, free at last! It was Jesus' power that freed him, that loosed him from the torment and trouble. Jesus made all the difference for him. The man with authoritative teaching also had authority over demons!

How did the people react to this? The people were again astonished, but primarily with his teaching, and spread the fame of Jesus around. Notice, in V. 27, what impresses them? The first thing mentioned isn't the exorcism, it's his teaching. They were impressed by his teaching and the obedience he was given. Note those two: Teaching, and obedience. Keep those in mind.

V. 28 tells us news spread, and I think, this is in a very good way. We'll get another note about Jesus' fame in a minute. This one is positive, but that will change soon. Let's follow him along and see what happens after the trip to the synagogue.

1:29-34 Jesus healed many and was served by Simon's mother-in-law after she was healed

First, Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, and she quickly served them. Jesus doesn't just cast out the demon in the public space, he takes away the fever in a private place too. This seems like such an insignificant little note. Two short verses tell us everything: She's sick, he heals her, and she begins to serve everyone. But this small story plays a huge part! This is the first of two times in this passage where an individual is healed and quickly begins doing something. In this case, she

serves them. Not just Jesus, but “them.” Who are the “them” here? She wants to help Jesus and those who are following him! What a way to show your heart of love for your healer!

But she was far from the only sick one in her town. These verses now detail that Jesus healed the people, but once again demanded silence from the demons.

What’s so significant about the sun setting though? Why did Mark note that? Well, the Jews counted days as ending when the sun went down, then a new cycle would begin with the night and the following day. It’s actually kinda neat. Like, without modern clocks, it’s really hard to tell when midnight actually is, so they just kept the day’s transition on something easily noticed. Anyway, people waited until after sunset, until after that day was done and the next began, to come for healing. That day, remember, was a Sabbath, the weekly holy day of worship and rest. They were not allowed to work on the Sabbath, and their religious leaders had constructed a bunch of fancy rules to keep them safe from violating God’s Laws for the Sabbath.

Now, Jesus would have something to say about that in a few chapters, but for now, let’s continue on. Jesus continues to heal the crowds, as well as addressing the demons. Again, people are healed. Again, demons are silenced! Notice that theme, that demons are not allowed to speak because they know Jesus. Why? If they know him, why not let them speak up and tell everybody what’s up? Do you want a demon talking about you? Do you think demons would be honest and helpful with what they said about you? No sir!

So again, demons are silenced. Jesus wants his fame, and his ministry to be known on his own terms. He wants people to have the right idea about who he is and why he came. In fact, in just a minute, he's going to explain one reason why he came. And as the night grows longer, the crowds finally fade. But instead of sleeping late the next day, Jesus slips away for an early morning prayer meeting with God the Father.

1:35-39 Jesus left the crowds, preferring to preach to other cities in accordance with his mission

Jesus left to pray in solitude. It's such a small detail. But we shouldn't overlook it. Just when his ministry was heating up, just when there was a ton to do and responsibilities piling on, he never forgot prayer. He was praying, even when people were clamoring for him. Such a contrast, I think, compared to my own life. I think we all can get so interrupted in our prayer times. I've found almost anything can interrupt it, even myself. Jesus made it a priority to be alone. Try as he might, Jesus did get interrupted eventually. Simon and the others let him know he was wanted by the townspeople. Jesus refused, instead choosing to preach to other villages. Why? Why would Jesus move on? I think part of the reason can be seen in the next verse.

1:40-45 The leper was healed, yet neglected to obey Jesus, bringing hardship to Jesus' ministry

Jesus continued doing two things: preaching and driving out demons. What isn't listed here? What was the big thing the crowds were gathering for the day before?

Healing! Now, Jesus healed people, he loved doing it! Of course, it's great, but I think there's something subtle and special going on here in the text. Twice before, we get notes about Jesus' teaching making a big splash, even when they sandwich Jesus casting a demon out, it's his teaching and authority that are highlighted... until the night before. Then, we had no notes about his teaching, his doctrine, or his preaching. Only healing, which he gladly did! But after some time of prayer and focus, Jesus moved away from that crowd so that he could do something in the other villages.

What's the word in V. 38? *Preach*. As he said earlier in the chapter, he came to declare the coming of the kingdom of God. I think the crowds were beginning to miss the point. I think they were getting far too fascinated with the healings, the good stuff that Jesus gave, rather than Jesus himself and his message. Rather than come to hear Jesus, come to truly follow him, and see him change their lives, they just dashed in, got whatever they wanted from him, and left. That was that. Now, does the text say that explicitly? Eh, maybe not. But hang on. I think it's heavily hinted at.

Now, you don't have to believe me yet, just hang on. Jesus was approached by a leper, who begged for healing. Leprosy was a serious condition. Today, we shutter to hear when a parent or grandparent is diagnosed with cancer. We wonder if they will live, if the treatment will work, how much pain they will endure. But cancer today had nothing on the despair caused by leprosy. Rather than rallying around the relative with loads of hugs and kisses as they endure the radiation, lepers were instantly tossed out of town, they

had to keep far away from any healthy people, and there was no cure. No touch, no close contact, and no hope. Over time, their bodies would break down in a long, slow, terrible death. To become a leper was a death sentence, and a banishment, and a deep, ongoing humiliation. There was no hope, in their time, for lepers. Except for Jesus.

This man is desperate. A couple of times in the Bible, God healed someone's leprosy. This man remembered those stories and begged Jesus on his hands and knees to heal him. Here's the amazing thing: Jesus touched him. Just to touch a leper would make you unclean, just touching a leper was forbidden, just touching a leper was all it would take to infect you too. But Jesus did anyway. His compassion, his care, his love sprang forward for this poor, diseased man, and Jesus touched him. Perhaps the first human touch the man had felt in years. Jesus touched him and healed him. He became clean. He was whole again. The incurable was cured, the horrible was made whole, the sick man was saved. Jesus had authority even over the leprosy. This is to be celebrated! It's awesome!

But then Jesus says something unexpected. Jesus healed him but demanded he report to the priests before telling anyone about his healing. There was a procedure in the Law of Moses, given by God to the nation of Israel regarding leprosy. If somebody was healed from it, they were to report to the priest, be checked, go into quarantine for a time, get checked again, and only then be declared healed and clean. Jesus sent this man directly to the priests. Check it out:

“Sternly warned...” Jesus was being serious. This wasn’t a joke. “Don’t talk to anyone!” Jesus said.

The man was commanded by Jesus to go through those ceremonies first, then talk to others. Now, we see Jesus’ authority stressed all through this story. We see demons obey him. We see sickness obey him. We see leprosy obey him. We even saw Peter’s mother-in-law serve him. What about this man? What does he do next?

The man spread the news of his healing all around, which resulted in overwhelming crowds like the others, fascinated by the healing. I’m sure it was very well-intentioned. I have no doubt the man didn’t mean it the wrong way. I have no doubt he thought it wouldn’t be a big deal. But as far as we know, he never went to the priests. He never offered the sacrifices. He never actually obeyed Jesus. The only thing we know is that the sentence begins with “yet.”

The man disobeyed. There’s no other way to describe it. He spread the story far and wide and to anyone who would listen. He had all the enthusiasm, all the energy, all of the joy, but his efforts seemed to bring a distinctly negative effect. Jesus couldn’t enter the towns, and now, people had to travel further, and endure harsher conditions, to hear him. I don’t think this is a good result.

This report of Jesus’ fame sounds a very different note than the one before. Before, crowds were astonished at his teaching and authority, and the Bible seemed to present that as a good thing. But now, after healing a

man who didn't listen to his authority, the crowds force a change in Jesus' ministry. It seems like the leper's well-intentioned disobedience resulted in more harm than good. I can imagine, though I'll admit it isn't stated in the text, that he praised Jesus for his healing! And rightly so! Amen! But I have to wonder if he made mention of Jesus' command or any of his teachings. Did Jesus expect the leper to know all of his sermons by heart? No! Did Jesus expect the leper to know all about who he was? No! Did Jesus expect the leper to be a Bible scholar? No! By no means! But Jesus did expect simple obedience.

It seems like the thing that Jesus wanted to be front and center, the thing that brings positive attention, is his authority and preaching, but now, a message that may have been focused *only* on his healing power brought problems. Because Jesus came for a much greater reason than just to heal sicknesses, he came to cure all of mankind of the sickness of sin. Jesus came to begin a new relationship with mankind, one based on his sacrifice for them, his love for them, and his forgiveness for them. Jesus was trying to teach people how everything changed through him, and how he had come to bring his incredible kingdom! And they were asking for so much less.

It's almost like a millionaire walking into a hospital to give away millions of dollars to people with medical debt. Million dollars to help pay for anybody's medical bills! That would be wonderful! But then, a person comes up, and instead of asking for money to help pay his bill, he hands the millionaire a piece of paper and asks him to fold a paper airplane. He does.

Then, somebody else comes up, again, not asking for money to pay for their medical bills, but asking, again, for him to fold an awesome paper airplane. As the millionaire tries to help people, more crowds gather begging for more paper airplanes. Soon, people from other hospitals are coming over...for more paper airplanes. The man instantly becomes famous for his incredible paper airplanes. Yet, he came to pay off debts. He came to free people from their burdens and pay a far bigger price. While the planes could bring smiles, joy, and laughter for a time, he wanted to truly make a bigger, better, greater, longer-lasting difference. They completely missed the point!

Rather than highlighting the authority of Jesus and the honor it is to serve him, and his salvation and teaching, I wonder if the leper missed the point and spoke only about what he got from Jesus. And in his praise of the gift, he forgot the giver. And in the rush of being healed, forgot the authority of the healer. Instead of speaking of what Jesus came to do and teach and save us from, he talked about, well, basically a really fancy paper airplane.

It's awesome, it's praiseworthy in its way, but it misses the greater mission of Jesus. When we miss the point of Jesus' mission when we misunderstand what Christianity is about, we can bring some confusion and trouble, and people can begin to look at Jesus like a cosmic vending machine. They can get whatever they want from him and forget that he is the king and we are his servants. Understand the Kingdom and serve it selflessly! Advancing the Kingdom of God is primarily about spreading Jesus' message, fueled by prayer, and

seen in serving others. When Jesus' preaching and teaching are central, when prayer is a big part, and when people respond with service and obedience, his kingdom is promoted, and his purpose fulfilled.

Disciples are called to serve, even in the face of opposition, rather than follow simply for personal gain. We must understand that! People must understand the deep life change, salvation, and redemption he offers. Jesus Christ offers you rescue from the power and guilt of sin, giving you new life in him and restoring your relationship with God. But knowing this savior first means realizing the deep problem of our sin. "In biblical usage, sin may be expressed in the negative, indicating a lack of conformity to divine standards (e.g., 1 John 3:4), or in the positive, referring to a condition or act which explicitly opposes divine standards (e.g., Rom 8:7)." Yet, this doesn't have to be the final word on our lives!

This salvation comes through the perfect life of Jesus, his death on the cross in our place, his taking our sins upon him, and his dying for us. Yet, Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave and lives forever, offering us eternal life with him! This is much bigger than a quick fix for a cold! This is freedom from sin and utter limitless forgiveness for our wrongdoing. He offers us a new life in him, a life of love, peace, and hope. He offers to save us and to lead us to serve him. That's the message of his kingdom.

It's not for personal gain. It's not all about what you can leech off of Jesus. It's not about using Jesus to get all the

fun and fame you could ever dream of. It's about being saved to serve.

God's kingdom must overcome hostile enemies, as well as the misunderstandings of those looking for self-centered temporal benefits rather than servant-hearted obedience. We expect demons to stand in the way, yet even they cannot stand against Jesus. No power can defeat him, no ugly sin, no unclean spirit, no enemy can stop his truth and power! There are enemies to face challenges to overcome, and problems to work through. Some forces do not like our message, they do not like Jesus, they don't want us to serve him. But Jesus can overcome them all. And he will. But there is a danger.

We must understand the nature of God's kingdom to advance it well! Disciples are called to serve, even in the face of opposition, rather than follow simply for personal gain. Hang on, does this mean you must know the ins and outs of every single verse of the Bible? No! Absolutely not! The Bible is too big, too great, too majestic for anybody to master all of it! A hundred lifetimes wouldn't exhaust all the riches and details of God's Word and who God is! There's no way we can know everything! Don't worry, you don't have to. Whatever you do, don't walk away thinking you can only serve God if you're an expert. Please don't walk away thinking you can only serve God if you know it all. That's not the point! It just means keeping the focus where it should be. Namely, on Jesus, and on his Kingdom. Not on the temporary benefit we can bring ourselves. That's the difference.

I don't want us to settle for smaller things when Jesus offers us more! It's like rejecting a hot doughnut fresh off the line, you know how Krispy Kreme does it, right? It's like rejecting a fresh doughnut hot off the line and instead, licking some of the week-old glaze off of the floor. God is offering us so much more with a relationship with him and learning of him and following him! I don't want us to settle for so much less. I don't want us to give people the wrong idea and hurt them in the process. Let me explain.

Church can be exciting, but we shouldn't go around telling people to come *ONLY* for the excitement. Church is a great place to meet new people, but we probably shouldn't come to church *ONLY* to meet new people. Youth games are fun, but we shouldn't be part of the youth group *ONLY* for the fun. Jesus is in the business of saving people from their sins, restoring their relationship with God, setting them free to serve him and live new lives in light of his teaching and his love for them. Jesus calls us to be saved and calls us to serve him. Hear his teaching and obey his words.

Jesus commanded us to *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Matt 28:19-20 (ESV)

So, Disciples are called to serve, even in the face of opposition, rather than follow simply for personal gain. This lesson, remember that Jesus has even more for you. Jesus came to save us, and all the rest, it's the cherry on top. Let's not get so fascinated by the bright

red cherry that we forget the ice cream sundae sitting underneath. Disciples are called to serve, even in the face of opposition, rather than follow simply for personal gain.

While at times, God does choose to bless us with physical health, financial stability, or even miracles, we cannot allow our fascination with those things to give us a wrong impression of what it truly means to follow Jesus. We cannot allow ourselves to become distracted by the temporary and flashy when our deeper needs, and the deeper blessings, lie in the learning of the Bible. We must dedicate ourselves to giving priority to learning the way of Jesus and serving him diligently rather than following him for whatever temporal gain we hope to get along the way. Remember, “Jesus is here on earth to do far more than heal the sick and free the demonized; he is here to reclaim this fallen creation and its broken people.”²⁵

Also, “Jesus’ mission was to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God. If crowds descended on him to see miracles accomplished or to benefit from his power, they would not be coming with the heart attitude needed to hear and respond to the gospel. Jesus did not want to be a miracle worker in a sideshow; he wanted to be the Savior of their souls.”²⁶

May we not forget that either!

²⁵ Strauss, Mark L. *Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

²⁶ Barton, Bruce et al. *Life Application New Testament Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001. Print.

Study Questions:

1. What are some ways you have seen Jesus dramatically change somebody's character and attitude? How have you seen that in your own life?
2. Too many churches get distracted with attractions and extras and then forget about emphasizing the most important things, those being the preaching and teaching of the Word. Why do you think that is? How can you help prevent that drift in your church?
3. How have you responded to God's work in your life? What areas of service have you gotten involved in?
4. What kinds of blessings do we receive in the Christian life? What are some ways we can keep a healthy perspective about those without getting too focused on those lesser things and forgetting the true value of God himself and his salvation?
5. How do you think our tendency to focus on the lesser benefits of knowing Christ has affected our prayer lives? Do we find ourselves more often praying for physical healing and financial stability than a deeper knowledge of God and yearning for his word? How can we change that?

Mark 2-3:6

Jesus and the Controversial

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: God's laws are meant to be lifegiving to us and glorifying to him. When we change them into traditions that harm people instead of helping them, we grieve God.

Context:

The last pericope showed the rejection and hardship that sometimes comes with following Christ since we are called to serve without regard for personal gain. However, this lesson highlights the personal peace and refreshment that shines through that service! This leads into the next pericope that shows the tight-knit nature of followers of Christ, creating a community of hope and care, even in a world that has rejected God's people and God's way.

IV Jesus and the Controversial (2:1-3:6)

- A Healing the Paralytic (2:1-13)
- B Jesus calling sinners to him. (2:14-22)
- C The Pharisees attack the disciples. (2:23-24)
- D Jesus explains his Lordship over the Sabbath. (2:25-28)
- E Jesus heals on the Sabbath. (3:1-4)
- F The Pharisees' hatred begins (3:5-6)

We are going to be looking at a collection of 5 stories in which Jesus deals with controversy. Now there are a lot of controversial topics out there today.

What it all comes down to is that two people are approaching a question or decision from two quite different perspectives. They are following different logical paths and so arrive at different solutions that they not only believe are correct but are also very passionate about.

2:1-13 Healing the Paralytic

Here in these stories, Jesus is confronting controversies about how to practice religion. He's touching on subjects like the forgiveness of sins, fasting, and the Sabbath. Jesus is in Capernaum again, teaching the Scripture. His popularity has grown to the point that it is very difficult to get to speak with him because of how large the crowd is. A paralyzed man tries to get in but can't. He is so desperate to see Jesus that he has four friends carry him to the rooftop, break open the roof, and lower him down in front of Jesus. Pleased with their faith, Jesus tells him "Son, your sins are forgiven." But the religious leaders thought, "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Now, notice that they are THINKING this, not speaking aloud. Still, Jesus knows their thoughts and replies: Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?

Wow, what a story! And yet the crux of the conflict here between Jesus and the scribes is their perspectives on who can forgive sins. The scribes say that only God

Himself can forgive a person's sins, and the way to get that forgiveness was through the temple sacrifices. Jesus says that He can forgive sins, and only requires faith to do so. Do you see why this caused so much anger and controversy within the Jewish community? Not only was Jesus undermining the entire temple system by claiming to offer forgiveness outside of it, but he was also claiming to have the power of the Divine- to BE God! And he further showed that by reading their minds.

2:14-22 Jesus Calling Sinners to Him

Let's look at the next story because Jesus goes even further this time. Again, Jesus is teaching large crowds. He walks by a tax collection office and sees Levi (who was also called Matthew) working there. Just a quick reminder that tax collectors were considered really bad people at the time. (Guess things haven't changed that much in 2,000 years.) But Jesus walks by and calls him to be his disciple! And Matthew follows.

Now to be Jesus' chosen disciple was a HUGE deal. At the time, only the best, smartest, and most religious men were allowed to be the disciple of a famous teacher like Jesus. Yet Jesus picks a well-known sinner and by doing so, infers that he has forgiven him his sins and made him acceptable to God as a religious disciple. He then goes to a meal hosted by Matthew, where other well-known sinners were in attendance. His very presence there indicated that he was allowing them access to God. The religious leaders asked Jesus' disciples why he did this. Jesus' reply was: It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Again, Jesus is completely undoing what the Jews thought about forgiveness and sin. We know that sin is redefining what God says is right and wrong by willfully breaking his law and missing the perfection of his demands. That sin shattered mankind's relationship with God. It takes forgiveness from God through sacrifice, like animals in the Old Testament, and ultimately, Jesus Christ in the New Testament, to restore that relationship. By offering religious favor with sinners, Jesus is offering forgiveness to them. He describes their sin as an illness that needs healing and said that he had come to offer that to all sinners.

What does this mean for us?

These stories tell us that no matter how messed up our lives are, no matter what horrible choices we have made, no matter how far from God we have gone in our bodies and minds, Jesus is willing to come to you, to offer you forgiveness, and to bring healing to your soul. This means that Jesus has the power to completely erase your record of sin with no complicated ritual needed. This means that no person is too sinful for Jesus and that no one is beyond the reach of his love. This also means that we as imitators of Jesus should be taking the gospel even to those we consider the worst of people.

Can you name someone you might be really hard to share Jesus with?

Now, telling these people about Jesus doesn't mean that we are ok with what they are doing or that they won't have to face consequences for their actions. It DOES

mean that we give them a chance to repent of their sins and receive a restored relationship with God. This is “going into all the world and preaching the gospel” It’s to the sinners, not the righteous.

Now we come to a story about the practice of fasting. Fasting was a common spiritual discipline for religious people, and it was an especially big deal for the leaders. Simply put, fasting is going without food for a specific amount of time.

A few of the reasons for fasting are to pray with your whole body, to mourn, to repent of sin, to strengthen the spirit while weakening the sinful nature, and to stand with the poor. John’s disciples and the Pharisees all fasted regularly, but Jesus’ disciples did not fast.

Jesus is comparing himself to a bridegroom on his wedding day. He observes that if you are invited to a wedding party, you aren’t going to be fasting! You will be happy and rejoice with the happy couple. Then after the groom leaves, you can go back to your fasting. But besides that, Jesus was not there to try to patch Judaism with more fasting. He was going to make a completely new way of doing things and it would be much better. Jesus did fast himself, and after his resurrection, his disciples did too. But the point here is that Jesus had come to make a new covenant with his people that would now include all who came through faith, and this new way of communing with God was not going to fit in the same parameters that they now had. It would be much larger and more encompassing than that.

2:23-24 The Pharisees Attack the Disciples

Next, he addresses the Sabbath or the Jewish day of worship and rest. The law stated that no one was to do unnecessary work on Saturday. They were to spend the day worshipping and enjoying life. However, the Jewish leaders had added lots of rules that ended up making the day more of a curse than a blessing.

Here in our story, Jesus and his disciples were walking through a grain field on the Sabbath and the disciples started eating some of the grain. Quick note: this wasn't considered stealing. Anyone who planted fields by a road was expected to allow travelers to eat some from the edges as long as they didn't take any with them. But the Pharisees who saw them eating declared this to be un-kosher because they failed to wash their hands.

2:25-28 Jesus Explains His Lordship over the Sabbath

How many of you are familiar with the story he is referencing here with David and the bread? David (the good guy) is running away from King Saul (the bad guy) and he and his men are super hungry. So, he stops by the priests and their tabernacle (this is before the temple was built) and asks the priests for some bread. All they had was the "bread of the presence" or basically bread that no one but priests could eat. BUT- and this is super important- the priests decided that it was more important to take care of the hunger of needy people than to follow the letter of the law: so, they let David have it.

But why does Jesus bring up this specific story when he could just say it's okay to eat a little snack on the way to church? Because the problem here is the Pharisees'

perspective about the law. They thought it was more important to follow the exact letter of the law than for human beings (whom the law was meant to help) to be taken care of. Here's another example of that line of thinking.

3:1-4 Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and a man with a deformed hand was there. The Pharisees were waiting to see if Jesus would heal the man or not. The reason for this is that they thought it was against the law to heal someone on the Sabbath day.

Again, like before, this is not in the actual law, but religious people had ADDED laws later. Jesus asks them: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

3:5-6 The Pharisees' Hatred Begins

Wow! Jesus heals a guy and people get angry about it? Why would healing be controversial? Again, because of their ideas about how God dealt with his people. The religious leaders thought it was more important to strictly follow their traditions than to do good to human beings. God's intentions towards man have ALWAYS been for man's benefit and his glory. Even the law (which may seem really strict to us) was intended for Israel's good. So, when it got warped over time into a set of traditions and rules that actually made life more difficult for people, that made God very angry. Look at verse 5 again. He looked at them with anger and grief because they did not have enough compassion in their hearts to see that what he was doing was right and good.

What do all 5 of these stories have in common?

They all have Jesus changing the religious narrative of what God is like and what obeying God looks like. What does this mean for us? We cannot rely on traditions or opinions of people to tell us what is right. We have to first know the Bible; but even more than that, we must have Jesus and the Holy Spirit's interpretations of it. We must have the heart of Jesus to know the difference between rules to be followed without question (the 10 commandments) and standards that help us follow those rules and bring us closer in alignment with God's heart. God's laws are meant to be life-giving to us and glorifying to him. When we change them into traditions that harm people instead of helping them, we grieve God.

Study Questions:

1. What religious traditions have you heard about or experienced?
2. Have you ever practiced the Sabbath? How do the Pharisees' binding laws compare to God's original life-giving purpose for it?
3. What about fasting? What have you learned about fasting, and have you ever done it?
4. What safeguards could you put into place to keep a beneficial practice from becoming legalistic and harmful?
5. How does God's goodness and purpose change how we view his laws?

Mark 3:7-35

Jesus' Family Relationships: Physical and Spiritual
Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus' claims demand a radical response: answer his call for discipleship, or risk rejecting him forever.

Context:

With the blessings of God's commands firmly established, Jesus now establishes the insider/outsider tight bond of faith that can run even deeper than family. This is an incredible relationship and fuels the desire for the next pericope's call to evangelism as we seek for others to join in the Christian community.

V Jesus' Family Relationships: Both Physical and Spiritual (3:7-35)

- A Jesus Ministers to the growing crowds (3:7-12)
- B Jesus calls and appoints his disciples (3:13-19)
- C Jesus is rejected by those that should have been closest to him. (3:20-33)
 - 1 The Scribes challenge Jesus, denying the Holy Spirit (3:22-30)
 - 2 Jesus' family tries to haul him off, but Jesus refuses (3:31-33)
- D He declares a closer relationship with his followers: Those who obey God are inside his family (3:34-35)

In 2022, a Michael Jordan jersey sold for a whopping 10 million dollars! That same year, a Mickey Mantle card sold for 12.6 million dollars.²⁷

Some people have seriously deep pockets for their passions. They pay massive sums of money to buy these special objects and feel a close connection to the celebrities or stars that owned them. That action gives them a special privilege, a unique experience. They have some major bragging rights. Trophies, cards, signed memorabilia, all kinds of stuff can reach crazy prices. But it doesn't stop there.

You could spend \$34,000 for a private hour-and-a-half tour of the Louvre, the famous Paris Museum.²⁸ But hey, at least you can bring 4 people with you on that one. Or maybe more up your alley, you can pay around \$450,000 for a 90-minute trip to space aboard a Virgin Galactic spacecraft.²⁹ (\$83 a second!) That's the one I'd love to do!

²⁷ ESPN. "The Most Expensive Sports Memorabilia and Collectibles in History." ABC7 Los Angeles, 15 Sept. 2022, <https://abc7.com/sports/the-most-expensive-sports-memorabilia-and-collectibles-in-history/12174058/>.

²⁸ Vora, Shivani. "What \$34,000 Can Buy You at the Louvre in Paris." CNN, Cable News Network, 10 Jan. 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/private-tour-louvre-paris/index.html>.

²⁹ Molina, Brett. "How Much Is a Seat on Virgin Galactic? \$450,000. Here's What Each Trip Includes." USA Today, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 16 Feb. 2022, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2022/02/15/virgin-galactic-tickets-space-trip/6795121001/>.

These insider experiences, these exclusive privileges, are considered very, very valuable. People pay a lot to be on the inside. They desire that special insight, to be a part of the exclusive club. To have those incredible bragging rights. Even if we don't care for those things, we see that major difference between insiders and outsiders. We see a big difference between those who have these special things and those that don't.

If I were honest, we probably feel like outsiders more often than not. Perhaps you feel that you don't have access to anything special or unique or amazing. Perhaps you feel that your life is boring, unremarkable, and...bleh. That you can't do that, you can't achieve this, you can't afford that, you haven't traveled here or there. And you see all these others with all their privileges and access and luxury and think, "Wow, I wish I had that." I wish I was part of something special. I wish I could go from the normal to the amazing, from the crowd to the inner circle; from the boring to the exciting!

Well, hang on, because I have some good news for you today.

7-12 Jesus Ministers to the Gathering Crowds

For now, there are a lot of crowds, this is really typical of the Gospel accounts and descriptions of Jesus' general teaching. But as he has continued this preaching Jesus has been gaining some very determined enemies. They've been making some challenges and accusations but this time around, they take things to the extreme.

This passage we're getting into contains the hotly debated passage on the unforgivable sin. If that's the meaty and fascinating portion of the passage, it's surrounded by some parallel elements. In effect, we have a burger.

- A Bread: Insiders
- B Rejection by family
- C Meat - Unforgivable sin/Rejecting the Holy Spirit
- B Rejection by family
- A Bread: Insiders

Let's take a look at this first slice.

13-19 Jesus Calls him and Appoints his Disciples

Jesus went up to the mountain and called up this special crew. Much like Moses going up the mountain during the process of establishing the 12 tribes as the nation of Israel, now Jesus is calling another group of 12: His disciples.

These people were to be the foundation of his church, the solid core of Christ-followers, the inner circle of leaders and influencers. They were on the inside. Only a little over 6,000 people have climbed Mount Everest. They alone have that experience. Now, 12, just 12, get to climb this mountain and be with Jesus. They got to be "with him." More than just knowing the secret passwords, more than holding the platinum club cards, these guys got the ultimate privilege, to be "with Jesus." They got to spend time with Jesus, learn from Jesus, and live with Jesus. That is the foundation for ministry and Christian life. To be a part of this amazing

Christian thing, you must first be with Jesus. And from being with Jesus, they were launched out to serve Jesus. They continued exactly the ministry Jesus had by casting out demons and preaching his kingdom. And, curiously, from here to the end of the book, we don't see Jesus "preaching." At least, not with that word. Instead, it's all on the disciples and other Christ-followers. That role of proclaiming the Gospel is our job now! We are to be with him, we are to learn from him, and we are to proclaim him to others. We get the inside scoop and bring it to those not yet on the inside. This inside/outside dynamic will color the rest of this story by revealing those who are with Jesus and those that reject him.

Which brings us to this sad section of our narrative burger.

20-33 Jesus is Rejected by Those that Should Have Been Closest to Him

So, the crowds gathered again, so tightly, so aggressively, that the newly commissioned Apostles couldn't even take a lunch break! So many people needed Jesus! So many people wanted Jesus! So many people admired Jesus!

But what did his family think?

In their culture, family was an even tighter bond than it is in our culture. Everything was tied into family, that connection between blood and genetics. Who you were related to, and who you came from, and who your family is determined a lot about you. These were the people who knew you best, who loved you most, that you spent the most time with. They didn't admire his

success, they didn't appreciate his teaching, they didn't want his fame. They thought he should be put in a mental asylum! No, really, that's what it says! They were convinced he was crazy, insane, wild, and completely nuts! His family wanted to restrain him, lock him away, and keep him quiet. It seems like they heard the news and made this choice to stop him. So, they begin heading in his direction, but before they arrive, the text swings us to the middle of the narrative.

We aren't told exactly what Jesus thought at the time, and before we can even comprehend what's going on, something, if possible, even more insulting comes up.

22-30 The scribes challenge Jesus, denying the work of the Holy Spirit

Down come scribes from Jerusalem. These were THE religious leaders. They knew the Bible more than anyone, they not only studied under the best teachers, but they were also the best teachers! It's like a Catholic church getting an unexpected visit from the pope! Or like the CEO of Walmart swinging by to check on something at our local store. But they didn't come for a friendly chat, nor did they come just to ask a few questions. They were coming to make a devastating declaration.

Even more than being crazy, they insisted that Jesus was possessed by a demon. No, more, the very prince of demons, Beelzebul. The vilest, the wickedest of the demons. He was closely aligned with, or perhaps even just a different name for, Satan himself. When the very demons were crying out that Jesus was the Son of God, these scribes were accusing him of being controlled by

Satan. Rather than confessing his deity, they claimed he was a devil. Rather than admit he was from God, they insisted he was from Satan. But, like most troublemakers, they didn't actually say it to Jesus' face. So, he called them out on that.

V. 23 tells us he summoned them like the authoritative king he was and gave them a story. They needed to know who he was. Although they were in the inner circle in the religious circles, they were outside and in the dark about Jesus. Jesus answered with a story. "How can Satan drive out Satan?" Jesus was casting out demons, removing their power over people, and eroding Satan's kingdom, so why would Satan do that?

Why would Satan empower Jesus to take out Satan's stuff?

It's like if OSU sent all their best players over to OU just before the Bedlam game and said "hey, take all our best people, have them wear your gear, and totally, completely beat what's left of our team!" That's nonsense! It's like the owner of a restaurant coming out, stopping you before you even walk in, and saying "nope, nope. don't eat here, go over there, they have cheaper prices, better food, and a cleaner place." That's nuts! People don't do that. Restaurant owners want you to eat at their restaurants, sports teams want their own people to win games for their team, and Satan certainly wouldn't want to undermine his own power and kingdom! It's a ludicrous idea.

If Satan began fighting his own kingdom, it would fall apart. If he wants to try to fight God, his own rule falling apart wouldn't help that! He would be finished

off! Then, a final story. Nobody can enter a strong man's house, the strong man is Satan here, nobody can enter his house and plunder his possessions, the people he influences and even takes over, possess, without first tying up the strong man.

Jesus is able to free those held by the power of Satan because he already defeated Satan's temptations in the wilderness, and Jesus will soon defeat the power of Death and Hell on the cross. Jesus Christ didn't come in the power of Satan; he came to utterly defeat him and rescue those enslaved by Satan. And Jesus begins to tell them just how much danger they were in.

This is a very, very important passage that gets a lot of discussion.

It talks about the "unforgivable sin." So many people ask, "what is it?" "Can I do it?" "What if I have done it unknowingly?" I want to help with those questions. But remember the discussion, these guys were looking at everything Jesus was doing through the Holy Spirit and claimed it was nothing but the work of Satan. It wasn't just a joke. It wasn't just a slip of the tongue. This was very deliberate, very precise, very targeted, and ongoing rejection of Jesus and his ministry in the strongest way.

This is serious. Jesus tells us that anything can be forgiven, even blasphemies. That's a fancy word for slander and mocking and railing against God. It's abusive speech and the worst of insults when they are directed at Jesus. That's blasphemy. One Commentator

wrote: “Blasphemy is an expression of defiant hostility toward God.”³⁰

Even that can be forgiven. BUT, whoever blasphemes, denies, slanders the Holy Spirit, that can't be forgiven. One writer said: “We could therefore define the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as defiant, willful, and final rejection of the Spirit's work in a person's life.”³¹ Another said “In this context, this refers to insistently and unapologetically misrepresenting the workings of the Holy Spirit as demonic”³²

Remember, they wanted Jesus' ministry stopped so badly, they were willing to murder Jesus to do it.

So, why couldn't this be forgiven?

Because to be saved, you must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and it is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin and draws us to Jesus. This is an “eternal sin” or a sin with eternal consequences. Why? To deny the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus is to reject his salvation work, it's to refuse repentance, refuse him as savior. To refuse when the Spirit draws you to Jesus. If you deny Jesus, then turn, repent, and ask for his salvation, he will forgive. But this is the one sin that, as long as you continue to do it, as long as you continue to reject the

³⁰ Lane, William L.. The Gospel of Mark. N.p., Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

³¹ Strauss, Mark L. Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

³² Barry, John D. et al. Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print.

Spirit's work, you are denying the power of God, not accepting it.

The one road to forgiveness of sins is through the Holy Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus. If you deny this, you've denied the only path to salvation. It's like if you were stuck in a prison cell, and there's only one exit, one way out. As long as you refuse to walk through that door, even if it's wide open for you, as long as you refuse to pass through that open door, you cannot escape. Jesus opens the door to forgiveness, but attributing his Spirit-led ministry to Satan, claiming Jesus' actions are devised by the Devil, refuses to walk through the wide-open door of salvation. And as long as you refuse to walk through that door, you cannot escape. As long as you refuse the reality of Jesus' ministry, as long as you think his work is evil, vile, and demonic, you cannot obtain the salvation he freely offers.

Much like basketball, the only way to win is to put the ball into that one hoop. That's the only way to score. One place, and one place alone. And if you refuse to put the ball down the hoop, you aren't going to win. And you, of your own choice, cannot be granted his forgiveness when you refuse to acknowledge what the Spirit is doing. Theologian David Mattis wrote: "For Christians today, we need not fear a specific moment of sin, but a kind of hardness of heart that would see Jesus as true and yet walk away — with a kind of hardness of heart incapable of repenting. Again, it's not

that forgiveness isn't granted, but that it's not sought³³." That's how serious their accusation was. That's how serious their rejection was. They had shoved themselves far away from Jesus, far on the outside, far distant from the only source of salvation.

But don't forget, they were not the only ones rejecting Jesus. His family finally showed up in time to reject him as well. Moving down our burger, we're back to his family.

31-33 Jesus' family tries to haul him off, but Jesus refuses

Jesus' family arrive on the scene and make their demands. The crowd relays their message. But Jesus responds in a very interesting way. He declares a new form of relationship. Here, Jesus is opening up his family. He is declaring a new and better way to be inside his family, to be in on the relationship with him, to be inside this Christian movement, to be in with Jesus.

34-35 He Declares a Closer Relationship with His Followers: Those who Obey God are Inside His Family

"Who are my mother and brothers?" Look at his answer: "here are my mother and brothers!" He was declaring that his circle, this group of followers, young

³³ Matthis, David. "What Is the Unforgivable Sin?" Desiring God, 23 Feb. 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-unforgivable-sin>.

and old, men and women, boys, and girls, belonged with him. Or could.

That special privilege was something they could have as well. With one condition: You have to do the will of God. His blood relatives were not in just because of genetics. The Jerusalem scribes were not in just because of their privilege or learning. Both groups that we would expect to have noticed who Jesus was first of all, both groups most familiar with him, and with the prophecies about him, were stuck, where? V. 31: “outside” tells us the physical position of Jesus’ family, but that word can also be described by the spiritual condition shared by the scribes and his family. They rejected Jesus, and lived on the outside of his community, outside of his teachings, outside of the acceptance he offered to them.

Let’s live on the inside!

Jesus is offering us an inside pass to follow him. But he’s also emphasizing just how distant one can be from him. He offers you a close relationship with him, a bond closer than blood. Yet, your choices could lead you far, far away from him. No matter who you are, young, old, boy, girl, great home, terrible home, Jesus will embrace you into his family. He will give you a place to belong, to live, to love. And he forces us to make a choice. Accept him or reject him.

Jesus’ actions forced radical reactions, the more you learn about Jesus, the less you can ignore him and his claims.

John 3:16 tells us this: “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone

who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” (CSB)

Romans 5:8 tells us: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (NASB)

We learned before that Jesus called ordinary fishermen to follow him, then, he called the tax collector Matthew, the hated IRS agent. In this text we see others. We see the 12, set apart for their task. But even more, we see that final declaration that whoever does God’s will is part of his family. Whoever. Even you. I plead with you today, don’t reject Jesus. Embrace him! If you don’t know about him, or have questions, come to me! I’d love to explain his love acceptance and care for you. I’d love to explain his salvation and forgiveness to you.

To deny his work, to claim that his work is the work of the Devil, or even just a deceiver, or a trickster, is to reject the only way of salvation. I don’t want that fate for you or your friends. I don’t want you to turn from him. I don’t want you to suffer forever for that choice. I don’t want that, and neither do the other Christians in this room. Christians, finally, to follow Jesus means to be with him, and to obey him. Following Jesus isn’t something he takes casually, and neither should you. To enjoy being “with” Jesus, you’ve got to want him.

You’ve got to decide what circles you are going to inhabit. For some of you, you’ve got those friends at school that do anything but point you to God. You have a close bond, you’ve gone through a lot together, but you know spending a lot of time with them is doing

nothing for your walk with Jesus. Maybe you've missed your Bible reading because you've been out too late with them, or you didn't pray at lunchtime because it might be awkward in front of them, or you simply don't talk about Jesus because they don't like it. Maybe. Maybe not! Hopefully not! But if so, then it's time to reevaluate those relationships. Because, perhaps, you've been choosing them over Jesus. And you've been missing out on him.

Jesus is greater, and he is worth it all. He offers the privilege of a relationship with him. He offers the unique experience of being close to him, of belonging with him, and of following him. This is the place to be. The choice is inside, with him, or outside. With him, or without him. Close, or so very far away. Choose him!

Study Questions:

1. Why would Jesus promote relationships between believers as a tighter connection than even family?
2. We often call others in churches our “brothers and sisters” but how should that affect the way we treat other Christians?
3. What do you think about the “unforgivable sin”?
4. Obedience is key to the relationship with God, what are some commands that come to mind with that?
5. Last lesson, we saw the difference between man’s oppressive rules and God’s life-giving help. How does today’s lesson on obedience and being “insiders” tie into that?

Mark 4:1-34

Parables Demonstrating the Kingdom of God

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus wanted to show them that their responsibility was to live out the Scriptures and witness to everyone: the results will vary from person to person.

Context:

Following on the insiders/outside dynamic, and the close bond within the family of believers, this pericope informs our call to others to join us in Christ. Some people reject yet the seed is to be widely scattered. While we may question why some don't come, and be discouraged in that, we must let faith in God guide us, a faith that the next pericope calls us to.

VI Parables demonstrating the Kingdom of God (4:1-34)

- A The Purpose of Jesus Parables (4:10-12)
- B The Parable of the Sower (4:1-9)
- C Explaining the Parable (4:13-20)
- D The Witness of Jesus is then compared to Light (4:20-25)
- E Parables of the Kingdom's Growth (4:26-32)

This time we are going to be studying Jesus' explanation of why some people respond to the gospel, some don't, and others are somewhere in between.

Last unit we discussed the hamburger of acceptance and rejection. Mark is really trying to drive home the point here that although there are HUGE crowds following Jesus in one way or another, they aren't all there for the right reasons. What are some reasons they are there? Now, not all these reasons are BAD: but Jesus was looking for something more. He wanted followers who would seek to understand the deeper ideas that he was teaching. He used something we call parables.

4:10-12 The Purpose of Jesus' Parables

The definition of parable is a simple story told to teach a spiritual/moral truth. Often on the surface, they seem very innocuous or even childish; but when considered more thoroughly, the truth becomes evident. Basically, only the people that were truly seeking spiritual truth would truly understand what he was saying.

With that in mind, let's look at this parable and really think about what he is saying here.

4:1-9 The Parable of the Sower

We have here a farmer who is planting seed. As he goes, the seed either falls haphazardly or is placed purposely and then we see the results. Seed on the pathway is eaten and destroyed. Seed on rocky ground begin to grow but dies quickly. Seed among thorns begins to grow but is interfered with by the thorns and isn't productive. Seed on fertile/tilled ground begins to grow and is fertile.

To someone uninterested in the spiritual, this seems like a commonsense story about agriculture. But Jesus is using this as an analogy for something that happens to humans. Here is his explanation:

4:13-20 Explaining the Parable

Now that we hear the explanation, it seems so simple, right? And yet the nature of this parable is that the more you think about it, the deeper it seems. So, let's break it down together.

The sower is not defined, so it can be anyone who has the seed. And what is the seed? And what is the word? So, the sower can be Jesus, the disciples, or you and me. And by sowing/spreading the word, we aren't just throwing bibles at people. It is living the word and having gospel conversations with people. So here we are, just living our lives and having Bible conversations with as many people as possible. Jesus describes 4 types of people that we may meet:

Pathway.

We have a conversation with someone; they listen. But before they can think about it, Satan comes and takes the word away. How might Satan do that? (False religion, family, distractions) So they never believe on Jesus.

Rocky.

We have a conversation with someone; they listen and happily accept the gospel immediately. But they don't have the depth of character, so when something bad happens to them, they lose faith and "fall away." What

are some things that might make a new Christian stop following Jesus? (Family, friends, mockery at school, prayer not answered, sickness)

Thorns.

We have a conversation with someone, they listen and accept the gospel and start showing fruit. But worry, wealth, and other priorities enter and choke out any progress they have made. What are some things that might destroy spiritual progress? (Worry about the future, desire for money or fame, sports, hobbies, body image)

Tilled.

We have a conversation with someone, they listen, accept the gospel, and begin to show fruit. While some believers produce more than others, the important thing is that we bear fruit.

Now what does he mean by “produce fruit”? The NT uses this terminology a lot- “fruit” is used 64 times in the CSB. As an agricultural society, everyone understood what he was talking about. How many of you your parents farm or garden even a little bit. What do you do to plant a garden or field? You till the ground, you plant the seeds, you water/weed as needed, then you harvest the fruit/crop. The fruit is the RESULT of the seed and the conditions of the ground. You and I cannot make a plant produce fruit any more than we can make it rain. We do what we can, and the rest is up to nature. A lot of farmers in this area lost crops this year because of the drought. Did that mean that something was wrong with the seed? Or how it was planted? The same is true about sharing the gospel. We

plant the seed of Bible truth everywhere we can; it will develop according to the conditions of that person's heart. The Holy Spirit will not force anyone to accept him or to grow in faith.

What does this mean for us? Jesus was not asking his disciples to index their own hearts and decide what kind of ground they were. He was not telling them to only give the gospel to people who they thought were "good ground." Jesus wanted to show them that their responsibility was to live out the Scriptures and witness to everyone: the results will vary from person to person. Some people will refuse it all together. Some will accept it with excitement but then become fearful. Some will believe but be distracted by other things. And some will trust in Jesus and begin in the actions to show the results of his work in their lives.

What do those results look like? Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (CSB) The result of following Jesus will be that you begin to show these attributes. Not because you try hard to be loving or good or self-disciplined, but because the Holy Spirit begins to produce these things in you. What we CAN do is give him something to work with. How can we help make our hearts ready for this growth? What do you think?

Jesus wants us to understand his teachings. He doesn't want us to be confused but to turn to him for wisdom: the more we learn, the more we understand.

4:20-25 The Witness of Jesus is Compared to Light

Jesus came to bring light into a dark world; not to hide the light. Everything he taught will be revealed to those who wish it. The more you seek and learn, the more you will understand and add to your knowledge. The less you seek, the less you learn- and eventually, you will lose even the knowledge you had. This is a “don’t use it, you lose it” situation. We have to be constantly learning and growing in faith, or we will slowly revert back to our former status “backsliding”.

Think of it like math. Unless you are a math genius, most of us must work hard at math. We go to class, do homework, and maybe even have a tutor. The more you study, the more you understand what you are doing. But if you stop studying (over summer break or after graduation), you start to forget. This is why your parents may have gotten straight A’s in high school but can’t help you with your homework. We don’t completely understand how God works in our lives; and that’s ok.

4:26-32 Parables of the Kingdom’s Growth

The way the gospel spreads is through tiny seed of “the word” or conversations of believers with unbelievers. This seems such a small thing, yet as it grows, it becomes much more than we might have expected. Christianity started with one man from Nazareth 2000 years ago, and now has millions of followers. Why? Because the gospel spreads like wildfire when people let the Holy Spirit produce fruit in their lives.

Here are some ideas for this lesson:

Think of one person to try to share the word with this week. If you are really nervous, this can even be another Christian. Practice starting conversations about Jesus, even if it is only a few minutes.

If you are already doing that regularly, think about who you have shared Jesus with already. How did they react? Try to determine what kind of “soil” their hearts might be. Maybe that will affect how you approach them next time.

Ask the Spirit to show you where you aren’t letting him grow your character. When he does, surrender that area to Jesus and try to find a few verses that address it. Maybe talk to a mentor/parent/teacher about it as well.

Study Questions:

1. Of the various kinds of people, what kind have you run into most often?
2. How do you deal with the disappointment of being rejected, or seeing others turn away from Jesus?
3. Can you name someone who seems to personify the final soil, and has a lot of fruit in their life?
4. In what ways are you spreading the message of the Gospel?
5. What kinds of things could choke out your own love and service to Jesus?

Mark 4:35-5:43

Miracles Showcasing the Authority of Jesus

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: To be a follower of Jesus, we must trust him, because he has the power to overcome our problems and restore our lives. While faith is rewarded, a lack of faith is strongly rebuked.

Context:

After the call to faithful evangelism, and the disappointing note that not all will respond well, this pericope reminds us that Christ does win, and in him is ultimate life and healing. This life is beautiful and freeing, and serves to encourage us when, like in the next pericope, rejection of others rears its ugly head once more.

**VII Miracles Showcasing the Authority of Jesus
(4:35-5:46)**

- A Jesus Calming the Storm (4:35-41)
- B Demons and Pigs (5:1-20)
- C Bringing Life and Healing (5:21-43)

In 2009, a burglar by the name of Gregory McCalium entered a home, armed with a knife, and began poking around for what he wanted to steal. TV, DVD player, game system, jewelry? Who knows what he was after.

The homeowner, a 72-year-old, was sleeping with his wife and awoke to the noise of Gregory shuffling around. Mr. Corti, the homeowner, slowly came out of his room, saw the burglar, and, of course, the burglar saw him. But that robber had no idea who he was dealing with. Mr Corti was no ordinary senior citizen. He was a retired boxer. A retired, award-winning boxer. Two punches later, and the would-be-robber was so stunned and dazed that he couldn't hurt a fly. ³⁴

That thief had no idea who he was dealing with when he entered that house, but he quickly found out. He thought he was tougher, better, more powerful, faster, stronger, smarter, but it didn't take long to find out he never stood a chance. The robber was sent to jail, of course. But he learned a very valuable lesson that day. Know who you are dealing with. Because it can be quite a wakeup call if you don't. Know who you are dealing with!

In our section of scripture this evening, we'll see the disciples slowly begin to see who they are dealing with, who it is they are following, and just what he is truly capable of and how they should treat this Jesus they have been following for some time now.

³⁴ Daily News Staff. "24-Year-Old Burglar Gregory McCalium Beaten by 'Victim' - Elderly Retired Boxer Frank Corti." New York Daily News, 11 Jan. 2019, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/24-year-old-burglar-gregory-mccalium-beaten-victim-elderly-retired-boxer-frank-corti-article-1.379153>.

We may think that the disciples should have this figured out by now. And yeah, that's probably right. But whatever expectations they had about Jesus were shattered in this first story. Jesus proved himself to be far, far more than they ever imagined.

4:35-41 Jesus Calming the Storm (Jesus over the downpour)

Jesus has been teaching and preaching all day long. He took his followers and pushed them off in a boat to escape the crowds and get a few moments of peace. And he begins sleeping. It's supposed to be a nice, peaceful trip across the lake. Plenty of time for a nice nap. The disciples, however, are doing anything but napping!

A great windstorm pops up, and blows them back and forth, up, and down, and somehow, Jesus is still sleeping. Water pours into the boat, and they are close to sinking. The wind is howling, the waves are crashing, the disciples are panicking....and Jesus is sleeping. The disciples try their best to keep everything together, but nothing is working, nothing is helping, and Jesus is sleeping. These guys used their expert knowledge. They called on all their training and experience and strength, and what was Jesus doing? What do they do?

They wake him and then they say something kinda stupid. "Don't you care that we're going to die?" Does Jesus care? Yes, of course he cares, but no, they aren't about to die. Now, the disciples get a lot of flak, for good reason, but don't forget "...they have already been with Jesus long enough to take it for granted that he

will have the solution to a problem beyond their control.³⁵"

Jesus hops up and speaks. "Silence! Be still" The storm obeys and as "great" as the storm was, now there is "great peace" everywhere. Jesus was confident in his authority over the storm. He had faith that it was under his authority. There was, as it said, "great peace." everywhere. Well, almost everywhere.

What does Jesus say in v. 41? Jesus calls out their fear and rebukes their lack of faith. The disciples were still in shock. They had no faith, no trust, but instead, were "terrified." This is an even stronger word than their being "afraid" before. They are more astonished at Jesus' power than the storm! Jesus' few words, and Jesus' calming the storm, gave them even more fear than the storm itself! Why were the disciples afraid here? Look at their question. "Who is this?!!!"

Perhaps their minds flashed to Psalm 89:8-9.
"LORD God of Armies, who is strong like you, LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule the raging sea; when its waves surge, you still them." (CSB)

Who did the calming in the passage? Is that LORD all caps? What does that mean? This was not something a human could do, only God! Only Yahweh, only the true God! "Who has authority over the seas and winds is discussed in the OT: Ps 104:3; 135:7; 107:23-30. When

³⁵ France, R. T.. The Gospel of Mark : a commentary on the Greek text. United Kingdom, W.B. Eerdmans, 2002.

Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea, he was making a statement about who he was."³⁶

If only God can control the weather, and Jesus just controlled the weather, what is that saying about Jesus? To us, that's a normal idea. To them, it was an earth-shattering proposition. It's like finding out your best friend is really a space alien from a distant planet hitchhiking his way around the galaxy. Everything you thought you knew about them is suddenly turned on its head. And this perfectly normal human being is revealed to be something utterly foreign, utterly unknown, utterly alien. The disciples couldn't believe it, couldn't quite wrap their minds around it. The best they could do is ask that question. Well, where the disciples have a question mark, someone else in the next story has an exclamation mark.

They know exactly who Jesus is. And they don't like it. Not one bit.

Jesus tamed the untamable, controlled the uncontrollable, and mastered the unmasterable. He faced the fury of the storm and won. and his next challenge is no different.

5:1-20 The Demons and the Pigs (Jesus over Demons)

Jesus arrives and is confronted by this untamable demonic. Demons have been a common feature in the gospel. Unlike the other demon encounters we've seen so far; we finally get a glimpse of the utter horror that is to be tormented by such beings. This dude is living

³⁶ Biblical Studies Press. The NET Bible First Edition Notes. Biblical Studies Press, 2006. Print.

in tombs, slicing himself with stones, and has constantly been chained, only to shatter them and go off screaming into the night. To sensible religious Jews, “Everything about the account has uncleanness written all over it. Gentile territory, demon-possessed man, tombs, [later we’ll see] pigs.”³⁷

This is not a pretty sight, and not a place any decent Jew would want to be. Like walking into a haunted house, everything here would be giving the disciples the creeps. They had just landed from the whole “calming the storm thing,” and now, they are entering a creepy haunted house, except, the blood is real, the possession is true, and they may not make it out alive.

The demon-possessed man sees them and comes running. He comes and kneels before Jesus. We get that familiar “What do you have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” It’s very nearly a demon catchphrase at this point. But he adds more: “Don’t torment me!” Verse 8 is a mini flashback showing Jesus had already told this demon to leave. At this point, he was just dragging his feet.

Then, we notice a fascinating conversation. The name is Legion, like the word army, or battalion, it’s a bunch of folks. This man wasn’t haunted by a single demon, but an entire horde. Whoa! But for all their numbers, they were still terrified. More fear at the realization of who Jesus is. He knew, like every demon before him, that Jesus was supreme!

³⁷ Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers*. United States, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012.

“Never forget that the King of kings is still reigning supreme over all the powers of darkness. Satan may rage and rave in his great wrath, but there is a bit in his mouth and a bridle on his jaws, and he can be controlled and restrained just as the Lord pleases. He who rules the roaring billows and rides upon the wings of the wind can make all the forces of evil subservient to His will. Even when the devil is permitted to attack the children of God, there is always a limit set beyond which he cannot go, as there was in the case of Job. He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. Now, why? I don’t know.”³⁸

He also asked that he would not be tormented. He is asking Jesus to refrain from taking him away from the region of Earth and instead sending him into torment, into Hell. Perhaps he is begging to stay in this world longer. I don’t know. So, strangely, Jesus actually agrees.

Jesus tossed the demon army out of the human, but at their request, sent them into the nearby herd of pigs. This is unusual! And theologians have puzzled about why the demons wanted this and what it means and frankly I don’t know either. But I think I know why Jesus said yes.

Do you have any guesses?

³⁸ Spurgeon, Charles “SATAN, SELF, SIN, AND THE SAVIOR” 19 April 1866, Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, London.

You see, the demons dashed out, took over a ton, and I mean a TON of pigs, dashed them over a cliff, drowned every single last little piggie, and then vanished from the story. This, of course, was seen by the locals. And they realized all their future supply of bacon had just killed itself. I think this would get a lot of attention, wouldn't you? And when they report to their friends, and all return in a giant group, they see the dude all calm, clear, clothed, and learning from Jesus. And the two ways, the two choices, are massively clear. Jesus brings healing, hope, and help. The demons bring death, destruction, and despair. Jesus used that to show the radical difference between choosing evil and choosing to trust in him. It's a powerful display of his power, his might, and his grace.

Jesus is the healing, helper, and hope-giver.

“The exorcism of Legion is therefore more than a strange tale of suicidal swine. It's about theological messaging. Legion recognizes that Jesus is rightful Lord of the country of the Gerasenes—old Bashan now under Gentile occupation.³⁹”

While this region was part of the Bashan/Mount Hermon area, an area legendary for its connection to evil spirits and death, now Jesus is very deliberately stepping outside of Jewish territory to declare war on evil spirits on their home turf. He is showing that he, and he alone, will rule. This event also foreshadows the

³⁹ Heiser, Michael S. *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, The Watchers & The Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. Print.

Transfiguration that will later take place on Mount Hermon, the seat of demonic power in that region.

But sadly, his rule in a physical sense would wait. The Gentiles, rather than embracing the gracious all-powerful king standing before them, reject Jesus. The people who saw everything reject him absolutely. In V. 17 they beg him to leave, just as the demons begged to stay in the area, just as, in a minute, another person will beg. So, Jesus leaves but on his way the newly healed man turns to his savior and we see a brief, but powerful, conversation. Most fear, most struggle to realize and accept who Jesus is, but not this man.

He gets a new role in life. He begs to come with Jesus, totally understandable! Jesus tells him to stay, though. And then, Jesus has him do something utterly unique. Until now, even the 12 Apostles haven't been sent out to preach yet. We just saw their lack of faith.

Until now, Jesus has insisted on silence from demons, and even from some that he healed. This man is different. He is given the task of preaching and teaching his own countrymen, pointing the Gentiles, the outsiders, the non-Jews, the pagans, to Jesus. So, he does! It brings amazement! This man does it right. He follows Jesus, trusts Jesus, and spreads the news of Jesus. Providing a good example that contrasts sharply with the doubting, fearful disciples. We see the single example of obedience and trust, but even more are on the way as Jesus returns to Jewish territory.

5:21-43 Bringing Life and Healing (Jesus over Death)

Here is another one of Mark's narrative hamburgers. The story of the little girl of 12 years old begins here, and ends later, but is interrupted by the story of a lady that has been extremely sick for 12 years.

5:21-24

While Jesus just faced rejection, here he is embraced. Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, kinda like a preacher in the church today, came up and begged Jesus for help.

His duties included the conducting of the synagogue worship and the selection of those who were to lead the prayer, read the Scriptures, and preach in it. But for all that position, all that authority, even the wealth that came with it, he had a problem that only Jesus could solve. His little girl was dying. Normally, in Mark, we find the religious leaders allied against Jesus. This guy is an exception.

But here, we learn it's not about who you are, it's about how you relate to him.

Whoever you are, even if everyone would expect you to be Jesus' greatest enemy, if you come in faith, he will help you. Jesus begins to follow him home, but as the crowds begin bumping and banging into him, a special someone also comes up to touch Jesus.

5:25-34

That someone was a lady who had been sick for twelve years, some sort of bleeding problem that no doctor could solve. She had lost all her money and had only gotten worse and worse. In her day, to be sick like this

meant she was ceremonially unclean, and couldn't worship in the Temple, she couldn't join in the corporate praise of God, she was the opposite of that leader we just heard about. But like Jairus, she had heard about Jesus. She came and touched him. She didn't need all the attention or want the stares from the crowd. Just a quiet sneak in, touch Jesus, get healed, and sneak away.

At first her plan works. She slips in, touches Jesus, and she is healed! This is a dream come true! Victory! Finally healed! But as she begins to slip back to her getaway car Jesus speaks up. Jesus asked who touched him. Of course, he knew. But he was asking for a reason.

His disciples brought up the obvious, that many had bumped and bonked him along the road. But Jesus knew there was something different about her touch. And he didn't have to wait long for her to come forward. She didn't want to come. She was afraid. She was, again, ceremonially unclean, even by touching Jesus, she would make him unclean, make him unable to worship in the Temple for a time, she would tarnish his ceremonial holiness.

She would corrupt him, in a way. But she needed to learn something. The one who touched lepers, the one who touched the demon possessed, the one who touched her, was greater. Instead of her uncleanness infecting him, like a contagious virus, Jesus' own holiness overflowed and washed away her sickness. Jesus played the Uno Reverse card, and instead of falling under uncleanness, he made her clean. He

changed her life. His speech becomes even more life changing.

What does he call her?

This is the only time Jesus calls anyone a son or daughter in Mark's Gospel. Think about it. The little girl that was dying, she had a powerful, rich, protective, loving father that could provide for her, protect her, and call for aid. Her daddy could seek out the healer. Her daddy would help her through. Her daddy would bring her what she needed. Now, Jesus was telling this woman that he would do that for her. Jesus would provide healing. Jesus would help her through. Jesus would bring her what she needed. Jesus would be there for her. Jesus would be the father she didn't have. God himself would be her helper, her advocate, her mediator.

Jairus was top of social scale, she was bottom. He was religious, she was banned from temple, he was rich, she had nothing, he was a leader, she was a reject. Jesus helped both.

What does that say about Jesus?

No matter who you are, Jesus can help. Just as we learned, no matter how big the problem, he can overcome it. Whoever you are, whatever is going on, all it takes is a little faith. And as Jesus is dealing with her faith, terrible news comes. Jairus' daughter has died. Game over. They don't need a doctor anymore, just a mortician. It's done. She lost.

But what does Jesus say?

But Jesus only tells him to believe, to have faith. He had just seen one miracle, he only needed to be patient and he would see another. So, they go.

5:35-43

Unlike the bleeding woman, this is a public affair. Mourners are already lamenting the death. It's confirmed, it's obvious, it's unquestionable. She's dead, and the funeral has, in a sense, already begun. Jesus comes in and makes a startling statement.

"She's not dead, she's sleeping."

Now, sleeping was a term they did use for death. Like today, we may say "wanna sleep with the fishes?" Or "she entered her eternal sleep." But, if both words can mean death, just like in English, why did Jesus correct them? Because sleep opens the possibility of waking up. Jesus tossed out the mockers and scoffers. He took a select few, and entered in. With a few words, he healed her, and she began to walk! Just to prove she was alive, Jesus had them give her some food. Maybe that dying thing makes you hungry. I don't know. And he left. Trust the authority that overcame it all! Have you noticed the escalation?

Jesus saves from near death (storm) He saves one from living among the dead (demoniac) and he saves the living dead (bleeding woman), and he saves the truly dead (little girl) Jesus overcame it all.

Jesus is revealing exactly who he is. What have some of the reactions been? How should people respond to Jesus? What are some of the qualities that Jesus seems to have? In light of all he does, who or what is Jesus claiming to be? If we are to respond in faith to Jesus, what are some ways we can do that today?

The downpour, the demons, the disease, and the death are all under his control. He can be trusted through it all. When we see who Jesus is, we too have a choice.

We can utterly reject him, shoving him out of our lives and ignoring the power he has shown to us. We can be afraid, terrified, and paralyzed at who he is and scared of him. Jesus knows everything about us, even our deepest secrets. And he knows what you've been hiding from others. And he is the judge over all beings. Yikes! Or we can come to him in faith, believing he had the hope and help we need right now.

What does the word Faith mean? Faith is trusting, believing, leaning on something to be reliable and true and helpful. Faith is trusting in someone or something. In V. 34, the woman's faith saved her. In V. 36 we see the phrase "only believe." Believe is the verb that translates the noun form of the word that is translated faith. In other words, in English, we have two different words: Believe and faith. In Greek, it was the same word. In the first two stories, the storm, and the demons, we saw who Jesus was, and then, we saw two people that saw miracles when they had faith, when they believed in Jesus.

When we remember who he is, that transforms our prayer life. When we have faith in Jesus, that transforms our lives. When we believe in Jesus, that makes all the difference. Jesus works miracles in these stories. He does the impossible. He can do the impossible in your life too. Have faith! Trust him! Ask him! Maybe you're nearing the end of high school and have no idea what you're going to do with your life. What college, what career, what city? Or, even bigger, who will you marry? How can you find somebody that matches you, completes you, and will stick with you for the rest of your life? Will you trust God in that?

Maybe your concerns are closer to home. Maybe your parents don't seem to care at all about God. Maybe they claim to be Christian, maybe not, but from your point of view, they sure don't act it. And try as you might, life is rough, they sure aren't perfect, and you don't feel that love and care and support you know they should be providing. God sees that need, and he will hear your prayers. Have faith in God! Folks, when we begin to see who Jesus is, that changes everything.

He loves us when no one else does. He cares when no one else does. He works for us when one else does. Jesus is the supreme storm-stopper, the Divine demon-destroyer, and the Lord of Life and healer of hearts. How will you respond to him today? Have Faith! That doesn't always mean we get what we want, the guy freed from demons wanted to follow Jesus back into Jewish territory and Jesus refused. Jesus pointed him to tell his own countrymen about Jesus instead. Just because we ask Jesus something doesn't mean he will do it, but he does know best, and we can trust that his

plan, his way, is greatest. That's part of asking in faith. We ask for the solution we think is best. But sometimes, Jesus, being God, knows something else is better. We can also trust him to give us what is best, even if we don't always like it. Have faith!

Faith is confidently calling on Jesus, knowing and believing he has the power to fix the problem and restore our lives. Jesus overcomes any problem, the downpour, the demons, the death, and disease. Whatever is going on in your life, trust Jesus, pray to Jesus, and he will hear.

Jesus is the Supreme storm-stopper, the Divine Demon-destroyer, and the Lord of Life and Healer of hearts. Have faith in him today!

Study Questions:

1. Jesus actions in controlling the sea reveal more than just his powers, they point to his being God, Yahweh, himself. What are some other ways Jesus has revealed his identity so far?
2. The former demonic was the first person “sent” by Jesus. He has an incredible testimony of God’s transforming power. Who is someone that you know that also had a radical life change when they met Jesus?
3. How do you think Jairus felt when Jesus was delayed? Do you think his feelings changed when he saw the woman healed? When God has worked in the lives of others, how does that make you feel?
4. The New Testament sometimes uses the term “sleep” for death. Do you think that is significant, considering the future resurrection?
5. Have you struggled in your faith in Jesus? How has reading of his power changed your own feelings? What questions do you still have about him?

Mark 6:1-29

Popularity Waning and Kingdom Proclaiming.
Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: People don't always understand or accept the truth. Jesus' mission did not change or stop because of misinformation or gossip.

Context:

After Jesus powerful display and declaration of his deity, we are reminded once more of the rejection many will have towards Jesus. John is killed for his faithfulness, and that hardness of heart, that same rejection, is also something even Christians can face, and something Jesus warns about in the next section.

VIII Popularity Waning and Kingdom Proclaiming (6:1-29)

- A Jesus was rejected by his hometown (6:1-6)
- B Jesus Sending his disciples on a mission trip (6:7-13)
- C Herod hearing of Jesus (6:14-16)
- D John the Baptist faithfully rebuked Herod's sin (6:17-20)
- E John's rebuke costing his life (6:21-29)

Have you ever felt like no one understands you? Like they don't appreciate how you have worked at something? Do your friends or siblings blow off your

accomplishments with “oh, that’s just because...” or “That’s not that cool, I can do...”? Maybe you are working hard to correct a flaw in your character, like anger or lying; but no one notices, or you get picked on. Sometimes it’s something little (like making fun of your Lego model) but sometimes it’s something big (like your calling in life). Jesus’ role as Messiah was underplayed by some and completely misunderstood by others. In Mark 6, we have another sandwich of misunderstanding and mission.

6:1-6 Jesus Rejected by His Hometown

What a reaction! First, notice the first verse: “He left **THERE** and came to his hometown.” The **THERE** are the stories in chapter 5: healing the demon-possessed man and Jairus’ daughter. Huge crowds are now following the famous miracle worker and being healed of all their illnesses.

While the Pharisees are displeased, no one is disputing the amazing works and words of this unknown rabbi who burst onto the scene with the power of God: except his family and hometown friends. When he comes back (with a large group of passionate followers), there is no parade or band or people shouting, “I went to school with Jesus!” He goes to the synagogue on Saturday and teaches. Luke 4 tells us what he preached:

“The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him, and unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled." Luke 4:17-21 (CSB)

This prophecy is about the coming Messiah. Jesus is declaring himself as Savior! And what did they say? "This is Mary's son! You know, the one illegitimate one? His brothers and sisters are here, and they aren't special. He speaks really well, but he's just a blue-collar worker like us. Isn't he the one who put in your new front door? Who is he to teach us what the Torah says? How did he get the ability to perform miracles?"

They were offended by him and refused to believe him. Luke even says they became enraged when he compared himself to Elijah and tried to throw him off a cliff! Yet Jesus did not become angry or chide them. He healed anyone who asked, but they weren't many. He was astonished by their unbelief, but not surprised. Why? Because it is hard for people to accept that the little kid they saw growing up could become something other than what they had become. Their expectations of his future clouded their mind to the current reality.

This has been true throughout history. A young person shows potential for extreme success and instead of uplifting and supporting them, their family and friends will discourage and impede them. Many times, this will stop the person entirely and/or imbitter them even if they do succeed. However, Jesus did not let his hometown stop him or even slow him down. He went

on doing what he was doing: teaching and healing. In fact, he started to scale up his ministry!

He sent the disciples on a mission trip. Now just imagine for a minute that our whole youth group was going on a mission trip to Israel. For two weeks, we are going to walk from village to village telling people about Jesus. Keeping in mind that you will have to carry everything you bring, what would you take? Let's see what they took.

6:7-13 Jesus Sending his Disciples on a Mission Trip

Who were the 12? "These are the names of the twelve apostles: First, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him." Matthew 10:2-4 (CSB)

This is possibly the pairing they received as well. Can you imagine being paired with Judas? Look at Jesus' specific commands: Take a staff and wear sandals. Don't bring extra food, extra clothes, a backpack, or money. Why? Trust God, not a mark for thieves, not tempted to take gifts. Jesus knew that the generosity of God-fearers would keep them well provided for and teach them a valuable lesson in trusting God for protection and provision. There weren't going to be hotels in most of these towns. They would have to get themselves invited into someone's house. And this is the abridged version of this story!

Matthew 10:5-42 is a much longer account of the same story, but even here, notice that Jesus did not promise that everyone would listen. When they were rejected, they were to go somewhere else. Jesus gave them unlimited authority over the evil spirits, but they still had to pray for their daily bread. Jesus predicted persecution of every form, but he also promised the Father's care. Jesus' mission was to spread the good news of repentance and restoration to all of Israel...and it worked!

6:14-16 Herod Hearing of Jesus

Jesus has become so famous that even the current secular king of Judea has heard of him. While his family and friends don't think he is much of anything, what does Herod think? He imagines that Jesus is a resurrected prophet! Now, last I checked a person who is raised from the dead is pretty special. Interestingly, this foreshadows that Jesus will in fact BE raised from the dead: something the Jewish leaders did not want to accept. However, I find it interesting that Herod is checking out Jesus at all. Who is this Herod?

This is Herod Antipas (Herod being his title, not his first name.) His father was Herod the Great who ruled the area of Judea from 40 BC to 4 AD. Although he married a Jewish princess and rebuilt the temple, he was a cruel and wicked man. He murdered his own wife and two of his sons when they were accused of betraying him, and then murdered the toddlers 2 and under in Bethlehem when the wise men told him of Jesus' birth. He was very aware of the prophecies surrounding the coming Messiah and feared them. Herod Antipas was one of three surviving sons when

his father died in 4 AD. He was given the position of tetrarch over Galilee. He had married a princess named Phasaelis but divorced her because of his desire to marry his brother's wife. This is where John comes in.

6:17-20 John the Baptist Faithfully Rebuked Herod's Sin

Not only was Herodias his sister-in-law, but she was also his niece! Herodias' father was the half-brother of both Antipas and Philip, making her their niece. She was betrothed to Philip at the age of 8 and had one daughter Salome with him. However, when it became clear that Antipas was going to have more political power than Philip, she divorced her husband in order to marry Antipas. This move had the country in an uproar. Jews and non-Jews alike were outraged by this union, but no one dared to say anything to them except John the Baptist. Herodias used her power to have him imprisoned, but Antipas didn't want anything to do with it. So, Herodias and Salome conspire to trap their husband/stepdad into an open-ended promise.

6:21-29 John's Rebuke Costing his Life

This guilt clearly hangs heavy on Antipas' conscience; so much so, that when a new teacher comes on the scene not much later, he fears that John that has been raised from the dead. Taking into account that Jesus and John probably looked similar (being cousins) and taught the same message (repentance being the path to the Kingdom of God), we can't blame him too much. However, notice that Herod doesn't understand who Jesus is any more than the Nazarenes did. John performed no miracles, nor did he claim to be anything but a messenger. The Jews asked if he was the

Messiah, but he wasn't. Jesus heals, exorcises demons, feeds thousands miraculously, and states He's the Christ! Yet, for some reason, Herod thinks he's John. Let's give him credit for at least attributing enough power to God to think he can raise the dead but notice that he does not repent.

So here we have 3 stories: Jesus' teaching in his hometown, Jesus sending out the disciples to teach, and Herod's response to Jesus/John. What do they have in common?

People don't always understand or accept what truth is. Jesus' mission did not change or stop because of misinformation or gossip. What can we learn from this? If you are a follower of Jesus, then your friends and family will not always understand or appreciate that you are trying to do what He says. In a kind and compassionate way, we are to continue our mission. Those who listen, listen. Those who don't, don't. Our trust is in God and the power he has over sin and in people's hearts and minds.

We are to preach the gospel of forgiveness and healing; if we are hated for that, we are no different than our Master.

Study Questions:

1. How have those around you treated your love for God? Have they encouraged you, or do you feel like they rejected you and pushed you away from God's purpose for you?
2. How would the disciples have felt when Jesus finally sent them out? Do you think his instructions about the trip would have excited them, made them nervous, or all of the above?
3. If you had the chance to go on a missions trip, where would you go, and why?
4. John the Baptist stood up to the moral corruption of his day and suffered for it. In what ways might you need to take a stand, and what consequences would result from that?
5. How have people misunderstood your message, or the Gospel? What misunderstandings of the Gospel have you encountered, and how open are people to hearing the truth?

Mark 6:30-56

Unsuccessful Withdrawal, Interrupted by the Crowds
Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Hardness of heart prevents us from tapping into the divine power that would otherwise flow through us to minister to others.

Context:

After Jesus' rejection from his hometown and the murder of John, we see the hardness of heart now infiltrate even his own disciples. Unbelief prevents them from seeing God move, and their misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what he can do is echoed in the next pericope. There, Jesus has to teach them the difference between outer works, and a genuine inner righteousness. Sadly, the disciples just aren't doing well at this point.

IX Unsuccessful Withdrawal, Interrupted by the Crowds (6:30-56)

- A Feeding the 5,000 (6:30-44)
- B Walking on the Water (6:45-52)
- C Miraculous Healing (6:53-56)

Last time, we learned about another burger in Mark's Gospel, one where rejection of Jesus took place on two ends, with a section about Jesus' mission in the middle.

Where was Jesus raised, what city? What happened when Jesus went to preach and teach there? What amazed Jesus, early in chapter 6? Jesus then sent out his disciples on a mission, what supplies were they commanded to bring?

Then we get the sad, sad story of King Herod. John the Baptist was preaching about Herod, but what had Herod done? What then did Herod do to John? Can somebody summarize what led up to John being killed?

People don't always understand what the truth is, but our response should be to continue our mission, and preach the gospel of forgiveness, and if we are hated for that, we are no different than our master.

Last pericope, we saw various unbelievers rejecting Jesus. Different ones that didn't follow Jesus, were very confused about who he was and what he was here for. They didn't understand him, and therefore, didn't want him. But, what about those that do follow Jesus, can they also misunderstand him? What happens then?

Last lesson, we talked about a feast, King Herod's feast. The feast of a corrupt king whose lustful indulgences eventually lead to the murder of John the Baptist. He was a man interested in John, fascinated by Jesus, but a man whose actions showed no recognition for who these men truly were. For Herod, they were like circus side-shows, a fascinating curiosity, perhaps, but nothing that should affect his daily life. And eventually, his daily indulgences, his own wickedness, ended the ministry of John.

When you treat God as a curiosity and fail to see him for who he is, you either finally wake up and submit to him and obey him, or you will squash his voice and end up silencing the very ones calling you to salvation. Needless to say, it doesn't end well for Mr. Herod.

But for now, we're picking back up with a different group of people. Jesus had sent his disciples to preach and teach and work miracles. They were to go out without food, or money, or even extra clothes, yet God would provide for them, protect them, and work miracles through them. And God did. They saw Jesus's power flowing through their lives, working through their hands, and moving through their mouths. Jesus was empowering them for service! And now, they are returning from their mission trip, excited, but exhausted too.

6:30-44 The Feeding of 5,000

Here, Jesus provides to the crowds through the disciples. Keep that in mind.

The disciples return and report. They echoed Jesus' ministry; they both did things and taught things. 6:12 told us what they taught. 6:13 tells us what they did. So, they come back from their mission trip, and like any smart leader, Jesus sees they've worked hard and have earned some rest. Rest is part of God's plan too, not just hard work. Even now, they had so many people around they couldn't even get a lunch break! They try to escape but are instantly recognized and the crowds come once more. The crowds crowded in thicker and thicker, but instead of dismissing them, Jesus looked at them with love. The crowds gather and invite the

compassion of Jesus. V. 34 tells us he saw them and had compassion on them.

What's compassion mean?

Compassion is having pity, affection, it's caring for others, it's helping others, especially when they are helpless. And helpless is a great description for this crowd. Jesus saw they were like "sheep not having a shepherd." (KJV) They were lost, leaderless, confused, and vulnerable. Where was their leader?

Who was the legal king at this time?

Herod. Herod, who was too busy dating his brother's wife and indulging in drunken, lustful raves to actually help his people. Herod was no help.

Who was the spiritual leader?

Pharisees. The ones whose names have become synonyms with stifling religious restrictions and utterly wacky man-made requirements that undermined the very heart of God's grace and love. They aren't helping either. These people need a real, caring, gentle, wonderful shepherd. They needed Jesus. And he loved them enough to put aside his rest and help them. So, for many long hours he teaches them, shows them the ways of God, and instructs them in his doctrine. Only, just like on Sunday Mornings, stomachs started growling, and people began to get really hungry. It has "grown late" and it was high time to do something about that food problem. For all we know, the disciples still hadn't eaten themselves!

What does the compassionate Jesus do next? Jesus works through the disciples to provide bread for the crowds. But notice how I said that “Jesus works through the disciples...” So, the disciples, probably still quite tired and hungry, note the problem: “It’s late, there’s no McDonald’s nearby, and the closest Chick-fil-a is hours away.” “Send them off and let them get food.” Unstated is probably the “...and let us finally get a break!” I sympathize! But Jesus, still fueled by his compassion for the crowds, has a startling reply in V. 37. Jesus didn’t say “I’ll feed them.” He said, “you feed them.” “You give them something to eat.” Jesus expects them to know what to do. But do they know what to do? No way.

The disciples know they don’t have enough money and what supplies they do have is hardly anything. Other accounts record this food isn’t even theirs, somebody else gave it! So, the disciples have nothing to give. No resources at all. But wait, back in 6:8, Jesus sent them on a mission trip and told them to bring, well, nothing but a walking stick. No bread, no money, no nothing. Now, did the disciples all starve to death on that trip? No! God evidently provided for them when they had nothing to give. God enabled them to minister to others. God gave the resources for that. Did the disciples learn from their previous lesson? Not quite.

Jesus has them sit everyone down, takes the bread and fish, prays, breaks them, and makes the disciples hand out the fragments. Now, we don’t even know if the crowd knew what was going on. But the disciples knew. They saw God the Son take the meager resources and feed an entire crowd. They saw him do the impossible! But, more, they were a big part. They fed the people,

they came back for more, they even brought the original loaves and fish to him! Jesus is teaching them that his power works through people. He is showing them that they can minister, they can help, they can see incredible things happen when they trust the power of God. Disciples, you feed them, you gather the bread, you sit the people down, you bring it to them, you gather up the fragments. You get to see God working through your hands and feet. Frankly, that's incredible! The ministry of Jesus doesn't stop with him. It continues on through us! Or it should.

But it doesn't always.

6:45-52 Walking on Water

Now, the disciples fail to recognize Jesus and fail to echo his power. It's sad to watch. At last, Jesus dismissed the crowds and prayed. He shoos away the crowd and sends his disciples on their way. Then, he went from an intense prayer meeting. Jesus is there all night, praying and talking with God.

Meanwhile, the disciples struggle against the tormenting wind. They are in trouble once again. They hit another freak storm on the sea and once again are struggling against it, afraid for their survival, fighting for their lives. It's a wild contrast, Jesus peacefully praying on the mountain, and his disciples in a mindless panic on the sea. Finally, in V. 48, Jesus comes to them. Jesus reveals himself and rebukes their hardness of heart.

So, walking on the water, Jesus comes to the boat. This is, of course, highly unusual behavior for human

beings. Naturally, the disciples thought he was a ghost and got even more scared. Jesus assures them, hops in the boat, and once again, the raging storm stops peacefully once Jesus gets involved. Now, there are two little hints that are really cool in this story.

First, Jesus is said to “pass by them” in V. 48. This exact phrasing was used in Exodus 33:22 when Yahweh passes by Moses, in a beautiful moment that shows God’s enduring presence with him, assuring Moses that God was with him through everything. It’s a literary detail reminding us that just as God was with Moses, now Jesus would be with his people. Then, Jesus replies to them “*It is I*” This one, especially in the CSB, doesn’t seem notable. Some other translations have the odd wording “*I am he!*” (LEB) Now, English doesn’t really work like that, it’s odd, so most translations steer into more normal English. Even the “he” is in italics, it’s just there to clarify, so one way to translate the word he uses is this “I AM” Here, right after passing by Jesus is uttering the phrase “I am.” Once again, look at all these hints.

He is passing by, he is the “I AM,” he calms the storm, what is Jesus communicating here?

Then, Jesus says something else. This comment always confused me in V. 52. What do you think it means? He isn’t rebuking them directly for all this fear and terror they just had. He isn’t even rebuking them directly for not recognizing him. He is rebuking them for the loaves. Why? Context matters, so let’s back up.

First, we saw the mission trip when the disciples healed people, cast out demons, and did all sorts of wonders through Jesus' power. With the feeding of the 5,000, which happens next, Jesus first tells the disciples to solve the problem, and THEN has them serve the food and then has them give it to all the people and then has them gather it up! Again, the disciples ministering through the power of Jesus. Jesus was trying to teach them that his power can flow through them to minister to others. That was the lesson they needed to know, but did they get it? Nope.

Because as soon as Jesus leaves their sight, they get in trouble, begin to panic, and forget everything. Jesus had told them to go to the other side, they were on his mission, and they forgot his power. They had hard hearts. Hard hearts have a hard time seeing God move. What is a hard heart? To have a closed mind, a stubborn and immovable mindset. To refuse to learn a lesson.

Think about it like this: On a beach, you can take the sand and mold it up, shake it down, make castles and sculptures and generally form it how you want. Now try that with a cement parking lot. Good luck. You may be able to get a couple surface scratches in it, but that's it. Only with a jackhammer breaking it up will you make any progress. And even though Jesus' lesson had hit with the force of many jackhammers, the disciples were simply not getting it.

So, was Jesus expecting them to try to calm the storm? I don't know. I don't want to say that outright.

They just learned he will work through them to accomplish incredible things. They were just sent, by him, to a certain place. They saw him calm the storm before. Perhaps, perhaps, Jesus was testing them to see if they would watch if Jesus would work through them while they are on his mission. Perhaps that's why Jesus let them struggle so long, and why he rebuked them for not remembering his power over the loaves, the loaves they handed out. Perhaps that's a stretch, and the text isn't clear on that, I don't want to push it too far, but it's interesting food for thought.

Obviously, the disciples failed on the sea because they forgot the lesson that Jesus taught them with the loaves. That lesson was that Jesus provides and has power over even the natural world. If they just learned that Jesus can provide, then when they get in another rough spot, they forgot that Jesus could provide. Either they forgot that Jesus would work through them, or they forgot entirely to pray to God. Their hard hearts failed them, just as they failed to learn their lesson. But while the disciples fail, we see an interesting contrast at the next stop.

6:53-56 Miraculous Healing

Unlike the disciples, who seemed to forget Jesus' power, the crowds recognize Jesus immediately and bring others to Jesus to be healed.

On landing, the crowds gathered once more. These disciples just can't catch a break! People immediately recognize them. The crowds then brought people to Jesus, in effect, continuing the ministry of the disciples in pointing people to Jesus for healing and help. With

the hungry crowd earlier, the disciples saw a huge problem, knew they had Jesus with them, but didn't put 2 and 2 together. And because they still didn't see Jesus for who he was, they were also terrified in the storm again! The disciples are slipping! They are forgetting all the wonders they just did in Jesus' name on their mission trip! The crowds, however, are stepping up to fill the gap. These crowds understand, at least a tiny bit, of Jesus' power. They know he is the solution to their problems, and they quickly bring their problems to him.

So now, these crowds are acting more like disciples than the disciples are! They see Jesus' power. They see the problems others face. They point others to Jesus for help.

They have faith in Jesus to make right, to heal, to help, to save. Their faith saw God move in incredible ways. They knew what Jesus could do, and they trusted him to change their lives. And he did.

But I don't see the disciples in this section. I don't see them anywhere. I wonder if that is to emphasize something. The disciples saw God move during the mission trip, but they failed to think Jesus would help the crowds. They saw a big problem, with no natural solution, and panicked, until Jesus worked through them to feed the crowds. Next, rather than remembering Jesus' power, they saw another big problem, the storm, which had no natural solution, and they again panicked, until Jesus came and chewed them out.

Now, others are seeing Jesus heal the unhealable and cure the incurable and make all the difference in the world. Hard hearts have a hard time seeing God move. I wonder if we fail to see God working in our lives because we fail to believe he can and he will. Unlike the disciples, odds are you won't ever see a sea instantly become calm, or 5 loaves feed 5,000 people. God usually works in different ways today. But more than work just in the physical realm, God can and will use you in the spiritual. You can share the Gospel with somebody and be a part of their coming to Jesus! You can! Somebody can become a Christian because you pointed them to Jesus! But I think we can refuse that, ignore that, and think we aren't spiritual enough, aren't trained enough, aren't good enough. We don't think God will, or can, use us. Our lips say "Yeah, Jesus is God. Jesus can do incredible things, Jesus gives us power to make a difference in others' lives" But our actions can say otherwise. Our hard hearts have a hard time seeing God more.

What a shame!

Even something simple like prayer. James writes "You do not have because you do not ask." I wonder, how much are you praying for God to do incredible things? Are you asking him to guide you, to encourage you, to heal you? Are you asking God to bring comfort to the hurting, and hope to the lost? Are you asking God to see your classmates begin to follow Jesus? How often, for how long, or are you doing it at all? Are you asking God to use you to spread the Gospel? Or do you barely pray at all? When we refuse to pray, we're acting like God doesn't care or can't work. We have stubborn

hearts, hearts that refuse to see God's compassion and refuse to trust him with life's problems. And, when we are faced with big issues that crowd us in with giant needs, far bigger than we can handle, we panic. We don't look to God, and we don't expect him to work, and then we find ourselves over our heads.

God can work incredible things, even today! Sometimes we wonder why others seem to see God work in incredible ways. They see classmates come to Christ. They see the youth group grow in numbers. They have a peace and joy in life that we can't seem to achieve. They really, actually seem to love praying, when to us it seems boring. They seem to understand the Bible, when it's confusing to us. They seem to always know what to say and how to help.

But, if we haven't shared our faith, if we haven't talked about Jesus lately, if we haven't introduced salvation to somebody recently, maybe we're missing something. It's so cool to share the Gospel with someone!

It's so cool even to invite them to church, to invite them to join in on this incredible thing we call following Jesus. But we can quickly fall into doubts. When we invite somebody, and they refuse to come, it's annoying and discouraging. And I've been there. We wonder, after inviting so many, if anybody will ever come! We wonder if maybe God just isn't working for us, and maybe can't use us. We wonder if anybody will ever come to Jesus because we invited them. And we give up. And we quit talking to others. God is big enough to use you, and he will use you! But if you refuse to call out to him, refuse to pray to him, and like

the disciples, refuse to recognize that Jesus can make all the difference, that puts a damper on things.

When problems come, cry out to Jesus! When issues arise, believe that God can make a difference! Let's focus on this. Here's the thing. When people finally believe in Jesus, and begin to follow him, he completely changes their lives. He does! He can change the way they talk and walk and dress and think. He can redeem them, remake them, and renew them. He's that good. But there are some people out there that make us think "wow...God can't save you." Now, we won't say that, of course. We know better than that. But we fail to see God act because we won't. It's like this.

You know there's that cool youth event coming up, and you want to invite somebody. And you look up and see that guy. That guy would never come. That guy would never care about Jesus. That guy is just best avoided. That guy would never agree to visit. And so, you never invite that guy. And so, because you were stubborn, that guy, was never invited. And that guy may never hear the Gospel. But hang on. if you go around and ask different youth pastors and various church leaders, you'll find that many were the wild, wacky kid that was totally that guy. Or, commonly, their fathers were that guy, and somebody finally stepped up, invited them to church, and their dads got saved. But what if they continued to stubbornly refuse to share the Gospel? They may never get saved.

Hardness of heart prevents us from tapping into the divine power that would otherwise flow through us to minister to others.

Maybe it's as simple as this, we don't see God working as much, because we have stubbornly refused to spend much time with him in prayer. Even Jesus followers can be confused about Jesus. Even Jesus followers can misunderstand him. Even Jesus followers can be so hardhearted, so stubborn, that they miss out on their full potential. This week, think of that one person you know that you've been writing off, that you just know will never come to Jesus, and pray for them every single day this week.

God can do the impossible. Sometimes, we miss out, just because we forget who he is. Hardness of heart prevents us from tapping into the divine power that would otherwise flow through us to minister to others.

Study Questions:

1. Jesus tries to retreat away and get his disciples some rest. Why is it important to get rest, even in ministry?
2. Why does Jesus emphasize putting his disciples to work, and getting them to be a big part of the miracle?
3. Jesus warned his disciples about having hard hearts. Does that phrase resonate with you? How have you shown that same weakness?
4. Jesus longs to work through his people, in big ways and small ways. What are some ways you've seen Jesus' work through you to help others?
5. How often have you specifically prayer for God to work through you? Prayer can go a long way, and I think is the oft-missing key to seeing God do incredible things. Will you take some time each day this week to pray in an extremely specific way?

Mark 7:1-30

God's Word vs the Traditions of Men

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Just because someone seems super righteous and religious and pure doesn't mean they are. True righteousness is found in the heart not just in external appearances.

Context:

Following the hardness of heart and disappointing unbelief in the last section, we see Jesus actively addressing a common misunderstanding. Outer actions don't equal inner righteousness. Thankfully the next pericope shows the disciples slowly grasping some of Jesus' teaching, illustrating some slow progress on that front.

X God's Word vs the Traditions of Men

- A Jesus teaches the Pharisees the difference between God's truth, and their traditions (7:1-23)
- B Jesus encounters a Gentile woman (7:24-30)

How many of you know what a "taboo" is? A "taboo" is a social or religious custom that prohibits doing or talking about certain topics or people. In the US, we might say that it is "rude" or "bad manners" or "inappropriate." Sometimes it is codified (written down

and enforced) but most of the time it is simply understood by those living in the group because of the reactions of those in authority. Want to hear about some interesting taboos around the world?

Let's start with social taboos. In Thailand, it is taboo to touch someone else's head. In Japan, it is taboo to wear shoes inside the house. In most of the world, it is taboo to eat with your left hand. In Spain, it is taboo to yawn in public. In Ghana, it is taboo to kiss your spouse in public. Here in the US, it is taboo to not tip a waiter, to refuse a gift, or to ask strangers personal questions. How about religious taboos? For orthodox Muslim women, it is taboo to shake hands with men. For Hasidic Jews, it is taboo to sit for a photograph. For Tibetan Buddhists, it is taboo to eat garlic. For Hindus, it is taboo to donate your organs when you die. While many of these things seem strange or even funny to us, EVERY culture has taboos. Some of them are harmless little social niceties that help keep peace between people. Others have the potential to cause harm and division. Jesus' community was no different, and today we will look at a situation he addressed specifically.

7:1-23 Jesus Teaches the Pharisees the Difference Between God's Truth and their Traditions

What are the Pharisees upset about? The disciples were eating without ceremonially washing their hands. Now, there is nothing wrong with washing your hands. I'm sure most of your parents encourage that. The problem was that the tradition of handwashing had become doctrine. In other words, the Pharisees weren't saying "you should wash your hands because it's better for your health." They were saying "You should wash your

hands because it's a SIN not to." That's an enormous difference!

Jesus tells them that by making up their own traditions and treating them as God's law they are dishonoring God in their own hearts and invalidating their worship. Why is this such a big deal to God? Because by making their own law, they are saying that God's law isn't good enough or that it is wrong and so abandon it.

God's actual law stated that adult children were to honor their parents and care for them when they got old. However, some sons would get angry with their parents and, out of spite, promise all their goods to the temple. This meant that their parents would receive no financial support from them. If the parents protested this to the religious courts, the question was which is worse: to break an oath or to dishonor parents. The religious leaders decided it was worse to break the oath, but Jesus said they were wrong. Honoring your parents is part of the 10 commandments and is necessary to hold society together. It is better to break an oath and pay the penalty for that, Jesus later said it is better not to make an oath at all. He then goes back to their original complaint about handwashing. Real purity is found in the heart. Physical cleanliness does not make you better as a soul before God. Our actions result from the desires of our mind. Desires that don't always lead to good actions, and instead, lead to Jesus' lengthy list:

"...evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence,

envy, slander, pride, and foolishness” Mark 7:21-22 (CSB)

This allows for no blame shifting. We cannot blame our environment, our upbringing, or other people for our sinful behaviors. Notice: everything from self-indulgence to murder is condemned under the same heading of sinful thought patterns. Then immediately Mark gives an example of what Jesus was teaching.

7:24-30 Jesus Encounters a Gentile Woman

Jesus is done teaching and goes on a trip. Now Tyre is OUTSIDE of Israel. He went there on purpose to escape the crowds. He found a place to stay and tried to lie low for a while so he and the 12 disciples could rest. But news got out, and a woman came to ask him to heal her daughter. She is also a Gentile. Not only a gentile, but from Syrophenicia; which Matthew points out is Canaan. Based on the Pharisees’ definition of purity, would this woman be allowed near Jesus? NO. Just like the woman at the well, she was trapped in social, religious, and sexist barriers between her and ritual cleansing. She is desperate. She seeks out the hidden Jesus and begs for him to heal her daughter. In Matthew’s account, her exact wording is used: Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon.” What did she call him? ‘Lord’ denoting respect. ‘Son of David’ calling him the Messiah!

Where did she learn about the Jewish Messiah? Somewhere, somehow, she had been told about the promise of God to restore Israel and of Jesus’ role- and wanted to partake. Notice, she (an unclean Gentile

woman) has a better understanding of who Jesus is than his family, the people in his hometown, Herod, even his own disciples!

Matthew 15 records the first part of the conversation. “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely tormented by a demon. Jesus did not say a word to her. His disciples approached him and urged him, “Send her away because she’s crying out after us.” He replied, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came, knelt before him, and said, “Lord, help me!” Matthew 15:22-25 (CSB)

At first, Jesus does not answer her plea. But he does not send her away like the disciples suggested. Instead, He starts a conversation. Loud enough for her to hear, he makes the statement that He is sent to Israelites. Jesus was the JEWISH Messiah. While his healing was for all the nations, his ministry on earth was specifically targeted towards Israel. However, the woman is encouraged by the lack of complete dismissal and comes and kneels before him. This is an act of worship that she would not have offered a Jewish rabbi unless she believed him to be something more than a Jewish rabbi: a King to be worshiped. Jesus, far from dismissing her, continues the conversation. He employs a metaphor of a family sitting around a table eating a meal, with little pet dogs sitting under the table. I love how he uses this metaphor just for her. The Greeks commonly kept small dogs and let them eat with them much like we do today; Jews would not have done this. So, he says Mark 7:27 that the children at the table should be fed before throwing scraps to the dog. Notice the use of “bread.”

What did Jesus do in the last chapter with bread? He fed 5000 Jews with bread he produced miraculously. 'Bread' is used all through the Bible to represent God's provision for believers in him. So basically, he is saying that God's first concern is for his people Israel because of the promises he made to them. However, he does NOT leave out the possibility of this "bread" going to other peoples. He just says it will go to the "children" first.

The woman (who seems to be well versed in this type of discussion) jumps on this hint of capitulation. "Even the dogs eat crumbs dropped by the children!" she says triumphantly. Notice how quick she is to understand the metaphors Jesus is using. She grasps the references to the Jews as the children and herself as the pet dog, both hungering to eat what the Father has provided. She accepts that Jesus' ministry isn't to her country but believes that He has so much power that even a "crumb" or a tiny part of his provision would be all she needs.

Jesus lets her "win" the argument! "Because of this reply, you may go. The demon has left your daughter." Matthew adds that he comments on her great faith. Her daughter was freed from the power of the demon and healed. And Jesus showed his disciples that your inside is more important than your outside. By all Jewish standards, this woman was unclean and unworthy of even a glance from Jesus. By Jesus' standard, this woman was full of faith and worthy of his attention and healing. He talked to her as a peer and granted her request.

Have you ever felt dirty? Like you are unworthy of Jesus' attention? There is nothing that will keep you from the love of God. The healing and salvation that comes from belief from Christ is for everyone who believes regardless of gender, ethnicity, nationality, language, or class. Jesus is not concerned with whether you are considered good by some religion's external standards. He is concerned with what is inside of you. The disciples were having to learn that just because someone seems super righteous and religious and pure doesn't mean they are. The Pharisees were considered the most holy at that time...and what did Jesus call them? Whitewashed tombs, snakes, blind guides, fools! The Canaanites were considered the worst...and Jesus healed them!

First: We need to stop using people's appearance as a gauge for their spirituality. Dressing nicely or smiling a lot doesn't make you righteous. Even doing charitable or churchy things doesn't make you righteous. Making right moral decisions doesn't make you righteous. And vice versa.

Second: We need to start focusing on our thoughts and motives rather than our behaviors. By this, I mean that if a behavior is bad- find the root cause of it. Then take them to Jesus. Read the Word and find out how to overcome your sin. Have people to make you accountable. Pray for strength and deliverance from temptation. God's provision is enough for you. He can heal the places broken by sin and give you freedom. there are no limits to whom or to what extent God can work.

Study Questions:

1. What social taboos have you noticed in the world around you?
2. The Pharisees were getting wild with inventing extra rules and being legalistic about it. Why is this such a big deal to God?
3. Our actions reflect what is going on in our minds. What kind of thoughts would you need to avoid? And how?
4. The Gentile woman had a much better grasp of Jesus mission of mercy than the Pharisees. How can overly, externally religious people today sometimes miss the heart intention of Jesus and his mission?
5. If we should be focusing on our hearts, what are some ways you can cultivate godliness in your heart and mind?

Mark 7:31-8:30

Wrapping up in Galilee and Looking Ahead.

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus' gracious patience can bring us from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is!

Context:

As Jesus finished up his teaching on outer actions vs inner righteousness, he has been addressing his disciple's unbelief and confusion over and over. Finally, Peter begins to get it. This finally opens up the opportunity for Jesus to fully reveal his transfigured glory in the next pericope.

XI Wrapping up in Galilee and Looking Ahead.

- A The deaf man is healed (7:31-37)
- B Jesus feeds 4,000 (8:1-10)
- C Challenge of the Pharisees (8:11-13)
- D Leaven of the Pharisees (8:14-21)
- E Jesus heals a Blind Man in Stages (8:22-26)
- F Jesus asks who people think he is, and Peter admits he is the Christ (8:27-30)

I'm certain that many, many books could be written on the topic, but one in particular caught my eye.

*Idiots Everywhere: Some People Are Amazingly Stupid: True & Funny Stories About Fools.*⁴⁰

While I haven't read the book, it was a collection of short stories about people. But it wasn't about any normal people. No, it was a collection of stories about remarkable foolish people. People that did remarkably foolish things.

Apparently, one time aboard an Indian airliner, the copilot and the head male flight attendant got a bit sideways. And I don't mean sideways as in mildly annoyed. Oh no! Worse, they started fist fighting! Like, actually throwing punches and actually trying to hurt, maybe even kill one another. Worse, their wrestling match eventually ended up in the body of the plane, in front of every single passenger. Worse, the pilot got up, left the cockpit, and jumped in the fray! Worse, he wasn't so much trying to pull them apart as much as trying to beat both of them up!

In front of everyone.

Now, I'm not entirely sure how the passengers felt as their plane neared the destination and both people capable of landing the plane were busy trying to rip each other apart. Can you just imagine what the passengers are thinking?!?! You two are supposed to be responsible, helpful, professional people and you're

⁴⁰ West, Jack. *Idiots Everywhere: Some People are Amazingly Stupid: "True & Funny Stories About Fools"*. One weird week publishing, 2014.

supposed to be the ones that bring this plane down safely! How can you do this? Why don't you get it? Why don't you open your eyes? The story continued, and thankfully, eventually, somebody came to their senses and the plane managed to land safely at their destination.

But I can't help but wonder, why didn't they get it? Didn't they see how important their job was, how could they miss the big things, flying the plane and keeping people safe, and how could they get so wrapped up in some petty argument? They totally missed it!

Well, they aren't the only ones.

7:31-37 The Deaf Man is Healed (Perception miracle)

This section starts here in chapter 7. It begins with something special, a wonderful and incredible moment when Jesus does the impossible. It's a perception miracle, a miracle helping somebody perceive something, sense something, be able to fully notice something, once again.

It's very similar to that idea of you walking into a dark room, and that flood of detail that comes when you turn on a light switch. It's a familiar miracle: Healing a deaf man. Sounds great, right? Jesus is the Divine Son of God, this is normal for him to heal and help, but there are some unusual things going on that should catch our attention.

Notice some unfamiliar elements. The crowd brings the deaf man to Jesus. But Jesus takes him away from the crowd, Jesus takes a little while to get going on the

healing. It's not instant. And only then, does he finally heal the man.

Any idea why Jesus would take him away from the crowd? That's kinda different, ain't it? Jesus is trying to very personally help this man, watch this.

Jesus communicated by touch to this man, touching the man's ears and tongue, letting him know, in a way he would understand, just what Jesus is about to do! What personal love to make himself known, what care to stoop to his level, to makes things clear for the man, to gently, carefully, patiently reveal his plan to this deaf man in a way he would understand it.

Jesus was a patient communicator.

He was deaf, Jesus couldn't just tell him out loud. I don't think they even had Hebrew Sign Language at the time. And yeah, Jesus is God, he could have beamed a message into the dude's brain, but he didn't. He was patient, he was caring, and he lovingly slowed down and communicated carefully to the man in ways that would connect with him. Jesus cared about getting the idea across to this guy. And he would patiently, carefully do it. So kind! The crowds noticed and were astonished!

Then, turning from the man who can now hear and speak, Jesus turns back to the crowds and Mark's story continues.

8:1-10 Jesus Feeds 4,000 (Bread)

Feeding a bunch of people, we know this story! Or, maybe not this one, but one very much like it. Once again, really cool stuff that only Divinity could do. Not even Chuck Norris can multiply food like this. This is unique and incredible! This is something big! This is cool, and more, this may have been a Gentile crowd!

Decapolis was a region of ten cities on the eastern side of Galilee, a region connected with other Gentile areas. The text doesn't say, but it's probable that this is a mixed culture crowd, or even mostly Gentile, and Jesus is continuing his ministry to these people. Just as last time Jesus had that conversation with the woman about crumbs, so now Jesus takes just a little bit, and shows it is more than enough to help these people with their needs. Once again, we see a hungry crowd, we see Jesus' compassion, we see the disciples baffled about how to respond, and we see Jesus taking a few loaves, this time seven, and feeding the crowds.

The story is familiar, even if a few details are different. Rather than 5 loaves and 2 fish, now Jesus uses only 7 loaves. Rather than 12 baskets full, perhaps as a sign to the 12 tribes of Israel, now they have 7 baskets full, perhaps a symbol of completing his ministry, not just to Jews, but already spreading it to Gentile nations. And once again, after the incredible multiplication of bread, Jesus leaves the area.

To us, this feels almost like a rerun, or an instant replay, since the feeding of 5,000 happened very shortly before in the book of Mark. So much here is similar. We're like, we know this story, we get it! Heard

it time and time again in Sunday School. We've read it, like, 50,000 times, we get it! Jesus is amazing! Only, somebody in the story didn't get it. And this is a bit surprising. Jesus does something that only God could do, but some people missed it. Some people who lived it, ate it, smelled it, still missed it. Again. Still that attitude of unbelief! They don't get it!

But what is worse still is another group we're about to meet. Sure, they have unbelief too, but worse, they also carry some serious hostility. This is no simple misunderstanding going on here. It's not a simple question, it's an open challenge.

8:11-13 Challenge of the Pharisees. (Rejection and Hostility)

Once again, we reach the middle of the sandwich, and sadly, it's not looking good. The Pharisees reject Jesus once again. One commentator explained it like this: "Now, it's fine that the Pharisees came to test Jesus, the Old Testament commanded the people to test the prophets and see if they were true. But the truth comes out in that word "argue." Moreover, that word "test" is also used by Satan's actions when he tested, or tempted Jesus in the wilderness in Mark 1:13. This isn't a friendly check-in, it's completely hostile!"⁴¹

Now, after this demand, Jesus basically says, "No way, Jose!" and walks off. Jesus was refusing to fall into their trap.

⁴¹ Osborne, Grant R.. Mark (Teach the Text Commentary Series). United States, Baker Publishing Group, 2014.

“How could the Pharisees not have recognized the hand of God in Jesus’ miracles? The likely answer is that they were obsessed with their own authority and position and viewed Jesus as a threat [...]The passage recalls 3:22–30, where, in the face of similar rejection, Jesus accuses the Pharisees of blaspheming the Holy Spirit and then begins teaching them in parables, so that they will keep on seeing but not perceive, and keep on hearing but not comprehend (4:11; citing Isa 6:9–10).”⁴²

It’s like the person today who boasts “if God is real, let him strike me with lightning!” Or others, who demand a sign in the clouds, or some special unique proof. So, Jesus left. Why would the Pharisees dismiss that? Do you really think, after not accepting those things, that they would actually accept something new? They missed it, but they aren’t the only ones who missed it. Oh no, not by a long shot! They were not the only ones plagued by unbelief.

8:14-21 Leaven of the Pharisees/Herod (Bread)

Now, everyone is back on the boat, heading away from the Pharisees, and we continue down to the next section, another “bread” focused section. The disciples were no different than us, they liked their food too! Except, when they opened their lunch pails, there was weeping and wailing. Why?

⁴²Strauss, Mark L. Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

The disciples failed to grab bread. Bad idea! They needed travel snacks. I guess they hadn't bothered to grab the leftovers. I don't know. But while James and John were craving some candy bars, and Peter really wanted some Cheez-its, and Nathaniel was longing for some beef jerky, Jesus had other things on his mind.

Jesus gives out some strict orders. At first, they seem to come out of nowhere. One of the few times this strong "command/marching orders" type word is used is back in 7:36, when Jesus tries to tell the crowd not to mention the miracle. Of course, that crowd failed, and blabbed it to the entire world. They don't do so hot. Here, Jesus is telling his disciples to avoid the "leaven" of the Pharisees, and even throws in Herod for good measure. Were they selling poisoned bread? Were they running a restaurant with a 1-star review that needed to be avoided? What's up with this?

Jesus is warning them against the attitude of rejection and blindness to him.

Remember that unbelief and hostility we talked about? Yeah, Jesus is saying to stay far, far away from that! If you look further back in Mark, you'll see that Herod was fascinated by Jesus, and was puzzled about who he was, but never once seemed to approach Jesus or show any sign of repentance or belief. The Pharisees, we just saw, refused to believe the many, many, many miracles that Jesus already performed, refused to listen to his teaching, and only came to him in this hostile attitude of demands and rejection. Both parties listened to news about Jesus, thought about Jesus, talked about Jesus, and the Pharisees even came and chatted with him

from time to time, but neither one moved an inch towards following Jesus.

Too much unbelief, too much hostility. There's an enormous difference between knowing some facts about Jesus, and actually submitting yourself to him, lifting him up, and honoring Jesus as the king he truly is. Plenty of others have gotten it right, the Gentile Syrophenician lady in the chapter before, the dude that had the demons tossed out of him a while back in the book, and others.

But Jesus is warning his disciples because, frankly, they haven't done so hot. Let's try to think about the magnitude of this failure! Jesus is trying to teach them truth, and they can only think about bread. But they didn't even think that through! Even if that was a worry, Jesus just multiplied a few loaves to feed thousands, not once, but TWICE!

I think he could easily take one loaf to feed a dozen people easily. But they still didn't get it. They still didn't think to trust that Jesus would provide for them and take care of their problems. They still missed it! What a display of unbelief! If they kept missing it, could anything help them? If this wouldn't teach them, what would? How long would it take?

Will they ever see clearly?

And that question is one, asked in a different sense, that one man probably uttered every day of his life as he sat, blind, unseeing, near the road.

8:22-26 Jesus Heals a Blind man in Stages (perception miracle)

Here we go again, another time when Jesus heals a major sense, and gives this person new perception. This should remind us of the first story. What's the same? The crowd brings the man to Jesus, but Jesus takes him away from the crowd, takes a little while to get going, then finally heals the man. And after that, the man is told not to tell anyone.

But for so much being the same, some things are radically different! In fact, something happens here that is utterly unique. Jesus healed him in stages.

Why?

This is the only time Jesus seems to do this in stages. Jesus is patient and Jesus has a plan. We will look at that in just a second.

8:27-30 Jesus Asks who People think He is, and Peter Admits He is the Christ. (Finally Getting It!)

Here is the really cool part today. So far, even the disciples have generally missed who Jesus is. Herod was fascinated, but not repentant. The disciples have been called "hard-hearted" a couple of times now. Jesus is still telling people not to spread news about him, probably because most don't understand his mission yet, and it would only create more confusion. So, Jesus surveys his disciples. "Who do people say that I am?" He gets the answers, showing the crowds just don't understand.

Jesus then asked his disciples the same question. Are the disciples getting it now? How are they doing?

Here, Peter finally gets it! Here we are, finishing up chapter 8, of a 16-chapter book. Halfway through, and finally, finally this title appears! Halfway through the book, and somebody finally gets it! This is amazing! It took a lot of patience. It took a lot of time. It took a lot of miracles. It took a lot, but Jesus was patient, and finally, Peter got it. Or at least some of it. Jesus' patience paid off.

Jesus Patiently Helps Us Realize Who He is

Jesus' gracious patience can bring us from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is! We've all been told some things that take a while to sink in. This comes up a lot with deaths. You hear that so-and-so died, and you know it. You even attend the funeral; you see the body. You repeat the fact with your mouth, you tell others that person is dead. But it's not until a few weeks later that it sinks in that you can't call them anymore, you won't hear their voice at Christmas, and you won't get a birthday card from them again. Those are rough moments. They take a while to sink in. But there are positive examples of this too, not just death. We all know the Grand Canyon is big. Really big. Mindbogglingly big. Nearly 2,000 square miles, big! It's also 277 miles long, or nearly 220,000 ice cream cones long, or 1/1000th of the way to the moon. You get the point, right?

How many of you have been to the Grand Canyon? Here's the thing, no matter how much we talk about it being big, I think it can only sink in so far until you see it for yourself. And then you realize, you understand, you experience just how massive it really is! There's

that gap of time between hearing how big it is, and truly beginning to wrap your brain around it. In many ways, knowing Jesus is the same way.

The disciples knew Jesus, they knew his name, they knew his favorite jacket, they knew his usual coffee order, they knew his favorite color. They even knew he did miracles! They recited the history of that to him! But only here do we see evidence that it's beginning to sink in that Jesus is so much more than just a teacher or miracle man, and Peter finally blurts out the truth: Jesus is that promised Messiah! This is awesome! Slowly, Peter's moving from that "head knowledge" to it actually sinking deep into his soul. It's getting there!

Jesus' gracious patience brought them from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is! And before we mock Peter too much, I think we're all on that journey as well.

Don't give up hope, Jesus will help you. I think in our Christian life there are times when we begin to understand and experience who God is even more clearly. We can know a bunch of facts about God, but as we follow him, we will begin to experience him more clearly.

Jesus' gracious patience can bring us from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is! With our narrative burger today, we saw this center of rejection and hostility, but moving out we saw Jesus speaking about bread, his providing, his miracles, his feeding the people, and we see on the outside Jesus

healing broken senses, making them new, giving new hearing and new sight. He can help you too! As Christians, we believe in Jesus, but because God is so big, so mind-bogglingly big, we often struggle realizing just how big and wonderful and good and powerful he is. Even in the face of incredible evidence! In our own lives, we have times of incredible peace of relying on Jesus, incredible victories over sin, incredible joy in serving him, incredible times of his deliverance through tough times. We know he is king, and he is good! Then we turn around and the next time temptation hits, we neglect God, we fall short, we panic, and we forget to trust him. And it can be discouraging to fall down yet again. And we look at others and think “Wow, how do they stay so faithful, how do they make better choices, how do they remember to go to God first?” Why can’t I remember it? Why can’t I get it?

Jesus’ gracious patience can bring us from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is!

Jesus will patiently help us, patiently teach us, patiently mold us to act more like him. It took his disciples a while. It takes us time too. But if you talk with Christians that have followed Christ for a while, those with gray hairs and many years of following Jesus, you can often see it in their eyes that they love Jesus, they see him, and know him, and have experienced his goodness in huge ways. Jesus was patiently helping his disciples learn who he was, as he does with us. If you’re sitting out there, listening, and thinking “Why does God seem so far away?” “Why do others talk about this close relationship with God, yet mine feels so hollow?” Jesus can help you see him better, and when

you see him for who he is, that changes everything.
Why teach this?

It's through Jesus that your doubts and fears can be laid to rest. It's through Jesus that your troubles and temptations can be overcome. It's through Jesus that you can find lasting peace and deep joy. Jesus is there to patiently help you through your doubts about him. If you're struggling because it doesn't seem to make sense, or is hard, or doesn't seem to be coming together, Jesus isn't here to condemn you, but to patiently help you. If you keep following him, he will teach you, help you, refine you, open the eyes of your heart so you can experience his goodness and faithfulness like never before. Only Jesus can work the miracle of transforming our hearts. Only he can, but I assure you, he will. Stick with him, and he will.

We've seen the disciples fail time and time again to call on Jesus and trust him. Is there any hope for their hard hearts? Oh yes, through Jesus! "The apostles demonstrate the same distinction between partial and full vision: While they occasionally show some understanding about Jesus, they struggle to grasp the full implications"⁴³

That's why the last man was healed in stages, I think. The text isn't crystal-clear, but I think it's to demonstrate that sometimes God's work is gradual, and our perception of who he is doesn't come all at once. One man wrote: "The fact that this man needed to be

⁴³Barry, John D. et al. Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print.

touched twice encourages me in my own areas of need. Be it with regard to physical healing, spiritual help, material provision—sometimes we need to pray for a second touch, a third touch, a tenth touch. Sometimes we must keep coming back to the Lord over and over and over again.”⁴⁴ Jesus is patient to help us again and again. Over and over, we see the disciples failing, having hard hearts, and missing the point. But Jesus didn’t give up on them, and over time, eventually, they got it. Jesus won’t give up on you either.

He will keep coming back, keep teaching you, keep working on your life, your desires, your trust in him. Jesus won’t give up on you just because you aren’t a “super-Christian” now. Jesus will still work on you, again and again and again! Even when you mess up, fall short, miss the mark, over and over, Jesus is there, patiently, carefully, deliberately helping you slowly become more like it. Take courage! Even if you’ve failed him before, be brave, be encouraged, don’t be down! Jesus is patient, he hasn’t given up on you, and following him is a process.

Jesus’ gracious patience can bring us from a place of hostility and unbelief to truly understanding who he is!

This gives us hope for our own lives and the lives of others. Those that don’t seem to get it, that don’t seem to want Jesus, and don’t seem to care. Jesus is patient with them too! He is so good and so persistent, and so patient. Be encouraged!

⁴⁴ Courson, Jon. *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003. Print.

Study Questions:

1. What are some of the differences between the feeding of the 4,000 here, and of the 5,000 earlier?
2. Why do you think it took so long for Peter, or any of the disciples, to speak up about who Jesus is? Do any other Gospels record It happening earlier? If so, why would Mark hold that until now?
3. Even though it took a while, Jesus was very patient and kind, slowly helping them understand him. How does that make you feel about your own life?
4. Why is Jesus so patient with his followers?
5. If Jesus doesn't give up on us, should we echo that patience with others? How?

Mark 8:30-9:13

Revealing Who Jesus is

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus revealed a glimpse of his glory and majesty, but that was met with confusion and odd responses from his disciples.

Context:

Last section, Peter finally understood who Jesus was, marking a major turning point in the Gospel. Here, Jesus reveals his mission and his glory, both of which carry massive Old Testament themes, but both of which are also misunderstood by the disciples. This is even more evident in the next section, as his disciples are crippled by pettiness and a lack of prayer, even after Jesus had shown them so very much.

XII Revealing Who Jesus is. (8:30-9:13)

A Jesus' Prediction of his death (8:31-33)

B Jesus Explains the Radical Life of a Disciple (8:34-38)

C The Transfiguration (9:1-13)

Who is Jesus? What was He here for? What does He require of us? I want you to think hard and give me an answer in one sentence.

Jesus is the Messiah (Christ), Son of the living God. He was here to seek and heal the lost souls of men and begin the kingdom of heaven. He requires us to live radically differently than we did before in order to follow Him.

In chapter 8, the disciples finally “got it”. Peter stood and proclaimed that Jesus is Christ. Jesus was pleased with his answer but told them not to broadcast that information yet. He had more work to do before He was ready for that. Then, master teacher that He was, Jesus began to teach them what his role would be as Messiah, and they were shocked and appalled.

8:31-33 Jesus’ Prediction of His Death

Facepalm, Peter! One step forward, two steps back. Imagine chiding God Himself! But what provoked this response? What did Jesus say would happen to him? Suffering, rejection, death. Yes, resurrection too, but as we will see later, the disciples don’t have a firm grasp of what that even means. Peter wanted a Warrior King who would free Israel from oppression from Rome. He wanted Jesus to overthrow the corrupt officials, to destroy the hated tax collectors, to establish a nation-state with its capitol in Jerusalem. He was focused on the here and now; or as Jesus put it: human concerns/interests. Jesus’ kingdom was completely different than what his followers had in mind. But even more importantly, Jesus’ expectations were completely different from what his followers were prepared for.

8:34-38 Jesus Explains the Radical Life of a Disciple

He calls everyone to him, as if for a big announcement. Then he states his requirements for disciples. Let’s

break them down a bit. First, you must deny yourself. Refuse to give yourself permission to do things like you did before! Not just sin, although that is part of it. This is refusing things that aren't necessarily wrong but stop you from being like Jesus. Take up a Cross. Accept that persecution, embarrassment, and suffering come from being like Jesus. Jesus was perfect and yet was hated. We should not expect anything different. This is what Jesus considers being an apprentice. You imitate Jesus' example, deny yourself anything that would hinder that, and accept any consequences.

Notice Jesus' reasoning in verse 35-36. If you try to keep your life for yourself and chase your desires and your plans, you will lose eventually. If you give your life to following Jesus, you will win eventually. Some results will be seen on earth, others when we stand before the Father and Jesus in his glory. What can you exchange for your life? No redos. No starting over. When Jesus comes back again, will he be ashamed of how you lived your life? We will all see Jesus again...some sooner than later.

9:1-13 The Transfiguration

What is Jesus showing Peter, James, and John in this moment? He shows them the power he has, giving them a glimpse of heavenly glory, letting them see his divine authority of God. And yet the disciples' response was so confused. They had gone up on a mountain with Jesus to pray. This is the mountain where Deborah and Barak defeated the invading army of Sisera. Luke tells us that the men had fallen asleep, and when they woke up, Jesus' appearance had changed. His face shone like the sun and his clothes had become dazzlingly white.

Now this may seem like a random thing for Jesus to do. Why would he choose to do this in front of the disciples? Let me show you something absolutely amazing as we compare this passage to several Old Testament passages.

Daniel 7:9-14

“I continued watching until thrones were placed and an Ancient of Days sat; his clothing was like white snow and the hair of his head was like pure wool and his throne was a flame of fire and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued forth and flowed from his presence; thousands upon thousands served him and ten thousand upon ten thousand stood before him. The judge sat, and the books were opened. “I continued watching then because of the noise of the boastful words of the horn who was speaking; I continued watching until the beast was slain and its body was destroyed, and it was given over to burning with fire. And as for the remainder of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but a prolongation of their life was given to them for a season and a time. “I continued watching in the visions of the night, and look, with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man was coming, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all the peoples, the nations, and languages would serve him; his dominion is a dominion without end that will not cease, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.” (LEB)

This is one of the famous prophecies about the coming Messiah! Jesus is constantly referring to himself as the Son of Man and the Jews understood that that was claiming to be equal with God. Now Jesus is standing in

front of his shocked disciples, shining with glory and power: just like the prophecy said! To top it all off, Moses and Elijah appear (also glorified) and begin talking to Jesus about his coming “departure” (Luke 9).

Now, Peter, James, and John knew EXACTLY what this meant, but since none of us grew up memorizing the Torah, so let me explain. This was 6 days after Jesus’ pronouncement that they would see the kingdom of God and power, right? In Exodus 24, when Moses is about to receive the law from God, he went up the mountain with three men, Joshua, Aaron, and Hur, and waits for 6 days before God tells him to go up further alone. God speaks from a cloud, declaring the law, and Moses’ face begins to shine from the glory of it. (Exodus 34) Then the Israelites built a tabernacle for Jehovah, who then ruled over them as their King. Sound familiar? I hope so because that’s what just happened to Jesus! He took three men up the mountain to pray six days after he said they would see the kingdom in power. Jesus begins to shine brightly with glory and speaks to Moses and Elijah.

Terrified, Peter offers to build shelters for their use. God then speaks from a cloud and declares his approval of Jesus. Specifically, he says: “This is my beloved Son, listen to him!” Why does he use this wording?

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

“Yahweh your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your midst, from your countrymen, and to him you shall listen. This is according to all that you asked from Yahweh your God at Horeb, on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘I do

not want again to hear the voice of Yahweh my God, and I do not want to see again this great fire, so that I may not die!’ And Yahweh said to me, ‘They are right in what they have said. I will raise up a prophet for them from among their countrymen like you, and I will place my words into his mouth, and he shall speak to them everything that I command him. And then the man that will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I will hold accountable.’ (LEB)

God had promised to send “another Moses” who they must “listen to” as he would have “my words in his mouth.” Does that sound like Jesus to you? Several times, Jesus said that he only speaks the words that his Father has given him. Here, God speaks from Heaven and says, “Listen to him!”

Now, I haven’t forgotten about Elijah. Elijah also had a mountain top encounter with God where he heard the voice of God in a whisper. However, more importantly, Elijah did not die but was carried away to heaven. So here he is with Jesus discussing Jesus’ departure...his ascension to heaven. The disciples were confused about his appearance because of the prophecy.

Malachi 4:5-6

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (ESV)

Jesus implies that John the Baptist had fulfilled the role of Elijah, while still leaving room for speculation that Elijah himself will be one of the two witnesses in

Revelation. He also highlights that as John had to suffer, so the Messiah will suffer. Jesus is stressing one thing over and over to his disciples: he will suffer and die...and then rise from the dead. From their actions, we can tell they didn't understand. But it wasn't because Jesus didn't tell them! Let's summarize this section. Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God: God Himself. He knows and accepts that he will be rejected, abused, misunderstood, and eventually killed. He warns his disciples that the same will happen to them if they follow him, but that it will be worth it in the end. He then gives three of his disciples a quick glimpse of the glory of God and promises his resurrection.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? What I mean by that is do you believe that Jesus is who he says he is? Are you trying to imitate his example in your own life? Do you try to obey his teachings? Then these verses are for you. If you want the abundant, joyful life that Jesus has for you, you must accept that rejection and persecution will come, too. Jesus was a happy, loving man who lived a hard life; but he gained the world! You can too: eternity starts now, and God has so much in store for you. But if you try to live for yourself and avoid any consequences for following Jesus, you will lose it all. Deny yourself and take up your cross- because Jesus is alive, he is real, and he is the Almighty Holy One of God!

Study Questions:

1. Last lesson, Peter “got it” and proclaimed who Jesus was. But it doesn’t stop there. Realizing who Jesus is also calls us to a proper response to him. How should we respond to those facts?
2. Have you heard about the Old Testament parallels to this event before? How does that change the way you think about Jesus’ actions?
3. Has there ever been a time you really seemed to understand who God was and felt like you saw him as never before? How did you respond to that?
4. Why do you think this event only came after Peter proclaimed who Jesus was?
5. How does Jesus reveal himself to us today, and how have you responded in the past to those moments? Do you feel that you responded well?

Mark 9:14-9:50

What Jesus Can, and Will, Do.

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Advancing God's kingdom, and accessing his power, only comes through a life of faith-filled prayer and humility, not one founded on petty rivalries and crippled by sin.

Context:

Following his transfiguration, and announcement of his death, we'd expect his disciples to be a lot more focused and understanding. Sadly, once more we see them consumed by pettiness and neglecting prayer. This pride-filled attitude towards life is what often fuels divorce and broken sexual relationships, which is Jesus' focus in the next section.

XIII What Jesus Can, and Will, Do. (9:14-9:50)

- A Healing the Demonic Child (9:14-9:29)
- B A Child-Like Humility (9:33-37)
- C A Service without Rivals (9:38-41)
- D A Serious Commitment to the Kingdom (9:42-50)

Escape rooms are fantastic places. If you haven't been, it's an attraction that puts you and your group into a themed room with different challenges and locks and

clues for you to work through, figure out, and unlock within a certain time. (Usually an hour) Some are hard, some are easy, but they're a bunch of fun.

One I was in was made to look like an old western train. The story was that we were train robbers and needed to work our way through the train cars, reach the gold, break open the safe, and then escape. It was fun! We did, in fact, make it. But at one point, we needed a clue. We were stuck. There was a challenge that we simply couldn't figure out. And as much as we pulled on levers, twisted knobs, shook locks, and poked all around, we simply couldn't figure it out without help.

We were lacking the solution, we were missing the answer, and without that figurative key, we couldn't unlock the next challenge. It was stressful! No matter how hard we tried, until we did exactly what was needed, we were not getting out. No amount of other effort, guessing, or even stressing, would work. We were missing what we needed. And until we learned better, we were stuck.

In many ways, it feels like the disciples, the closest followers of Jesus, are stuck as well. Jesus, of course, is the hero of the story, so incredible and wonderful. More than just a man, he is also God in the flesh, but his followers, even his closest inner circle, haven't quite caught on to some important things.

In this passage, we are joining Jesus and James and John and Peter as they come down from the mountain. This mountain, probably Mt Hermon, was a hotspot for demonic activity and false worship, but Jesus went

there, to the satanic stronghold, to reveal his own power and glory and majesty and might! On the mountain, an event happened that we call the Transfiguration. Jesus revealed some of his holy, divine glory and showed some of his disciples who he truly was!

That, let me remind you, was an incredible opportunity! They saw the ancient prophets Moses and Elijah join Jesus, but even more importantly, they saw Jesus, transformed, transfigured, revealed, in his divine glory! They saw God the Son in all the divine power and wonder and might that he had! That made a serious impact.

This was one of those spiritual high places, an incredible spiritual event, like the Thursday night at Youth camp, or the middle of that one amazing service you remember to this day. Jesus was working, God was speaking, things were happening, and it was incredible! But hang on, while they were on the mountain, something far less victorious was happening down below. In a word, there was utter failure and chaos.

Life is like that sometimes. Others seem to be thriving, others seem to be loving God more each day and others have all the faith and all the success, and all the spiritual perfection and all their kids are angels and our lives are messy and chaotic and rough. And we mess up. A lot. What's the difference when we struggle with so much doubt and failure and others seem to succeed?

9:14-29 Healing the Demonic Child

So, while the three disciples got to witness the transfiguration and had that “mountaintop” experience, what about the other 9? How was their day going? You know, they got up, had their cheerios, did their morning stretches, checked their Facebook pages, and then what? Well, we find them arguing. But not with each other...not yet.

Who are they arguing with?

The 9 disciples are arguing with the scribes. The way it’s written about, it almost feels like a giant crowd gathered around an impromptu wrestling match. The Bible isn’t perfectly clear exactly what they were arguing about, but we can make an educated guess.

All this time, as we’ve seen before in the Gospel of Mark, the scribes and Pharisees have been denying Jesus’ authority, mocking his power, and generally claiming he’s a demon himself. So, naturally, they will look for any opportunity to mock Jesus, and his disciples, as failures. The thing is these 9 disciples just gave them some prime ammunition.

How so? Because they failed to heal a little boy. Ouch!

Because Mount Hermon was such a hot spot for the demonic, it’s no surprise that Jesus’ band of followers encountered one such demon. What is surprising is the utter failure they face. A little boy is possessed, and the disciples couldn’t help.

V. 18 ends the father's plea with "...but they couldn't." This is the first time we hear of a failed healing.

How do you think the disciples were feeling about this?

Forget the disciples, what about the father?

Well, the father seems really ticked! His kid was controlled by a demon, a demon who delighted in trying to burn him, drown him, and wreak havoc on his life. This father needed help! The disciples were trying to advance the kingdom of God, trying to win victory over the demon, push the borders of the Kingdom of God even wider, encompass more people, see more healed and follow God. But they failed. Completely failed. They were missing something that was oh so important!

Much like when we are tempted to get angry with God when something we're expecting from him doesn't happen. And now, we look crazy in front of everyone. It's embarrassing, and it can rock our faith. But look at how Jesus handles this!

Jesus drives out the demon, but then teaches them all a lesson. Jesus takes over and before anything else, rebukes the unbelief. Who was he rebuking here? The Pharisees had already mocked him and rejected him. Jesus had just called out his disciples for not believing in him. And this man would admit to unbelief in just a second! So, "all of the above" really. So, Jesus talks with the man, learning how long the kid has been this way, and then the man says something interesting. I already said that this man seems ticked off. Here, at the end of

V. 22, the man says, “if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

“If”

On its own, it doesn't seem that bad, right? But this man was just ticked off and terribly disappointed by the disciples. His kid is still sick, his troubles are still there, and this famed miracle-worker's followers completely failed. And now, he's wondering if even Jesus can help. And Jesus picks up on that. “If you can?” Jesus asks, echoing the words and offering, I think, a rebuke for doubting him. And Jesus makes it clear “everything is possible for the one who believes.”

At this moment, the man's attitude shifts, and he realizes that Jesus can, in fact, heal his son. That pride and unbelief fade into a humble remembering of who Jesus is and the power he alone holds. Hope is restored, but it's still a quivering, shaky kind of hope. In place of a slight disrespect comes a total desperation. The man cries out something that I think we may have uttered from time to time: “....help my unbelief!” The boy is healed in a dramatic display, and Jesus leaves. It's done. Jesus wins, his kingdom is victorious, and the miracle is complete. Goodbye demon, hello freedom! And Jesus quickly leaves.

But the disappointment of this event isn't so quick to leave his disciples, who later ask him about it. “Why couldn't we drive it out?” Without looking at the next verse, what do you think Jesus' answer would be?

“Prayer” Most manuscripts also add “...and fasting”⁴⁵ as seen in the KJV and NKJV tradition. “In this case, they do not know that the power of exorcism bestowed on them (cf. 6:13) is in fact not theirs to use at liberty. Jesus informs them that they have failed because this type of exorcism requires prayer, which is to say constant reliance on the source of power! The power is conveyed through communion with the Almighty; it is not inherently resident in the disciples on an ongoing basis without such communion.⁴⁶” The power of God is seen only through lives that are seeking God and in close connection and submission to him. Advancing God’s kingdom requires prayer! In fact, it requires a lot of prayer! One of the keywords in this passage is “believe.” What does that word mean?

So, to see the power of God, we must remain connected through prayer and belief, to God. The power is not in us, it’s in him. Advancing God’s kingdom requires prayer and belief, or prayer and faith. You can’t live without those! But it takes some humility to realize that doesn’t it? We like being in control, we like being powerful. Power brings control, it brings order, it brings fame and ability, but Jesus is about to teach them something else about his power.

⁴⁵ France, R. T. *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2002. Print. *New International Greek Testament Commentary*.

⁴⁶ Witherington, Ben, III. *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Print.

Even Jesus, with all his power, operated with a humble submission to God's plan. And we're going to see him reveal more of that plan in a minute.

9:30-32 Prediction of his death/resurrection

Jesus told them again about his death. Three times in the book of Mark, Jesus is recorded as telling his disciples he would die and rise again. This time, he added the note about betrayal. He will be "handed over" or "betrayed." Not just captured, but way worse. Somebody close to Jesus, in his inner circle, was going to turn against him. Jesus knew, but rather than root out the traitor now, he humbly followed God's plan. Even when that would mean betrayal and death. Jesus was humble.

But they still didn't get it. We wrote two lessons ago about Jesus helping them, patiently, mercifully, helping them understand who he is. Peter got part of it! Jesus is the Messiah! He is God's Anointed One! But like the blind man that, at first stage of healing, saw people as trees, blurry and indistinct, Jesus' disciples have a blurry and indistinct vision of who he is. They get that he is Messiah, but this, this story of betrayal, death, and resurrection, this is way beyond them. They didn't get it. And they were afraid to ask.

Why were they afraid to ask?

The Disciples failed to believe, failed to pray, failed to understand Jesus' message. They ain't doing so hot. Just Jesus is still patient with them. So, to move on, Jesus has another lesson for his "work-in-progress" disciples. Because they didn't seem to get it at first, he very

pointedly speaks about the humility needed to follow him.

9:33-37 A Child-like Humility

First, Jesus calls out their arguing. They were at it again! Seriously?

Once more, they were arguing about who was greatest, who should get the most stuff, who had the biggest muscles, who was the top-dog, who would have the longest limo and biggest jet when they ruled the world with Jesus. The disciples, most of whom just utterly failed to cast out a demon, and who completely misunderstood Jesus' mission, and who failed to pray, and haven't been showing themselves to be that great, are arguing about who is greatest.

Wow. Just, wow.

It's like a bunch of pigs wallowing in mud and then bragging about who is cleanest. Then, Jesus speaks up. Jesus then explains how things work in his Kingdom, in a word: Humility is key. If you want to be lifted up, put yourself low. If you want to be exalted by God, lower yourself before men.

Humility is key. It is THE key, the thing they were missing, the thing that kept them back. The thing he was about to teach them. And then he shows them a child.

“While in Western culture we tend to view children as innocent, vulnerable, gentle, even pure, in first-century culture they were viewed as insignificant and having no

social status. Welcoming a “little child” (παιδίον; diminutive of παῖς) means breaking social norms, lowering oneself to accept another of lower status and thereby risking one’s own position of power and prestige”⁴⁷

The idea is like a millionaire today, who spent thousands of dollars cleaning his house, decorating his house, and making it look fancy, sound fancy, even smell fancy, invited a bunch of drug addicts to come stay with him for a week to help them out. Folks that stained his clean curtains. Folks whose body odor smelled far stronger than any scented candle in the house. Folks whose table manners were savage at best. And then, that millionaire invited his snobby millionaire friends over. How do you think they would react to the sights and smells and swearing?

In Eastern society, your reputation was everything. You had to present a good image. You had to maintain a good reputation. You had to have powerful friends. So, this idea of being humble, of serving those that couldn’t help you, and of spending your time and effort assisting those that brought you no benefit, was utterly radical. Yet, Jesus did it. He healed, not asking for payment. He taught, not demanding a reward.

He reached the outcasts, the cast offs, and the unwanted. That’s Jesus. Serving Jesus isn’t just about keeping connected to God in prayer, it’s just

⁴⁷ Strauss, Mark L. Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

understanding who Jesus is, it's also about serving others with humility.

So, after teaching them this lesson, we might expect a victory story where they learn their lesson, continue in humble dependance on God, and cast out a demon. Well, the next story is, in fact, about a demon being sent packing, but it wasn't by the disciples. It wasn't even by Jesus!

9:38-41 A Service without Rivals

John rebuked someone outside the 12 for casting out a demon. So here, we learn that somebody outside the 12 is echoing Jesus' actions. Why might this annoy the disciples? Do you think their previous failure had anything to do with it?

John stopped him but let us look at his wording. Who was this man not following? "Us" is probably a reference to the disciple alone, not necessarily Jesus. Jesus corrects him, pointing instead to the validity of his ministry. The man wasn't following "us" meaning the disciples.

Apparently, though, the man was following Jesus. Jesus' power isn't one that can just be waved around like a magic wand. We already learned that it takes prayer and faith to see God work. So, if this guy is truly doing miracles, and he seems to be, then he must have a better prayer life than the disciples at this point! You can't do God's work, with his power and with his blessing, without loving God.

Advancing God's kingdom requires belief and prayer, those are things you can't fake.

This guy, then, seems to be the real deal. Jesus then gives a generality. Most of the time, if somebody truly ministers in Jesus' name, with a relationship and faith that is deep enough to really see God move in incredible ways, he probably won't immediately turn around and hate Jesus. Or speak evil of Jesus. Or mock Jesus. You don't go from loving Jesus, praying to Jesus, preaching Jesus, authentically, truly, fully, then waking up the next day and deciding to be an atheist. Not usually. "For whoever is not against us is for us." This is an interesting statement.

What do you think it means?

Jesus is saying that people can follow him without being in your little click, or part of your exclusive group. The power and influence of Jesus is bigger than just one group or one tribe. That doesn't mean you need to always be super close friends with others. Our differences are still important. There's a reason we believe what we believe. BUT others can still follow Jesus, teach him, and work in his power, even if they don't look just like us and follow us.

It takes some humility to see that. Humility is key here too. Advancing God's kingdom requires belief, it requires prayer, it requires a little humility too. We see that phrase "in my name" show up over and over. It's about Jesus' authority. His name. His power. His team. Not just our glory or our stripe or our branding.

While the disciples were getting distracted by their own greatness, they soon began to discourage others who didn't follow THEM, forgetting that we serve a bigger, greater master. It's all about Jesus! It takes humility to serve our king well.

And as Jesus continues onward, he continues to teach his work-in-progress disciples even more about his kingdom. To be effective in God's kingdom, to see God work in incredible ways, we need belief, we need prayer, we need humility, but there's one last thing he brings up.

9:42-50 The Serious Commitment to the Kingdom

So, Jesus has already talked about some requirements of his followers: First, prayer, and faith, then humility. Jesus is helping his disciples learn what it takes to follow him. It takes a lot. What's a repeated phrase here? (Things like "thrown into Hell" or "fall away" or "better for you")

Things are getting serious!

This is the first time we encounter Hell in the Gospel of Mark, and it's no joke. But before we even reach the parts talking about Hell, what other thing is mentioned in V. 42? The first, "better if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea." (CSB) *Yikes!*

In Jewish culture, they put HUGE importance on proper burial and treatment of a dead body. With this, not only would you die a horrible and painful death, your body would just rot in the sea. No comfy tomb, no

careful preparation. It's gross, it's shameful, it's terrifying. But Hell, that's even worse. Way worse. Jesus says so. What does Jesus say about it in V. 43? It is "Unquenchable fire." Now, we don't have time to get into a study of Hell tonight. But just from this, it doesn't sound pretty. Jesus keeps mentioning these "it is better for you..." statements. What does he mean by all this?

To sum it up: We must remove any obstacle to a humble, servant-like attitude, or it may result in serious problems. "'Life' here is clearly eternal life in God's presence. The third statement uses 'the kingdom of God' (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) instead of 'life,' showing that the two are coreferential. [...] In any case, Jesus' statements are clearly hyperbolic and are not meant to encourage self-mutilation. This is obvious from the fact, first, that self-mutilation was forbidden in Judaism, and second, that even such mutilation would not prevent sin. Jesus' point is to challenge his hearers to take seriously their actions in life, since these actions have eternal consequences"⁴⁸

"All who desire to follow Jesus must remove any stumbling blocks that cause sin. Jesus did not mean to literally cut off a part of the body; he meant that any relationship, practice, or activity that leads to sin should be stopped. As a person would submit to losing a diseased appendage (hand or foot) or a sense (eyes) in order to save his or her life, so believers should be just as willing to "cut off" any temptation, habit, or part of

⁴⁸ Strauss, Mark L. *Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

their nature that could lead them to hold onto this world and turn away from Christ.”⁴⁹

Is Jesus saying to start slicing off parts of your body? Deuteronomy 14:1 was often applied in his day to forbid any self-cutting or mutilation. Jesus is using hyperbole, an intentional exaggeration to convey his teachings. It's like your mom saying, “if you disobey me one more time, you'll be grounded for 1,000 years!” Or even a basketball team saying, “We killed the other team!” No, there wasn't an actual murder, but it's an exaggerated way to convey the idea of utterly overcoming them.

Jesus was no stranger to hyperbole, idioms, or colorful illustrations. But now he's telling them the extreme dedication it takes to follow Jesus. You can't be distracted by self-dependance, by pride, or by valuing your desires, your favorite sins, over following Jesus. We are often prideful by thinking we can live in our own strength, we are prideful by thinking the power lies in us, we are prideful by valuing our own worth and skills and position, we are prideful in refusing to submit to God, and submit our desires to him. Humility is the key that unlocks the power of God in our lives. And it takes humility to serve the King of Kings.

Humility is the key that unlocks the power of God in our lives.

⁴⁹ Barton, Bruce et al. Life Application New Testament Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001. Print.

Advancing God's kingdom, and accessing his power, only comes through a life of faith-filled prayer and humility, not one founded on petty rivalries or crippled by sin.

I opened with our escape room story, and yes, we got out, and yes, we had a ton of fun. But at each puzzle, each problem had only one solution, one way to progress and continue on. We had to know what to do to move forward.

I don't know what each of you need personally, but I know all of us need more humility, and less rivalries and jealousy and sin, to see God do even more in our lives. Humility, that praying to him and trusting in him, and that radical commitment to seeking him and him alone, even to the point of radical sacrifice, is the key that unlocks the power of God in our lives.

Study Questions:

1. How do you think the disciples felt when their healing failed? Do you think their failure colored how the man later interacted with Jesus?
2. The failure of Jesus followers can similarly disappoint people today. Do you know any stories about that? How did people react to that disappointment?
3. Why would the disciples be arguing about who is the greatest after a moment of utter failure? Even the three coming back had failed on the mountain to truly realize who Jesus was.
4. Jesus' statement emphasizes the radical unity Christ-followers must have. But have you been guilty of harsh rejection of other Christians, just because they aren't completely identical to you? Have others treated you harshly for the same reason?
5. Can you think of any other times when the Bible speaks about humility?

Mark 10:1-12

Deity's Decision on Divorce

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: God's blessed ideal for human sexuality and marriage was founded in creation and reinforced by Jesus himself.

Context:

Coming off the pettiness, pride, and prayerlessness of the previous pericope, we now see Jesus addressing one major area where those qualities create chaos on God's intended design. Jesus draws the line firmly with God's creation pattern, showing the superiority of God's way above mankind's way. This theme returns in the next pericope as God's valuing of humility and service contrasts sharply with mankind's elevation of power and riches.

XIV Deity's Decision on Divorce (10:1-12)

- A The try to trap him in their debate (10:1-2)
- B Jesus' answer is grounded in Scripture (10:3-9)
- C The Disciples Ask for more Details (10:10-12)

Who is Jesus? What was he here to do? Jesus is the Son of God come to forgive sin, heal broken people, and usher in the kingdom of God. Humanity's sin has

messed up the world pretty badly. One of the things that has been messed up the most is human sexuality and with that, marriage. So it shouldn't be that surprising that much of what Jesus said about marriage seems very foreign, weird, and even harsh compared to what we are used to.

We are about to read a story about Jesus' word on marriage and divorce. Many of you may already be accustomed to what you are going to hear; for some of you, this may be new. What I want you to know is that Jesus is framing a coming kingdom of God where the ideal for humanity is restored. Followers of Christ are to live as close to the ideal as possible: we call this Christlikeness. So, if you know someone or ever become someone who deals with marriage issues, just know that Jesus came to rescue us from our brokenness not to bury us in guilt and shame.

It's important that we understand where Jesus is coming from in this story. He is coming from Galilee and the events of chapter 9. Let's look at those quickly. Mount of Transfiguration, and healing a demon possessed boy. He has shown the authority of God on Him and his ministry to all willing to see. But what I want you to see is at the end of this section.

9:43-50

I know we talked about this briefly last time, but I want to go over it again because this whole section goes together. The chapter heading doesn't mean that we are changing topics entirely.

Here we have Jesus explaining what you may have to sacrifice for the kingdom of God. Of course, he is using hyperbole here and giving exaggerated examples, but some sacrifices may be as painful or difficult as losing a hand, foot, or eye. Remember that the kingdom of God is not heaven here. He is talking about being his disciple- living a life that reflects the original intention and design of God. That involves repenting or changing our minds about the way we think life should be. Here, John's pride and jealousy over their position as inner-circle disciples caused him to look down on the other man preaching and throwing demons out. Maybe in your life it is something else, but maybe it is a similar pride. We all have things in our thinking that have gone wrong. We have to let Jesus change it to what is right and good. So back to Chapter 10.

10:1-2 They Try to Trap him in Their Debate

Jesus has been teaching them about sacrifice and the separate way of life he has for them- and the Pharisees come to question him. They are testing him to see what he will say about a huge hot-button topic of their time: divorce. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" such a simple question yet loaded with nuance and implications. Matthew adds the clarifying clause "on any grounds." This sheds light on the fact that they were really asking if he identified as a "liberal" or a "conservative."

There were two influential rabbis and corresponding schools of thought: Hillel (the more liberal) and Shammai (the more conservative). Those who followed Hillel advocated for divorce for any reason at all. Those who followed Shammai did not allow divorce except

for adultery. (When it was required.) The Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to pick a side.

However, Jesus did not take the bait. Instead, he flips the question on them, master debater that he is. He asks them what Moses said about it. They reply that Moses permitted divorce. They are getting this answer from one passage in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

“When a man takes a wife and he marries her and then she does not please him, because he found something objectionable and writes her a letter of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her away from his house, and she goes from his house, and she goes out and becomes a wife for another man, and then the second man dislikes her and he writes her a letter of divorce and places it into her hand and sends her from his house, or if the second man dies who took her to himself as a wife, her first husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to become a wife to him after she has been defiled, for that is a detestable thing before Yahweh, and so you shall not mislead into sin the land that Yahweh your God is giving to you as an inheritance.” (LEB)

This is the only law about divorce in the entire Pentateuch, except a clause that priests could not marry divorcees in Leviticus. And as you can see, the focus here is that a divorced woman cannot remarry her original husband if she has taken a different husband. Nowhere does God endorse or encourage divorce: the law simply stated what was already happening and prevented it from being a way to treat women like property or manipulate them into abusive relationships.

10:3-9 Jesus' Answer is Grounded in Scripture

However, Jesus cuts right to the heart of the issue: their sinful hearts. In the Deuteronomy example, you have a woman who in her sinfulness has done something indecent. You also have a man who is unwilling to forgive her. Because of their sinful hard hearts, God permitted them to divorce. But that was NEVER his plan for marriage. Jesus takes them straight back to Genesis. When God made Eve and brought her to Adam, Adam said "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh." Genesis 2:24 (CSB)

Then Jesus adds his interpretation: "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Mark 10:9 (CSB)

God's original plan for marriage was that one man and one woman would leave their families and bond together, becoming a new family that would last for life. However, mankind's bent towards sin has warped the plan for marital happiness- so much so that when we read Jesus' words on the subject, we cringe a little. Most of us know at least one couple that has been divorced. Some of you may have parents that divorced or never even got married. It is important to remember that this teaching of Jesus wasn't meant to lambast people that were ALREADY divorced, but to prevent others from doing the same.

His reasoning against divorce? The result is sin.

10:10-12 The Disciples Ask for More Details

In a brief statement later, Jesus answers his disciples with his definitive ruling on post-divorce relationships. Divorce doesn't create a clean slate before God, and it doesn't completely sever that bond that existed. To divorce and remarry another carries with it the same guiltiness of adultery even while married.

While other passages add to this, and bring more details and guidelines, it's clear that Jesus doesn't think well of the rash marriage, divorce, remarriage, and constant binding together and ripping apart that today's culture indulges in. Just because it's common doesn't mean it's right. But what causes this rampant behavior? Why is it so common?

The top reasons for divorce: adultery, money problems, lack of communication, constant arguing, weight gain, lack of preparations, and abuse. As many as 45% percent of marriages ended in divorce last year- and the number isn't much different for Christians. We aren't doing a particularly good job of modeling God's ideal, are we? And it's taking its toll on people's souls.

Divorced people (especially men) are more likely to commit suicide- 3x more likely. Children of divorced parents are more likely to struggle with mental health disorders, especially depression. "...they all regard divorce as something like cutting up a living body, as a kind of surgical operation. Some of them think the operation is so violent that it cannot be done at all; others admit it as a desperate remedy in extreme cases. They are all agreed that it is more like having both your legs cut off than it is like dissolving a business

partnership...they all disagree with is the modern view that it is a simple readjustment of partners...⁵⁰”

You may be wondering why this lesson should be taught to those too young for marriage. I personally think this is best taught to them! The reason is two-fold: to keep you from heartbreak and to teach you compassion for others. All of you will start dating in the next 5-10 years, and statistically, will all be married in the next 15 years. The time to start deciding what is important in a marriage is now. Decide now, and you won't have to make a hasty decision or reevaluate your moral values later.

What are some things every Christian should decide before getting married? Marry a Christian, divorce is not an option, remain sexually pure. Talk about these things before you get engaged and avoid many dangerous or just painful relationships.

And be compassionate towards others. Many people have been hurt and broken by failed relationships and the last thing they need is for some single person to come and tell them everything they have done wrong. Jesus was full of forgiveness for every type of sin: including and especially sexual ones. Our God is a God of second chances. He is a God of “from now on, sin no more.” This includes any pre-marital sins. If you have or do make a mistake before marriage, Jesus is ready to forgive. You are not less of a person; you are not less loved by God; you are not unworthy of a happy future

⁵⁰ Lewis, C. S.. *Mere Christianity*. United States, HarperCollins, 2009.

and marriage. Remember, the laws of God are for our GOOD and our BENEFIT. Jesus' forgiveness is there to restore and redeem us, not trap us in guilt and shame.

I want to challenge you to decide now not to marry someone unless you intend to be married to them forever. Decide now to have hard conversations with your girlfriend/boyfriend BEFORE you get married about what their opinions on moral values are. Decide now that you will never make fun of or judge someone because they were divorced.

Study Questions:

1. Often today, people don't like the Bible's clear teaching on divorce. Why do you think God was so insistent on pointing people towards his created plan?
2. In John 4, Jesus encounters a woman that was divorced over and over. Does he treat her harshly? Read that chapter and record how Jesus treats her. Does God use that woman in his service?
3. Have you been harsh or judgmental towards those that have fallen from God's ideal for marriage?
4. How has this lesson helped you adjust that attitude?
5. If you are involved in a romantic relationship, have you had a conversation about marriage and divorce with your romantic interest?

Mark 10:13-52

Humility, Pride, and Jesus' Example

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: We cannot depend on money or power but must submit both of those things to the humble purpose of God as we follow in discipleship.

Context:

Jesus' words on divorce and remarriage echo the Creation pattern but runs against the grain of worldly culture. So too, does his attitude towards power and riches. However, for all the value and hope humanity places in those things, the next pericope reveals that having that upside list of priorities, and thereby rejecting Jesus, leads to some grave consequences.

XV Humility, Pride, and Jesus' Example (10:13-52)

- A Jesus welcoming the Children. (10:13-16)
- B Riches and the Kingdom of God. (10:17-31)
- C Jesus predicting his Death. (Again) (10:32-34)
- D James, John, and Jesus' teaching about servanthood. (10:35-45)
- E Blind Bartimaeus (10:46-52)

In Star Wars Episode 1, released in 1999, Watto, an alien, is bargaining with Qui-Gon Jinn, a Jedi Knight. The conversation goes something like this:

Watto: “Republic credits? Republic credits are no good out here, I need something more real.”

Qui-Gon Jinn: “I don't have anything else...But credits will do fine.”⁵¹

The conversation continues, but along the same line, perhaps, you've seen some foreign coins here in the US. They may be cool, but there's a problem. They may have value elsewhere, but around here, you can't spend them very easily.

Well, you can try to spend them, but they aren't spendable in most places. There is a bill, a dollar bill, which is 100 trillion dollars. Not, in, of course, the USA, but in Zimbabwe. The 100,000,000,000,000 Zimbabwean dollar is the bill with the greatest number of zeros shown.⁵² Now, assuming you had, said 100 trillion-dollar bill, it wouldn't do you much good. For one, that currency no longer exists. For two, nobody around here takes it. You'd be hard pressed for anyone around here to even take other perfectly fine currencies, like the Euro or the British Pound.

⁵¹ Lucas, George, et al. Star Wars. Blu-ray + DVD. Beverly Hills, Calif., Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013.

⁵² “Zimbabwe Rolls out Z\$100TR NOTE.” BBC News, BBC, 16 Jan. 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7832601.stm>.

As much value as those may have overseas, here in Altus, they don't work. There's no way to exchange them here, and nobody accepts it that I know of. What is so highly valued elsewhere, around the world, is worthless here. It's the wrong currency. I like what Watto says. It's a throwaway line, but he says, in part "I need something more real."

We're actually going to look at that idea tonight. We're going to be looking at something that other places, foreign lands, and alien peoples, highly value, but doesn't actually work in God's economy. And we're going to be looking at what God considers valuable, what, if I may put it this way, is "more real" in his kingdom.

There are five major sections to our text tonight.

10:13-16 Jesus Welcoming the Children

Notice here, how Humility gains the Kingdom. The disciples tried to run the children off. Right off the bat, we see something unusual with Jesus. He was indignant! This is the only time we see that word used about him! He's not happy at all. And he quickly acts! Take note of what upsets him. It's preventing others from Jesus. It's offending, shoving away, those coming in humility and lowliness. Children, in their culture, held no social standing. They couldn't offer anything to Jesus, couldn't help fund his ministry or elevate his prestige or bring extravagant gifts. Little kids wouldn't get him invited to fancy dinners or bring him in front of great rulers. They didn't have anything to offer to Jesus. Then, the disciples shoved them away.

We already learned in Mark 9:42 that God doesn't think highly of those that keep children away from God, so it's a little surprising to see the disciples doing it now. Surprising, and annoying. If we're repulsed by this. If we agree with Jesus that children need him too, and children should come to him too, then we're catching something about God's Kingdom that the disciples hadn't quite figured out yet. They are getting there, and Jesus was going to help them.

Jesus embraced them and lifted them up as examples. He gleefully invites them to himself! And then comes something wonderful. Jesus welcomes them in, and then explains why. "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." (CSB) What does he mean by that? Do you have to be under 12 to be accepted? He continues. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (CSB)

It's not saying, you must receive WHEN you are a little child, he's saying AS or LIKE a little child. When we say, "you're as beautiful as a sunset" or "clumsy as a bull in a China shop." We are comparing aspects to those other things. So too, Jesus is comparing what everyone needs to do to these little children. But when we speak, we usually make it clear. You're clumsy like a... You're beautiful like the... You're smart or wise or strong or fast as... Jesus wasn't as explicitly clear. It's something in the way children receive the Kingdom of God. It's a quality they show when they believe in Jesus.

Any guesses?

The NET Bible notes say: “Children are a picture of those whose simple trust illustrates what faith is all about.⁵³” It’s only by faith, by trust, by a simple reliance on...what? Children, the weak and poor and lowly, enter God’s kingdom through simple and total faith in God. Next, however, we pivot from the poor and simple, with nothing to bring to Jesus, to a man that has everything at his fingertips.

10:17-31 Riches and the Kingdom of God

It’s a pity how very often riches refuse the Kingdom.

This dude is known as the “rich young ruler.” Mark only highlights the rich part. This young man has it all. He’s got a long life ahead of him, but already has power and prestige and lots of money. He’s living a good life. To the people of his day, he has it all together. But he has also heard about Jesus. He comes to Jesus. This guy is running, kneeling. He’s got a great question!

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” It’s a great question! Things are looking great for this guy. He’s obviously very eager to learn from Jesus, sees Jesus as amazing, and just wants to know what else he needs to enter eternity ready. But, where we expect a straightforward answer, Jesus throws him a bit of a curveball.

“Why do you call me good?” What’s up with Jesus’ response? “No one is good but God alone.” Now, Jesus is God, so Jesus is not denying that he’s good. But he’s

⁵³ Biblical Studies Press. The NET Bible First Edition Notes. Biblical Studies Press, 2006. Print.

doing something with these words. He is saying to reach God's level of goodness, to reach his standard, is impossible. This story is the only use of that word "good" in Mark's Gospel, and Jesus is preemptively setting God's standard up even before the next statement by the rich man. Then, Jesus lists several of the commands, and he does something remarkably interesting.

Comparing the Ten Commands to this, what stands out? Rather than say "don't covet" Jesus says, "don't defraud."

Why? Coveting "it means an ungoverned and selfish desire that threatens the basic rights of others."⁵⁴ It's unique, in the 10 commands, as the only one that deals with internal desires. Every other command, don't bear false witness, don't steal, don't kill are all outward actions. So, Jesus does a little switcheroo. He flips it to an outward action: "don't defraud" Don't scam them, don't cheat them out of money. And I think he says it that way for a reason.

Now, after the switch, every command is now an outward action, an external thing you do or do not do, regardless of how you feel about it. The man replies: "I have kept all these from my youth" (CSB) To us, that sounds kinda prideful and, like, totally empty bragging. Jesus doesn't call him out on that, it's very possible that he was an extraordinary righteous fellow.

⁵⁴ Fallis, William J. "Covet, Covetous." Ed. Chad Brand et al. Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003: 360. Print.

Jesus loves the man. This is the only time Jesus is said to “love” someone in Mark’s Gospel. Now, of course he loves people, we see that in his actions and words and in so many, many passages from the Bible. But it’s notable when a Biblical author only uses a word once. Jesus loved this guy, Jesus wasn’t disgusted with him or annoyed at him.

If the man was being deceptive or extremely prideful, I would think Jesus would have mentioned that. Instead, Jesus goes a different direction, and talks about his still lacking something. Jesus tells him, now, another external thing, but one that reveals an internal problem. The man is told to go and sell everything, give it all away, and come live in poverty following Jesus. Sell your mansion, sell your ski boat, sell your Lamborghini, sell your jewelry, sell it all! Jesus says. And instead of treasure on earth, he would have great treasure in Heaven. And he was called to follow Jesus.

The man, sadly, refused. He turns, and trugs away, grieved and dismayed. Why? He had many possessions. We just learned that entering the kingdom of God doesn’t come through social status, it comes by simply trusting IN GOD. This man, however, loved his money, relied on his riches, and adored his wealth. He needed a reliance on God for his needs but chose to rely on his riches instead.

Kuruvilla noted: “There is nothing inherently wrong with riches. It is the clinging on to them, as was the case

with the rich man in Mark 10, that is antithetical to Jesus' radical demands of discipleship.⁵⁵"

Clement of Rome specified "If one is able in the midst of wealth to turn from its mystique, to entertain moderate desires, to exercise self-control, to seek God alone, and to breathe God and walk with God, such a man submits to the commandment, being free, unsubdued, free of disease, unwounded by wealth⁵⁶." This man, it seems, was not. He had all the outward actions down, but Jesus waited, then revealed his heart. At first, Jesus plays along, only listing outward commands, only the physical actions. Then, he shows the man his heart problem. His desire problem. His love for riches was greater than his love for God. And he is the only personally called by Jesus to follow him or refuses that call. He tells God no. He tells Jesus no. The kingdom comes by simple faith, not through actions and riches.

Now, we bounce from the negative, "kingdom doesn't come by..." to something more positive, a good example once more.

10:32-34 Jesus Predicting his Death (Again)

The Kingdom way was opened by Jesus' humble suffering, even when the disciples don't understand that. They were "on the way" when the trouble began.

⁵⁵ Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers*. United States, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012.

⁵⁶ Oden, Thomas C., and Christopher A. Hall, eds. *Mark (Revised)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Print. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

On the way to where? Not just the location, but what event awaits them there? Both groups are utterly confounded. The disciples were astonished, while Those who followed him were afraid.

Both still reflecting, no doubt, on Jesus' showing them the economy of Heaven runs on vastly different currency than their own. They are all trying to process this and understand it. It wasn't going well. It's almost like a boxer who never saw it coming, was nailed with a right hook, and is now laying dazed on the floor. Except, to continue the analogy, Jesus is about to leap up and body slam them with something even more powerful. It'll send them even deeper into confusion, but it's something they need to hear.

Jesus tells them, the 12, what will happen in Jerusalem. Each time he's mentioned this, he's added details. First, we learn the Jewish leadership would condemn him, then the second time, that he would be betrayed, and yet again, rise after 3 days. Now, we learn that he is going to be given over to Gentile, to the foreigners, he will be mocked, beaten, flogged (whipped) and then killed by them. And again, rise after three days. What's new here, and why is it important? Psalm 2, among so many others, present the Messiah, the Christ, as one who rules the nations, welding authority over all other kingdoms and powers. Yet, now, the very people he was supposed to conquer, and rule will have power over him. The ones that he was to overpower would overpower him. The Jews were longing for deliverance from the Gentiles, in their heads, the key role of the Messiah would be to run out the Romans and establish

Israel as the superpower over all others. This being killed by them made no sense!

So, how did the disciples react to this?

Bit of a trick question, as we aren't told. But according to the text, the chosen solution was to utterly and completely ignore it. There's no reaction, no response, nothing! And the next paragraph has the disciples acting like the whole thing never happened! Oh boy. The kingdom of God was going to be established, not by military power, but by a humble submission to God's plan, a faith-filled trust that his way was best. The kingdom will come by simple, dependent faith, not through mighty outward actions, domination, or riches. Jesus' mission was to die. His mission was to be overcome and lose his life. That was the way Jesus' church would begin, the way that salvation could be offered, and the only pathway by which man could be reconciled to God.

The kingdom will come by simple, dependent faith, not through mighty outward actions, domination, or riches. But like I said, the disciples were simply not getting it.

10:35-45 John and James Aiming for Positions and Jesus' Teaching about Serving (Power keeps us from the Kingdom)

James and John were part of the inner circle. They were among the first called by Jesus, they were on the Mountain of Transfiguration, they got to do and see things none of the others, besides Peter, got to see and do. They had special privileges, they had rank, they

had status, they were a couple of the top dogs with the disciples. This begins suspiciously. They come up and ask “Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask.” Mark 10:36 (CSB) This is odd. Perhaps you’ve had others do this to you, when you walk up and they are, like, “You agree, right? Just say yes!” And you have no idea what you’re about to agree to. Jesus knew what they were up to, so he demanded more details. They wanted to sit on his right hand and on his left in his glory.

His glory.

Now, I think they missed the whole speech about the whole rejection, suffering and death thing. They wanted to be his right-hand man, the 2nd and 3rd in command, the vice presidents in Christ’s whole-wide kingdom. I can’t help but imagine Jesus paused for a long while and maybe even sighed a bit before answering. They have yet to understand that Jesus’ kingdom operates on a different currency. Humility is valued, and submission and trust are far more valuable than position and riches.

Then, we get a rather cryptic note. Two church fathers help us out with this verse. Augustine wrote: “Of course, he was recommending [meant] the cup of humiliation and suffering”⁵⁷ Chrysostom said “Here Christ was calling his crucifixion a cup and his death a

⁵⁷ Saint Augustine. *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1–40*. Ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald and Boniface Ramsey. Trans. Edmund Hill. Vol. 12. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009. Print. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*.

baptism. He called his cross a cup because he was coming to it with pleasure. He called his death a baptism because by it he cleansed the world.”⁵⁸

Here, Christ is again pointing them to his suffering, his death, his rection, and his struggle. Not exactly what they were looking for in this moment, naturally they rather cluelessly claimed “we are able” to join him in that. Still not knowing what Jesus meant by that. And yet, Jesus shifts a bit and admits that they would, in fact, suffer as well. And they did!

James was one of the first killed for being a Christian, while John was imprisoned, exiled, and ill-treated. “The history of the martyrs demonstrates that many have been unreservedly willing to drink this same cup with the Lord, to suffer and die for the truth⁵⁹”).

Jesus then flatly refuses to play along with their request. They wouldn’t get an answer to their question at that time. The others hear about this conversation. They ain’t happy at all. Not necessarily because they understood any better. Probably because they were jealous that they didn’t think of asking it first.

Everyone seems in on the power-grabbing game. So, Jesus decides to put a stop to that. “Y’all are acting like a bunch of pagans!” It’s more or less what he said. The

⁵⁸ Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. 86 vols. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–

⁵⁹ Oden, Thomas C., and Christopher A. Hall, eds. Mark (Revised). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Print. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture.

tyrants and dictators around them were flinging their authority around, flaunting their power and generally being power-hungry jerks.

Jesus' kingdom, however, works very, very differently. To be considered great, in Jesus' economy, you need humility, submission, and a servant's heart. These were not empty words; Jesus was showing it by his actions. He came to serve. He came to die. He came to give his life for us. The kingdom will come by simple, dependent, serving faith, not through mighty outward actions, domination, or riches.

Again, we don't get any details about how the disciples reacted. The story moves on

10:46-52 Blind Bartimaeus

Once more, we circle back to the idea that humility gains the Kingdom!

To wrap up, we see another example, of someone of low social standing, no riches, no power, nothing at all to offer. But this blind man cries out in faith, cries out with this unusual title "Son of David." Bart here is crying out that he believes Jesus is the coming Messiah, the Christ, the prophesied deliverer! Bart sees who Jesus is, knows he is coming to save Israel, and cries out for mercy! Perhaps he had heard of the other healings Jesus had done, perhaps he remembered the legends that the Messiah would bring healing to the blind, either way, he brings nothing but a simple trust, a poor and lowly trust.

Even the crowds didn't want him, telling him to be quiet. But Jesus heard his cry of simple faith. Not a reliance on power or riches or social status, just a simple, submissive faith in Jesus. And Jesus welcomed him and healed him. In fact, this is the last healing in the book of Mark. Unlike the rich young ruler, we know Bart's name. Unlike the ruler, Bart followed when called. Unlike the ruler, Bart trusted only in God and counted that is worth more than anything else. Bart got it.

The kingdom comes by simple, dependent, serving faith, not through outward actions, status, or riches.

Each one of us is prone to misunderstanding God's kingdom economy. Some of us think too highly of ourselves, finding in our talents, brains, and skills everything we need for happiness and our version of success. We live this life as functional atheists, neglecting God, his Word, and his humility. We trust, even if we don't say it, in our own accomplishments and entertainment and hobbies to make our lives worthwhile. We may be really, really nice people, praised at school and home and church alike. But you don't know Jesus. You haven't worshiped him, you haven't trusted him, and your actions look amazing, while your heart, deep down, you've forgotten Jesus. I've seen too many talented, special, charming people do some important things, impress a lot of people, but miss what it truly is to follow Jesus.

And soon, their own pride, their own heart issues become known. They serve for fame and for praise. It's so easy to look good on the outside, but not really walk

with God. Hey, be humble, walk with God. The kingdom comes by simple, dependent, serving faith, not through outward actions, status, or riches.

Some of us may land on the other end. We find ourselves failing too often, hurting ourselves and others, and seemingly making more messes than fixing them. We are discouraged and down and feel worthless and poor. We have nothing to offer God and feel as if we have nothing to offer anyone. We can do nothing, absolutely nothing but cry out for mercy, even while the thought crowds in that we shouldn't even bother with that. Like the children, with no status, or the blind man with no wealth, no talent, no ability, nothing. Like them, Jesus does embrace you when you come to him.

In your desperation, you can toss aside all other things and rely only on him. You see the failure of your own strength and the weakness of everything else you've tried. That's the first step to total, wonderful, vibrant, living, faith in Jesus! We can truly follow him only after we surrender everything to him and love him more than anything else. He is waiting for you. He will embrace you.

The kingdom comes by simple, dependent, serving faith, not through outward actions, status, or riches.

Study Questions:

1. What is it about the faith of children that is so desirable to God, and the model for us?
2. After the lesson in humility, why do you think James and John would be so bold to ask Jesus to sit by his side in his kingdom?
3. How can we similarly be blinded by pride into even more prideful actions?
4. How can we cultivate the humility promoted by this passage?
5. Why does Jesus value humility so much, and gladly welcome even the most destitute, humble, and powerless to him?

Mark 11:1-26

The Contrasting Crowds and Withered Tree.

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Rejection of Jesus and his plan leads to serious consequences.

Context:

Last section shows that Jesus doesn't value money and power like mankind does. Instead, he elevates service and humility. When people refuse his way, and desperately try to hang on the security promised by their own greed, they will find themselves facing utter disaster and rejection by God. The better path, as the next section reveals, is following Jesus and bearing fruit in him.

XVI The Contrasting Crowds and Withered Tree (11:1-26)

- A The Triumphant Entry (11:1-10)
- B Jesus in the City (11:11)
- C Cursing the Fig Tree (11:12-14)
- D Jesus Cleansing the Temple (11:15-19)
- E The Fig Tree's Meaning Explained (11:20-26)

Who is Jesus? What did he come here for? The Son of God came to save the lost and usher in the kingdom of

God. However, as we have seen, his way of doing that was vastly different to what everyone else thought!

Over the last few months, we have seen Jesus rejected and ridiculed by some; worshiped and followed by others- yet misunderstood by all to some degree. Those he has healed and forgiven declare him as Lord and King, but Jesus is about to confuse them all again. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to observe the Passover feast. He had done this with his disciples before, the first time openly and the second time in secret as his life was in danger. Let's look at a quick excerpt from his last Passover in Luke 13.

Luke 13:31-35

“At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (ESV)

Here, Jesus states that he will not return to Jerusalem till they receive him as Messiah using a quote from Ps 118, which we will look at later. But earlier in the chapter, he tells this parable aimed at Herod and the Pharisees. Jesus comments that they won't see him for

a time, but then he predicts the chant of the crowd when he enters Jerusalem!

Luke 13:6-9

“And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

(ESV)

Backing up a bit, here is the idea is that the Jewish people have had John the Baptist and Jesus teaching them for the last 3 years, and yet there isn't the result there should be. The fig tree Jesus speaks about has, likewise, been given three years to bear fruit. Yet, it has remained stubborn and refused to grow any. The intent is that the vinedresser will give a little time, give it some extra care, but if it still fails, it will be cut down. They are given one more year to repent before God stops pursuing them. The reason this is important is because in today's chapter, exactly one year has passed.

Mark 11:1-10 The Triumphant Entry

Finally, they get the donkey, but donkeys are super boney and uncomfortable to ride- especially young ones. So, they took off their cloaks to form a makeshift saddle for Jesus, but so many people want to give their garments that there are too many. They start spreading them on the road as an act of love and worship. Others

cut down branches and put them on the road as a symbol of victory and celebration.

All of this is done to fulfil the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (CSB)

Notice how this animal show Jesus’ humility and gives a hint that he might not be the kind of King they were expecting. This is not a war horse, a strong mule or even a long-enduring camel. This is a young, untrained donkey colt who is being borrowed from a stranger.

But what are the people chanting? Hosanna is a term of worship and praise. Did you notice the next phrase though? Did we hear that earlier? Yes! Jesus said that they would say that the next time he came to Jerusalem. It is also a quote from Psalm 118. I wanted us to read the entire psalm but for sake of time we will just read the last part.

Psalm 118:19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness; I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to Yah. This is the gate of Yahweh; The righteous will enter through it. I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone. This is from Yahweh; It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which Yahweh has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Yahweh, save! O Yahweh, succeed! (LSB)

This psalm gets quoted 13 TIMES in the NT.⁶⁰ So much about Jesus is seen in this psalm. Just in the verses we referenced we have the “righteous” entering Jerusalem, God giving salvation, the rejected “stone” being honored, one coming with the authority of Yahweh, and a festival (Passover) sacrifice being given. Quick note: John’s gospel tells us that this was on the Sunday before Passover, when all the lambs doomed for the altar were selected and then inspected for the week. Jesus shows up the same day, and I imagine a few people remembered John calling him the Lamb of God.

You can imagine the excitement that is building in Israel. Huge joyful crowds are pushing their way into the temple city, bringing the injured and diseased- and are seeing them healed! Jesus’ teaching is like nothing they have ever heard before, and his power is clearly from Jehovah God. The city is worked up to a frenzied pitch waiting for Jesus to stand up and summon his waiting army to thrust out the Romans (Who are very nervously staying in their forts). But what does he do?

Mark 11:11 Jesus in the City

He takes a quick look at the state of the city and temple, and then leaves! He and his closest disciples return the donkey to its owner in Bethany and go to bed- probably at Lazarus’ house. Jesus had his own timing for everything. The next morning, he goes back to Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ Brannan, Rick, and Jeffrey, Glen Jackson. “New Testament Use of the Old Testament.” Logos Bible Software, 2015.

Mark 11:12-14 Cursing the Fig Tree

As he walks the 2 miles to Jerusalem, Jesus gets hungry. He sees a fig tree and goes to pick a snack; but when he gets to it, there's nothing on it. Now it wasn't FIG season yet but based on the time of year and the fact that the tree had leaves, there should have been small, immature buds that would have still been edible. However, there were not- indicating the tree was diseased, damaged, or barren. Jesus then states that no one will enjoy fruit from this tree again. Then continues his walk into Jerusalem.

Mark 11:15-19 Jesus Cleansing the Temple

He comes back into Jerusalem and the crowds are still there. He goes straight to the temple of Jehovah God and begins to challenge the current administration of the sacrifices. Specifically, he quotes Isaiah 56. We will start in verse 6.

Isaiah 56:6-12

*“Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh,
To minister to Him, and to love the name of Yahweh,
To be His slaves, every one who keeps from profaning the
sabbath and takes hold of My covenant, even those I will
bring to My holy mountain and make them glad in My house
of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be
acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of
prayer for all the peoples.” Lord Yahweh, who gathers the
banished of Israel, declares, “Yet others I will gather to them,
to those already gathered.” All you beasts of the field, All you
beasts in the forest, Come to eat. His watchmen are blind; All
of them know nothing. All of them are mute dogs unable to
bark, Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber; And the
dogs have a strong appetite; they do not know satisfaction.*

And they are shepherds who do not know understanding; They have all turned to their own way, each one to his greedy gain, to the last one. "Come," they say, "let us take wine, and let us drink heavily of strong drink; And tomorrow will be like today—beyond exceedingly great." (LSB)

What made this quote so damning is the end of the chapter. What is Jesus accusing the leaders of? Abandoning their purpose for pleasure and profit. To top it all off, he says they have made the temple a "den of thieves"! This is coming directly from Jeremiah 7.

Jeremiah 7:3-11

"Thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, "Make your ways and your deeds good, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in lying words, saying, 'This is the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh.' For if you truly make your ways and your deeds good, if you truly do justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own evil demise, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

"Behold, you are trusting in lying words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear while lying, and burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations?

Has this house, which is called by My name, become a robbers' den in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares Yahweh." (LSB)

Wow! Jesus is not holding back his opinions of them, is he?! Remember, of course, that Jesus' opinion is God's opinion! God had a design for the temple and for temple worship that would draw people to him. But the people's sin had destroyed that design and caused them to twist it into something disgusting. This isn't the first time that Jesus said this, either. Jesus did the same thing 3 years early at the start of his ministry. At that time, he predicted that they would "destroy this temple" (speaking of his body) and that it would be "built up" (resurrected) after 3 days. He has given them YEARS to repent, and they have not. Instead, they plot to kill him. Kill the one who is clearly the Messiah- why? Because he is going to destroy everything that they deemed valuable- manmade traditions. They went back to Bethany for the night, and Tuesday morning they walked back to Jerusalem.

Mark 11:20-26 The Fig Tree's Meaning Explained

Remember that fig tree from the day before? Now as they walk by, it is completely dead leaves shriveled and wood dried out. Peter mentions this and Jesus begins to teach them. The fig tree here represents the Jewish nation/religion.

God has reached out to them again and again, but they fail to respond. God is moving on. The temple is going to be destroyed. No more will Judaism or Israel be the focal point of God's plan. Now the church will begin to live out God's design. No more will prayer and forgiveness be housed in a building; rather, the Spirit will be in believers and present wherever they gather.

Jesus tells them that their faith has to be IN GOD. Not a building or religion or person. Jesus' opposition is about to be destroyed. Through prayer, we can destroy our opposition as well. False religions and ideologies may seem as daunting and impervious as a mountain, but the power of God can overcome it all! Do you need to be cleansed of unforgiveness? Pray and have it forgiven without an animal sacrifice. Pray in faith; pray in humility; pray in hope.

What does this chapter teach us about Jesus? That he is the promised Messiah come to restore God's plan and design, which is to allow all people access to communication and blessing from Him. What does this teach us about us? Our faith **MUST** be in God Himself, not people, religions, or ideologies. With the power of prayer, we can overcome mountain sized obstacles; but we must forgive as we have been forgiven.

Study Questions:

1. Jesus used a fig tree parable in Luke 13, and now makes one a physical example in Mark 11. Why do you think he chose to repeat that example?
2. Jesus enters to a cheering crowd, but then uses the fig tree to show rejection of others, is this the same group, or different groups that have different reactions?
3. Did you realize the amount of Old Testament prophecies and references in this short event? How does that help you understand its significance?
4. The fig tree demonstrates the now dead and fruitless nature of the national leaders and the Temple. Sadly, our own lives can often reflect that same attitude. How are some ways in your past that you've rejected Jesus' authority and call, and how should you have responded?
5. Whatever your past, you can be forgiven and restored. Will you take a moment to pray to God and give you strength and boldness to submit to his commands?

Mark 11:27-12:12

Grounding in Jesus is the Way to Bear Fruit for Him
Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Submit to Jesus, bear fruit for him!

Context:

Following the massive consequences of rejecting Jesus, the Savior now reveals a better road. Not one marked by greed and destruction, but by abiding in him and submitting to his rule. However, those themes of judgement are revisited in a striking parable as the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees heats up in time for their back-and-forth encounters in the next section.

XVII Grounding in Jesus is the Way to Bear Fruit for Him (11:27-12:12)

- A Jesus' Authority is Challenged (11:27-28)
- B Jesus Turns the Tables (11:29-33)
- C Jesus' Parable about Proper Authority (12:1-12)

We're back, once again, in the book of Mark. This Gospel, this account of the life of Jesus, is coming to a close. Spoilers! At this point in the history, Jesus' death is less than a week away. The book of Mark really doesn't record much after his resurrection. We're

covering some of chapters 11 and 12 this time out of the 16 total, so we're rapidly nearing the end of our study. It's been awesome, but the best is yet to come!

As Jesus has continued his teaching ministry, the religious leaders of the time have gotten increasingly nervous. They've seen their power base shrinking, watched as his wonders wowed the crowds, and began shaking at his stark warnings against their greed and pride. This tension was reaching the breaking point, and several times now, the text has told us that the Pharisees were talking about killing Jesus. Soon enough, they would accomplish their goal. But first, because he was so popular, they needed to discredit him.

Jesus had just waltzed into town on a donkey, proclaiming through his actions that he saw himself as the promised messiah, the prophesied king that would set Israel free. What was some of the significance to Jesus entering on the donkey? What did he do after that? He cleansed the Temple! Don't forget the other thing, that thing with the fig tree. What was up with that?

Jesus was showing off his royal authority and his religious authority. His influence was unstoppable, and his words swept away the opposition. But he was doing all of this without the approval of the Temple Authorities. He was, in their eyes, an unauthorized invader, an unsanctioned radical, and a perpetual pest.

Now, Jesus was forcing their hand. But he was so popular, it would take some careful maneuvering to get

rid of him without upsetting the crowds. The only way they would succeed would be to turn the crowds against him. And that's exactly what they try to do next.

11:27-28 Jesus' Authority is Challenged

Here we go, things are heating up again! The Temple leaders, influencers, and big wigs have returned. Last lesson, we learned that Jesus, well, ruffled some feathers in the Temple.

What did he do again? How do you think they felt about that?

Here they come. Maybe the first is Bob, he's in charge of making sure the doors are polished and clean. And then Joe, he's in charge of making sure enough tables are out. And then Leon, he's in charge of the finances. And then Dominic, he's got giant muscles and looks mean, so people just listen to him. All these people, with all this power and all these responsibilities. For some, their jobs were handed down by their father, who got it from his father, who got it from his father. For others, it took years of service or several large donations to the temple to get the power they had.

For others, extreme dedication to the Word of God and lecturing others on it for years. All of these could trace how they got their power, their authority. The HR department for the Temple could look at resumes and explain why each was hired. Each one had a position, had power, and had earned it or been given it by the Temple Authorities and Jewish Leaders. One person, however, remained an anomaly. His name was Jesus.

What was the question they asked Jesus?
Why did they ask this?

Notice that they didn't ask in a backroom or private meeting. They asked in the Temple, in public, on their turf. They wanted the crowds to hear him, they wanted to humiliate him in front of everyone. They wanted public victory. They had planned this. They were very clever. But Jesus was cleverer still!

11:29-33 Jesus Turns the Tables

This really is an impossible situation for them. I love it! It turns what was supposed to be a public humiliation of Jesus to utterly undermining the reputation of the Pharisees. Jesus asks them about John. Not the disciple John, but John the Baptist. It's been a while since we've heard about him. What can you tell me about him?

John the Baptist was sent by God, preached repentance, baptized Jesus, and was eventually arrested and killed by Herod. But he made quite a big splash in his short ministry. He and the Pharisees didn't get along either. What was their relationship like?

The official stance on John's ministry was a firm NO. The Pharisees, at least as a whole, didn't repent, didn't listen, and didn't obey. And so, they officially treated John as nothing more than a human radical, some sort of wild cult leader. But this came back to bite them. Jesus brings this up. V. 31 explains the dilemma.

What was the problem for the leaders here?

They say the only thing they really can, but it reveals two major problems. First, they care more about the crowds than the truth. Even though they think John was a fraud, they wouldn't dare admit it. They cared more about the crowd's approval than the truth. Wow. So much for being zealous about the things of GOD.

Second, even more damaging, they couldn't tell the difference between truth and error. They openly admitted "We don't know." They couldn't tell, they didn't know. Even though they had secret opinions, in front of the crowds, in public, before all the people, they said they couldn't tell the difference between God-ordained prophets and wild cult leaders.

Think about the ramifications of that. If the most prestigious religious leaders admitted, in public, that they couldn't tell who was from God and who wasn't, that seems really pathetic! That's, like, part of the job description! But here it is in black and white. How would you feel if the person who was supposed to really know God, couldn't tell the difference between a God-follower or not?

It's like a taste-tester that can't tell the difference between real bacon and turkey bacon. That's terrible. You need to be better than that. These so-called experts were really cracking under the pressure of Jesus' teachings. As they are squirming and squawking under Jesus' trick question, he begins to tell a parable, a story, to hammer home his point. And so, he does.

12:1-12 Jesus' Parable on Proper Authority

This accusation is incredibly in-your-face and blunt. Think about it like this: A guy comes in and says, what this town needs is a good Raisin' Canes. He buys the land, builds the building, and hires employees and managers. The first month, there's a crowd, of course, and tons and tons of money comes into the restaurant. So, the owner, he's out of town, on vacation in the Bahamas or something, and sends his butler to go pick up the cash. The butler comes, and the manager runs him off. The owner's still out of town, so he sends a different employee out, and they call the police on him to run him off!

Then, he sends another employee, and the manager grabs a mop bucket and dumps it on his head before running him off! Things are getting wild! Another employee comes, this time in a scuba outfit, maybe he learned from last time. But instead of the mop water, they throw the mop! Finally, the owner sends his son. A little unrealistic, I'll admit. I wouldn't send my son, I'd hire an army of mercenaries, or send a SWAT team or something, but whatever. I think the absurdity is part of the point. The extreme patience of the owner, and the utterly ridiculous lengths the managers would go to keep their grimy, dirty hands on the treasure. They kill the son. And somehow expect that they, then, will gain ownership of the store. They be crazy! Let me tell you. And the story ends, finally, with the owner returning and taking care of business. What a wild story!

Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction.

What do you think Jesus is saying about the Pharisees here? They think they are in charge. They think, by rebelling against God, taking out his prophets, rejecting his servants, that somehow they will become the true leaders of Israel and hold all the power. But is that how things normally work, and is that how it will work now?

This parable isn't just a random story. It's based on Isaiah 5:1-7. "Fruitfulness is here linked to spiritual stewardship. The religious leaders are guardians of the vineyard Israel and so carry a responsibility for her well-being.⁶¹" The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders, and were supposed to lead Israel to follow God, know his Word, and as an important part of that, warn them about how to know true prophets from false prophets. But, even by their own admission, the Pharisees failed at that. In fact, they failed so hard that they cared more about people's opinions than God's opinions of them! So much for doing a good job!

Vs. 10-11 make an interesting ending for this. This comes from Psalm 118:22-23. "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from the LORD; it is wondrous in our sight.*" (CSB)

The very rock that the builders tossed aside became the chief cornerstone. It was revealed to be the most important. Not trash, but the greatest treasure of all. It's a marvel, it's amazing, it's a little astonishing that the initially rejected thing was revealed to be the most

⁶¹ Strauss, Mark L. Mark : Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2016.

important. It's amazing that Jesus, though rejected, was so very important.

While the Bible doesn't directly address it, what eventually happens to the Temple and Temple leaders? Not quite 40 years later, in 70 AD, Rome came in, dominated the Jewish nation, desecrated Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and scattered the people of Israel all over the place. No more nation. No more Temple. No more sacrifices. No more power and prestige for this group. It was violently taken away. They rejected Jesus' authority, and eventually, he took theirs away. It's a sad story. It's a somber story.

Submit to Jesus, Bear Fruit for Him!

This big idea is Jesus' authority and how we respond to it. In his authority, God built the nation of Israel and gave them spiritual leaders. But those leaders failed to bring God the fruit he deserved. They failed to produce. Now, Jesus is building his kingdom, his people, around himself. We are his servants, his followers. Jesus' disciples would be the new spiritual leaders, the new pastors, the new teachers. They would be entrusted with God's people, to guide them, help them, teach them, and shepherd them.

They would cultivate God's people and help them bear fruit for God's glory. You are the new leaders. You have the field of your life from which to grow fruit. You have the field of your influence on friends, family, and neighbors. You have been carefully given so many qualities and talents and opportunities. You, as a follower of Jesus, are a tenant-farmer of the resources God has given you.

What does it mean to “bear fruit?” Bearing fruit is cultivating godliness. A good starting point is to see where else a subject is mentioned in the same book. In Mark 4, Jesus gives the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. This parable is the only other time Mark mentions fruit. In it, the “Word” the message of God, is freely spread all over the place. Some get excited about it, then fall away. Some begin to grow, then get choked by the cares of this world. Some are too hard, and it cannot take root in their lives. Some, though, do well, according to Verse 20.

Does this say exactly what the fruit is? Some interpreters lean into the role of fruit reproducing, spreading seeds itself, and seeing others grow from that. In other words, spreading the Gospel and seeing others come to Jesus. Another angle is personal maturity. A plant bears fruit when it’s healthy, strong, and well-cared for. It’s a sign of health and power and life. So too, as Christians grow, their Christian lives, behaviors, and thoughts, become stronger, healthier, more in the life of truth and God and less in the death and illness of sin.

Mark isn't the only one to use the “fruit” imagery, though. This usage has some famous examples. Notably, the “Fruit of the Spirit.” These are personal qualities in somebody’s character. Attitudes and actions springing from the new life within.

These are not entirely separate. If you’re following God, letting his change your attitude, actions, and behavior. If your character is most closely echoing his. If you are thinking and living in his Spirit. Then you

will tell others about Jesus. The more you tell others, the more he will use you to draw others to him. And you will see others come to him and be changed. Bearing fruit, then, in both ways.

The danger that they fell into was one of selfishness and self-centeredness. Even when the Pharisees feared the crowds, it was to preserve their power and reputation. So, ultimately, this all boils down to their greed. They rejected the prophets, rejected Jesus, rejected the Father, all because they wanted power, and they wanted their own personal kingdom. Their desires were more important than God to them.

That's greed. Pure and simple Greed. (Well, not pure, but utterly, thoroughly terrible, greed, through and through.) A greed we too can share. We can become so obsessed with acceptance and gaining influence with our friends and teammates that we grow wishy-washy on the truth and fail to be the true spiritual influence we were put there to be! They may not even know we are Christians! We want God's blessings, we want the position he gives us, we want his help, but NOT our obligations to him. We want God's good things, but not always him or his work.

Our lives aren't perfect by any means either. It's easy for us to look at others and see their problems, the problems of history, the problems of our parents, or their parents, but then make the very same problems. And we hear the Word of God over and over, like the prophets that came over and over, yet do we listen? We have the entire Bible; we have the perfect revelation of God. We know about Jesus, the Son, the final

messenger, the greatest and fullest revelation of God the Father there ever was or ever will be! Yet, we can find ourselves rejecting him and his commands. And we think that'll be ok.

We really do. We think it'll be ok. Or are our desires, our lifestyle, our greedy practices, that important to maintain? Jesus is the ultimate authority, and we must hand control over to him. We must willingly submit to him. Or we'll find ourselves struggling and suffering. He is the cornerstone of our lives, the capstone, the chief stone, the central component. At the end of the parable, Jesus speaks of giving the vineyard to "others." Those others are church leaders, the ones tasked with teaching others who Jesus is and how to follow him. There is great accountability there. Yet too many church leaders have fallen into this very same trap. I don't want that for us. I don't want that for you.

Study Questions:

1. Following after last lesson's warning about unfruitfulness, this challenges us to submit and bear fruit. What actions did you take in response to that, and what result did you see in your own heart towards God?
2. How do you think the Temple leader's question affected their reputation as authoritative spiritual leaders? How would the people react to this exchange?
3. What elements of Jesus story stand out to you?
4. In what ways could we keep the fruit of our service for ourselves and rebel against God?
5. What kind of fruit is this passage talking about, which interpretation, souls being saved, or growing in godliness, is most likely here?
6. What's something that we could do this week to submit to him and help us bear fruit for him?

Mark 12:13-44

Challenges and Truth

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Through a series of encounters, Jesus shows the superiority of God's loving law against the faulty and harmful interpretations and applications of their traditions.

Context:

The last pericope highlighted the better path of submitting to Jesus' authority and bearing fruit for him but ended on the serious note of the Pharisees utter rejection of Jesus. Now, angered by that parable, they (and their allies) fiercely attack Jesus, but find him more than a match. Jesus' superiority is then brought to the forefront in his dramatic address on the future in the next pericope.

XVIII Challenges and Truth (12:13-44)

- A Pharisees and Taxes (12:13-17)
- B Sadducees and the Resurrection (12:18-27)
- C The Scribe and the Greatest Commandment (12:28-34)
- D Jesus' Own Tricky Question (12:35-37)
- E The Warning about the Scribes (12:38-40)
- F The Widow's Coin and her Generosity (12:41-44)

Let's get started in Mark chapter 12 tonight. Quick review before we read: Jesus is in Jerusalem, teaching in the temple every day. It is the week of Passover and all the religious Jews are gathered to celebrate. Last week, we started the section of the leader's challenges of Jesus and his authority. In chapter 11, they asked him directly where he got his authority from, and he answered (like all good rabbis) with another question about John the Baptist. When they refused to admit that John's authority was from God, he said that they wouldn't accept his either. He then told the story at the beginning of chapter 12 of the vineyard. This angered them to the point of trying to arrest him, but he had the support of the crowds. They decided to try to trick him into saying something that would divide his followers and give them the upper hand. Starting in verse 13, we will have 3 attempts right after each other to discredit Jesus.

12:13-17 Pharisees and Taxes

So here come the Pharisees and Herodians to trap Jesus. Now, first off, this is just weird because these two groups were normally enemies. The Pharisees held the Mosaic law very strictly and hated Roman occupation, while the Herodians held a looser view of the law and wanted to keep Herod in power. So here they come to Jesus acting like they want him to solve a problem for them. First, they start with a truth used as flattery, saying he is always truthful no matter how unpopular it is. Then they state the question: Should we pay taxes to Caesar? Now like the question about divorce a few lessons ago, this seems like a simple question; but it is

truly loaded with incredible nuance and emotion. First of all, no one likes paying taxes. No one. But the Jews of that time especially hated it.

Imagine for a moment that the USA was taken over by Iraq. Imagine that our government was being run by militant Muslims, and all our taxes went to paying them and funding jihad against the remaining non-Islamic countries of the world. Imagine that they reprinted all the money to put a picture of Muhammed on it and you had to handle that every day. That is how the Jews felt about paying taxes to Rome. Jewish leaders further confused the situation by taking different sides, and Jewish tax collectors added emotional pain to it all by further cheating their countrymen. Revolts over taxation have killed hundreds of men and poverty from taxation has been slowly starving the nation.

So, Jesus, what is your answer for this?

Jesus' answer (like always) is genius. First, he calls them out for trying to trick him, but then he (like always) cuts to the heart of the issue. He shows them the inscription of the coin: Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus on one side, and High Priest on the other. Then he answers the question they were really asking: who has the right to our money- God or government?

Let's reread Jesus' answer. Remember how the coin had the image of Caesar on it? Jesus is saying that that symbolizes his ownership of the coin. His authority as king is why he can demand them to give that money back to him through taxes. We still operate by this

system today. Here in America, we use dollar bills that have former Presidents on them and the name of our country. Our government has the authority to demand taxes from us because we elected them to office. Who or what is the image of God? Human beings. We carry the likeness of God around with us, and that gives God the authority to require our obedience to him. What is Jesus saying here? That we may have to give earthly kings money, but we should be giving our heavenly King ourselves. More important than our political affiliation or religious sect is our devotion to God- so give earthly rulers what they ask. Your soul matters more than your money.

Jesus: 1

Pharisees: 0

But they didn't give up!

12:18-27 Sadducees and the Resurrection

So here come the Sadducees. Now they were just a sect in Judaism like the Pharisees, but they were part of the ruling class. Up to now, they haven't really interacted with Jesus regularly as his ministry hasn't been based in Jerusalem. But now he is there during the feast of Passover, disrupting their authority structure and threatening their fragile peace with Rome. Sadducees were different from Pharisees in that they did not believe in the afterlife at all. So, they come up with this totally unrealistic hypothetical situation to make Jesus look silly; but of course, it doesn't work. So, their hypothetical situation is that a man dies and leaves a widow with no children. Now according to Deuteronomy 25, his brother is responsible to marry

the widow and take care of her. The first male child born of the marriage would be named after the first brother in order to keep his name alive and respect his memory. In their story, there are 7 brothers. The oldest marries a woman but dies. She marries the next brother, and he dies too. She marries the next brother, and so on until all the brothers have died. She dies too, having never had a child. Now that is a morbid story to come up, but the real weird part is in verse 23.

Suppose that there is a heaven, and they are to be resurrected in the next life...who would she be married to? The idea here is that it would be immoral/against God's law for her to be married to all 7 at once. I think we can all agree that would be an awkward situation.

But just imagine Jesus shaking his head in sad amusement as he tells them that they are sorely mistaken. Notice, he doesn't say they are hypocrites or wicked like he often told the Pharisees. They are misunderstanding the Scriptures and they need to be corrected. So, Jesus explains that when the dead are raised, their existence is different. There is no need for the marriage relationship, so it ends at death.

There are many examples of this logic throughout Scripture, but we don't have time to read them all tonight. However, he confirms there is an afterlife by reminding them about the story of Moses and the burning bush. God declares himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The only problem is their bodies have been dead for hundreds of years. Either God is lying here by stating that he is currently the God of these men, or those three men still existed

in heaven with him. God is the God of the living- our souls never cease to exist. However, this presents no moral problem with remarriage because there is no need for that covenant in heaven. Hearing how masterfully Jesus answered these questions, a scribe came close to ask his own question.

12:28-34 The Scribe and the Greatest Commandment

Notice there is a little bit of a shift here. Matthew adds that the scribe was an expert in the law and was testing Jesus. What was his question? What command is the most important, or does one command have priority over the rest? That was basically the role of the scribe: to explain how the different laws interact with each other and if conflicting, which ones were more important. In response, Jesus quoted the first two lines of the Shema- the most important Jewish prayer. Ancient and modern Jews alike recite this prayer every morning and evening. It is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (ESV)

The next command Jesus gives, “love your neighbor as yourself” is from Leviticus 19:18. Notice that the first part of that chapter is a restating of the 10 Commandments and a few other crucial commands that were to form the backbone of Israel’s law.

Matthew adds this sentence: *“All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”*
Matt 22:40 (CSB)

Jesus is saying that every single command and law in the Bible is based on helping us show love to God and others. There is literally no better way to summarize the Bible than this- this depth of wisdom shocked and amazed both the crowds and the scribe. The scribe repeats back what Jesus said and adds that those two things are the most important things any religious Jew could do- even more important than sacrificing at the temple. Keep in mind that this statement would have made him a lot of enemies!

We are really used to the idea of free forgiveness, but for a religious Jewish leader to say right in front of the temple where all Israel came to receive forgiveness through animal sacrifice was a very brave thing to do. It is also important to note that in the book of Mark, this is the ONLY time a religious leader agrees with Jesus. Jesus tells him he is close to the kingdom of God. What did he mean by that? That he was close to understanding that God is worshiped in the heart. Now we come to three more short stories about Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem. At first glance, they seem kind of random. We have a question about Psalm 110, a strong warning about the scribes, and a woman's financial gift. They are closely tied to the three stories we just covered. Let's review quickly and see if you can match the three stories together.

Story 1: Money and who we owe it to.

Story 2: Scripture and how it can be misunderstood.

Story 3: Love and how it is the basis for law.

12:35-37 Jesus' Own Tricky Question

Jesus is teaching as always, huge crowds of devout and excited Jews around him. The religious leaders have given up on debating or confusing him but since he has them all together, Jesus asks a question about Psalm 110, a prophetic psalm of David. This psalm and the two following clearly describe a coming earthly king who will not only possess the authority and blessing of Jehovah but also embody the character and power of Jehovah. He specifically calls out the scribes, asking them who Messiah is the son of. When they reply "David", he asks how that is possible if David described him as divine. Notice that Jesus doesn't give an answer to the question: he allows the listener to think and ponder.

This idea of Messiah being God Himself has been hinted at throughout the Scriptures, and Jesus has implied and indirectly confirmed this throughout his ministry. But here he directly challenges the Pharisees' interpretation of Psalm 110. In this prophetic passage given to David, the LORD (Yahweh) speaks to my Lord (ruler) saying that to sit down in power with him while he destroys all his enemies. The rest of the psalm goes into details about how Yahweh and this Lord will conquer and reign over the earth. However, if this ruler was only a son of David, a natural descendant with no God power, why would David call him Lord? Several NT writers expand on this later on. But the idea here is that the supposed scholars of the Bible didn't have a right interpretation of one of the most important prophetic psalms. They misunderstood the meaning of Scripture and so misunderstood the role of Messiah.

What story does this correspond to? Story #2

12:38-40 A Warning about the Scribes

The audacity and courage of Jesus of Nazareth! Here he is on the home turf of the scribes and Pharisees, and he is just berating them! Imagine you were in the service on Sunday and all the deacons and Sunday School teachers were there getting ready for Easter, and suddenly our pastor got up and shouted “Be careful of the deacons! They are all arrogant and selfish! Beware of the SS teachers! They cheat poor widows and pray just to be heard!” Would you feel a little uncomfortable? But Jesus was absolutely right, as always. The religious leaders had long since stopped following God with their hearts and only served him with their mouths. They wore long fringed robes to show their piety and gave blessings in the market. They sat on the front row at synagogue and made sure they went to banquets where they would be honored. Meanwhile, they had neglected the law of love.

They did not help the poor as commanded, and their prayers were empty and hollow. Jesus said they would be punished harshly for pretending to represent God’s design. For those of you who go to church a lot, consider Jesus’ warning for yourself. First, that you love God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Outward actions of piety don’t matter if your motive isn’t love. You may fool people for a while, but never God. Our love for God and others must impact how we treat others. Second, that you do not assume a leader is close to God just because they are a position of authority. Be sure to weigh everything against the Bible, and don’t blindly

follow people. What story does this correspond to?
Time for Story # 3.

12:41-44 The Widow's Coins and her Generosity

Now Jesus is people-watching. He sits and watches people dropping their offerings into the offering plate. All the rich people are putting in large sums of money and making sure everyone knows about it. Then along came a poor widow who drops in two small coins which was everything she had. Jesus calls his disciples to him and points her out as the one who gave the most that day to God because she gave everything to God, not just her excess spending money.

The direction of our money shows the direction of our hearts. Jesus praised this unnamed woman because she gave even when it caused her financial hardship. She gave because she herself belonged to God and she trusted him to provide for her. What story does this correspond to? Story 1. God is less concerned with the amount of money we give than he is about our confessing our submission to him. The rich people gave huge sums- but it only represented a fraction of their income and was no great sacrifice. The widow gave it all.

Keep this in mind this lesson: God wants our love. More than money, more than animal sacrifices, more than blind rule following: God wants us to live out his design for humanity in our lives. He wants us to study Scripture, to believe it, and to practice what it teaches. What areas do you need to trust God in? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you this time where you need to follow Jesus more fully.

Study Questions:

1. Taxes are never fun. Even to this day, we hate them. But what does Jesus' answer mean for tax paying today?
2. How had the Pharisees neglected the loving intent of the law with their treatment of others?
3. How can our own misreading of Scripture skew our expectations of Jesus and how he should work in our lives?
4. What kind of outward actions can we get obsessed with, while forgetting the important matters of the heart that God values?
5. What would prevent you from giving to God extravagantly, and sacrificially?

Mark 13

Jesus' Hints about the Future

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Be Alert! God is on the move, even in distress and tribulation, his people are to remain faithful to witness of him, be loyal to him, and trust him through the chaos.

Context:

Coming off the fierce attacks of the Pharisees, Jesus reveals the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the wild events to come, events that his followers must be alert and ready for. They must remain genuinely committed to him, and reliant on God, for the strength to face all that will come. The next section continues the stark contrast of good and evil, as the woman's worship of Jesus condemns Judas' selfishness and the Pharisees' murderous schemes.

XIX Jesus' Hints about the Future (13)

- A Misplaced Admiration of the Temple (13:1-2)
- B Prediction of the End (13:3-8)
- C Prediction of Persecution (13:9-13)
- D Antichrist and Deceivers (13:14-23)
- E Return of the Son of Man (13:24-27)
- F The Timing will be Sudden (13:28-31)
- G Be Alert! (13:32-37)

I'm going to start with a quote this morning from a rather famous pastor from the 400's. Augustine: "A person does not go wrong when he knows that he does not know something, but only when he thinks he knows something which he does not know."⁶²

In many ways, this characterizes the passage tonight. There are some clear elements, and some very odd ones. Some things I get, and some that are a little harder to figure out. Several commentators noted that this chapter of Mark presents some of the most puzzling material in the book. I would tend to agree.

But as we work through it, I hope I can shed some light on a few things. One teacher I saw, Mike Winger, had around 5 and a half hours of teaching on this chapter alone.⁶³ But, since your parents want you home before midnight, we won't be echoing his example.

So here we go.

Mark 13 feels very odd. We're coming off of some narratives about Jesus coming into Jerusalem, arguing with scribes about his authority, and finally commending the widow who gave her all to God. Mark 14 resumes all those themes. We get the stories of Jesus

⁶² Oden, Thomas C., and Christopher A. Hall, eds. *Mark (Revised)*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Print. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

⁶³ Winger, Mark, "Pandemics and Earthquakes are NOT Signs" "Jesus said THIS was the sign to watch for...but what does it mean?" "What will the second coming look like?" "Why did Pastor Chuck predict the Rapture?" "If Jesus is God, why didn't he know everything?" Mark Series, YouTube, January-March 2021

being anointed, Jesus eating the Passover, the arrest of Jesus, and all these story elements that we normally think of when we examine the last week of his life. Mark 13, however, presses pause on all those stories and gives us an extended speech, by Jesus, prophesying about future events. It's heavily soaked in Old Testament references, talks about the future for a bit, but certain elements are often misunderstood.

1-2 Misplaced Admiration of the Temple

What are the disciples impressed with?

This is the only bit of narrative, and it's kinda sad. Jesus had just taught that the poor, unimpressive widow gave more than the flashy, sparkly, rich dudes. Because that genuineness of faith, that pure trust in God, is worth way more than loads of material goods. And this continues the pattern. The materially impressive Temple looks great on the surface, but as we've already seen, the spiritual value is lacking. Jesus showed that by cleansing it and giving the vivid fig tree example. The leaders are selfish. The authorities are power-hungry. The moneychangers are corrupt. And Jesus sees that and predicts the event that would put a stop to it. That example of the fig tree suddenly drying up and dying was going to come true. The temple was doomed.

What event fulfills this prediction? Or at least most of it? The sacking of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Now, the disciples have some serious questions about this. The Messiah was supposed to return, establish an eternal kingdom, and promote eternal worship of God

in his temple. So, like, where does this destruction fit in?

3-8 Prediction of the End

Some disciples have questions. They were troubled by this prediction and wanted to know more. If the Temple was going to fall, they wanted to know when. But Jesus doesn't really answer that question. His answers are a bit cryptic, actually. Which isn't very helpful.

That's why there's a big debate.

This is the big question with this chapter. You see, some of these events and descriptions seem characteristic of the Destruction of the Temple in 70AD. The disciples would be persecuted. Other people that claimed to be the Messiah would rise and lead some away. Followers of Jesus would be hauled before Jewish and Gentile Authorities. This sounds just like the early church in Acts. It would be a terrible, terrible time. So, some people would take a position called the "preterist" position.

It means these predictions were all talking about events that already happened from our point of view, and they are NOT talking about events still in our future. "Preterists" is the name, with "Pre" meaning "Before." Everything Jesus predicted here has already happened before our time, mostly in 70 AD. There's a small problem here, as some of these events don't match well with that idea.

Up to V. 14 sounds like it could fit there well. But V. 14 onward seems to describe something far worse and far bigger. In fact, the events of 14-18 happened in exactly the opposite order of the Temple Destruction in 70 AD. Something that only finds matches with the similar prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

Something that hasn't happened yet. Something that will come in the future. Hence, the opposite view is "futurist." These things will happen in the future. They haven't happened yet, but all of it will happen in the future. Even though some really do match really well with 70AD. Which is why many scholars don't land on either extreme. They hold to something often summarized in the phrase "already, but not yet." This means some aspects have already happened, but others have not yet happened. It's happened in small ways, but not the big ways yet. Almost like an earthquake aftershock, it's smaller, comes later, but kinda points to the big quake.

This is like that, only in the opposite order. It's a foreshock of the big, main one to come. Some details here fit really well with 70AD, while others seem to point beyond it to the future. Prophecy can be a little confusing sometimes, but I think we can handle it. So, rather than focus on every tiny detail that we don't always know the answer to, we're going to focus on certain things that Jesus says that were crystal clear.

I don't know everything going on here, and I may not be able to help with all the answers, but let's go ahead and take a look at these things.

Jesus begins with an imperative. "Watch out!"

Why? What's Jesus talking about? Don't be deceived! Don't let people draw you away from Jesus. From time to time, people do claim to be Jesus, there's a whole Wikipedia page dedicated to those guys, but what's even more common is that people come in, claim to be personally commissioned by Jesus, claim to have special unique messages from him, and then trick people away from following Jesus. And sadly, many can follow those celebrities and false prophets. This news could be frightening, that many will be tricked by liars!

But Jesus has another command, another imperative in V. 7. "...do not be alarmed." Now, I was always a bit confused with this verse.

I'd heard growing up that "wars and rumors of wars" and earthquakes and things were the signs of the end, like, more earthquakes and wars equals Jesus is coming back soon. But what does the end of V. 7 say?

"Not yet" These things may be the "beginning of birth pains" but that doesn't mean things are near the end! Even Augustine, the very pastor I referenced earlier, noted that there were so many wars in his day that people seemed certain Jesus was about to return, and that was 1,600 years ago! And another recent source claimed the global number of earthquakes are actually down at the moment, and if numbers do seem up, it's the more sensitive equipment, and better technology, that have made us more aware.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ "Why Are We Having so Many Earthquakes? Has Naturally Occurring Earthquake Activity Been Increasing? Does This Mean a

And I don't know of any time when the world hasn't seen earthquakes and wars. And we should probably be careful using that as a prediction guide. But the next portion gives us a clue.

9–13 Prediction of Persecution

Again, the imperative “watch out!” This time, not for deception, but persecution. The disciples would be handed over to synagogues and stand before governors and kings.

Does this sound like somebody from the Bible?

This sounds like Paul! He stood before Felix, had a hearing before the emperor of Rome, and before his conversion, handed Christians over to synagogues. If we consider these things to be signs of the end, these signs have happened since the very beginning of Christianity! Along with wars and earthquakes. Then, an interesting line: “The Gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations.” (CSB)

“While the Gospel has gone to every political country in the world, when Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples of all the nations” in Matthew 28:18-20, He was not referring to political nations such as Canada, Kenya, Russia, etc. Many of these, such as the

Big One Is Going to Hit? or We Haven't Had Any Earthquakes in a Long Time; Does This Mean That the Pressure Is Building up for a Big One?” U.S. Geological Survey, <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/why-are-we-having-so-many-earthquakes-has-naturally-occurring-earthquake-activity-been>.

United States, did not exist as entities when Jesus gave the command. The word Jesus used for nations in Greek is "ethne" from which we get the English word "ethnic". "Ethne" can simply mean any non-Jew i.e., Gentile or it can mean a collection of individuals with a common identity. For a good study on this, click here. In the Great Commission Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples from every ethnic people group⁶⁵."

If we consider "nations" to be the known Roman world in Jesus' day, that's been done. But were we to consider the whole globe, according to one group, well over 7,000 people groups are still considered unreached. We don't know exactly how literal this command is. How big or small does a group need to be?

I don't know.

But I do know this: The Gospel was being proclaimed. Through wars, earthquakes, persecution, and injury, the Gospel was being spread, being taught, being explained. Christians must NEVER lose sight of that. And we must never, ever stop spreading the Gospel. If you have one takeaway from this lesson, it's this: Keep faithfully following Jesus and spreading the Gospel.

But again, we get a familiar command from Jesus: Don't fret, don't get nervous or begin to panic. When persecution comes, and torture and death await, trust

⁶⁵ Project, Joshua. "Has Everyone Heard?" Joshua Project, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/has_everyone_heard.

the Holy Spirit. When people close to you betray you and reject you, trust the Holy Spirit. When you are hated for following Jesus, trust the Holy Spirit.

Does this mean we shouldn't study the Bible and learn how to defend the faith? Warren Wiersbe noted this: "This passage should not be used as an excuse or a crutch for poorly prepared preachers. It is an encouragement for all believers who sincerely want to witness for Christ and honor Him (John 14:26; Acts 4:8). If we are walking in the Spirit, we will have no trouble bearing witness for Christ when the opportunities arrive (John 15:26–27)⁶⁶."

But all these events of tragedy and persecution and hurt, along with the wars and earthquakes, are only the beginning, and they've been happening since the beginning. Finally, Jesus reveals the only actual, concrete sign that the end has arrived.

14-23 Antichrist and Deceivers

Here we get a familiar phrase "Abomination of Desolation" An earlier revision of the CSB has "the abomination that causes desolation" (HCSB) It's a horrible, defiling, polluting, poisoning, thing that causes great ruin and loss. Like a nuclear bomb, this thing will blast out, causing ruin and sending deadly radiation seeping through the landscape. Radiation that would leave the place uninhabitable for years to come. But this abomination isn't a bomb, or even a weapon. It's a person. A very scary person.

⁶⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W. The Bible Exposition Commentary. Vol. 1. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996. Print.

The phrase comes from the book of Daniel. Specifically, Dan. 9:27, 11:31 and 12:11. This is also unique. Notice how each of the previous events are only the beginning, and as we noticed, wars and such things have happened since the beginning. "When you see...then..." This is the sign. This is when the end has arrived. This is the event on which people should base their predictions, not wars or earthquakes. Notice, this is now the end.

Previously, Jesus' commands have been to "watch" and not be "afraid/anxious." Only AFTER the Abomination of Desolation is seen does he tell them to flee. That's the one sign of the end. That's when they should run and hide and do so as fast as they can.

V. 19 brings in that familiar word "tribulation." We are familiar with that phrase, I think. We see it in Mark 4:17, with the parable of the Sower. Revelation 2 has it several times referring to the hardship of persecution and evil men tormenting the church. Revelation 7:14 refers to the Great Tribulation, but Matthew 24:21 is really where the phrase comes up.

It's an era of time that is unlike anything else, before or after. And it's only because God cuts the days short that any survive. Daniel speaks of a tribulation of seven years, a very short time, but one with untold destruction and death. We would take that literally, a real period of 7 real years. Though there are other ways of seeing it. Revelation also picks up on this idea. And it's cut for the sake of God's people. Those people that know him, follow him, are his elect, are the reason he stops. God is protecting them.

24-27 Return of the Son of Man

This cosmic scale is another tie to Revelation! Sun darkened, stars falling, powers in heaven (likely angelic like beings) all shaking at the power of Jesus! Then, Jesus comes and sends his angels to gather the elect, the saved, no matter where they are. That is the END! And we know, from Daniel and Revelation, that Christ's coming has a lot of moving parts to it, but this is where Jesus stops. This is the end, the climax, the grand finale!

Far as we can tell, this didn't happen in 70AD.

So, unless it's very symbolic, to the point of hardly being intelligible, this verse is great proof for a futurist view. Unanswerable proof, in my mind.

28-31 The Timing will be Sudden

But then, Jesus returns to this idea of timing. That was, after all, the original question. When you see “these things” recognize that he is near, at the door. What things? Those things talked about in verses 24-27. These unmistakable events of the end. V. 30 is interesting. It speaks about a “generation” that won't pass away. Jesus does on to explain that his words won't pass away either, and we're familiar with that.

But who is “this generation?”

Depends. The preterist would say this is proof that everything must be fulfilled in 70 AD, when the generation of Jesus' day would be 40 years older, but still around. Generation, like we use today, with Gen Z

or Boomers. But that's not how the Bible always uses "generation." One lexicon offers this as a secondary definition: "of those alike in character, in bad sense,⁶⁷" Rather than focusing on the time period being the boundaries of the "generation" it's focusing on the character.

According to Indeed, a popular job website, millennials are a generation characterized by a "Passion for learning." So that character trait marks that "generation."⁶⁸ It's possible that Jesus is leaning heavily into using generation for a group of people that are set apart by a certain character trait, but not necessarily by a certain time period.

In Mark 9:19 he refers to a "faithless generation" and Acts 2:40 speaks of a "crooked generation." Then again, Jesus may be referring to a single generation, set apart by time. But he doesn't say by how much time, or when that time will be. In V. 36, Jesus speaks of coming "suddenly" And V. 28 has "as soon as." And V. 20 has Jesus speaking about "cutting those days short." Perhaps, Jesus is saying that, from the Abomination of Desolation, to the final victorious coming of Jesus, is less than the time of a normal generation.

It's sudden, it's quick, and it won't last long.

⁶⁷ Abbott-Smith, G. A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament 1922: 89. Print.

⁶⁸ Indeed Editorial Team. 10 Common Characteristics of the Millennial Generation - Indeed. Indeed, 8 Aug. 2022, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/10-millennial-generation-characteristics>.

It's another clue that we could puzzle over for a while, but let's move on, as Jesus does, to his next point.

32-37 Be alert!

A final, incredible command comes to be alert! Through all of this, do watch, don't be afraid, but be alert! God only knows when Jesus is coming back. We don't. Rather than try to guess or do some fancy math stuff and make a guess, we need to stop, realize Jesus could come back at any moment, and keep doing what we're supposed to do. He even ends with that command once again: Be alert!

We get this quick parable about a boss who left town, commanding his doorkeeper to be alert, the same command given to us. He's not to fall asleep, not to abandon his job, but to constantly consider the fact that his master could soon return!

This applies to us: We don't know when these events will happen. Until the Abomination of Desolation comes, we don't have a sure sign, as far as this passage tells us. I would believe in a pre-Tribulation rapture, a time when Jesus swoops up the Christians on the earth before raining his judgment down during the tribulation. But we have no idea when even that will happen. So, what does Jesus tell us to do? Be alert!

How? Don't be deceived. Look, there are a lot of people out there known as "prophecy nuts" who run around making wild predictions and trying to guess when Jesus

will come back. Again, a whole wiki page⁶⁹ is full of guys that have claimed Jesus will return, and so far, none have been right! John Wesley even guessed 1836, Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chapel guessed 1981. Others have claimed to be Jesus and gathered big followings.⁷⁰ Don't, just don't, follow them.

I don't have much fear of y'all doing that. But there are a lot of people claiming to speak for Jesus who don't. Let this, the Bible, be your guide and anchor. Just teachers by this, judge claims by this, judge by this alone. There are a great many ways to be led astray.

Proclaim the Gospel

Jesus didn't predict easy street for his followers. He promised hard questions, hostile enemies, and heated disagreements, even from those close to you. Yet. He promised his spirit to always be with us. And has given those opportunities to present the Gospel.

In 1521, Martin Luther was called to stand before a jury for sparking the Reformation. He ended his speech with this: “Since your most serene majesty and your highnesses require of me a simple, clear, and direct

⁶⁹“Predictions and Claims for the Second Coming.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 11 May 2020, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predictions_and_claims_for_the_Second_Coming/.

⁷⁰“List of People Claimed to Be Jesus.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 30 Apr. 2023, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_people_claimed_to_be_Jesus

answer, I will give one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is clear that they have fallen into error and even into inconsistency with themselves. If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God's word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be either safe or honest for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen"⁷¹
Oh, that we would have that bravery and courage! That we would stand before the gathering of our friends, and the glares of others, yet proudly proclaim the Supremacy of the Bible and beauty of the Gospel.

Luther stood and proclaimed, earlier in the speech, these words regarding persecution: "But far from being dismayed by them, I rejoice exceedingly to see the Gospel this day, as of old, a cause of disturbance and disagreement; for such is the character and destiny of God's Word."

He rejoiced that the Bible was changing lives, upsetting the works of darkness, turning the sinful world upside down, and attracting the hatred of Satan. May we echo that with our own faithfulness to the Gospel.

Don't be afraid. Yes, Jesus' words here speak of terrible events and problems and lies and death. But they are supposed to be comforting. The Holy Spirit helps in

⁷¹ D'Aubigné, J. H. Merle. History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century. N.p., Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2020.

persecution v. 11. God will protect v. 20. Jesus will return v. 26. The Trinity, our unique and incredible three in one God is on the move!

We don't face this alone, but in his power, under his rule, anticipating his return! Don't be afraid! Like children scared, but clinging to parents, we can cling to God! He's got it all planned, he controls it all, he knows what he's doing. This speech of Jesus wasn't to bring them fear, but confidence. The Trinity, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all at work in the lives of his followers, guiding them, empowering them, helping them. There is no need to fear. No matter what the future holds, we can hold on to Christ!

Study Questions:

1. What do you think this means, with the “wars and rumors of wars” bit? How have you heard that in the context of current events? What view do you think is the most biblical?
2. Have you heard any of these verses explained in a different way? If so, how? Have you changed your mind, or has the further examination of the passage helped you better defend your previous view?
3. The entire Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are said to be active and helping God’s people in this terrible time. Why do you think Jesus emphasized the joint role of all three persons of the Trinity in this act?
4. There’s a lot of detail to this passage, but why do you think Jesus replied as he did, and avoided their direct question?
5. How can you help others avoid the fear and deceit that Jesus warns us about?
6. Martin Luther’s speech has been quoted, remembered, and loved for centuries. But do you think it has any relevance today? If so, in what way? How do his words apply to Christians in the 21st century?

Mark 14:1-11

Love for Jesus vs Love for Money

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Genuine, sacrificial worship contrasts sharply with Satanic selfishness.

Context:

The previous section's wild imagery and dramatic happenings fades into the cozy and private setting of a simply home, but the themes of true worship against the selfish sedition of sinners remain and find expression in murderous plots and selfish schemes. All of these puzzle pieces, however, are falling right into Jesus' plan, as he prepares to announce the new covenant through his blood in the following section.

XX Love for Jesus vs Love for Money (14:1-11)

- A The Plan to Kill Jesus (14:1-2)
- B Anointing the Feet of Jesus (14:3-5)
- C Jesus Praising the Woman for Her Love (14:6-9)
- D Judas Begins to Betray Jesus (14:10-11)

Last time, you learned about the tribulation that Jesus predicted and the persecution that would occur. Matthew adds that Jesus said specifically that he will be crucified in two days. Then the narrative continues in Mark 14. The first few verses are kind of an aside to the

audience, informing them of what is going on while Jesus is doing all these things.

14:1-2 The Plan to Kill Jesus

The priests and scribes have now come together in an organized group to get rid of Jesus. They cannot tolerate his claims any longer, and fear that the people will accept him (and put them out of a job). They plan to arrest him after the festival to avoid any angry riots. Then the curtain closes, and we go back to following Jesus to Bethany.

14:3-5 Anointing the Feet of Jesus

Two days before his death, Jesus is invited to dinner by Simon, a healed leper. Now, similar to how some Japanese do it today, Judeans at that time ate at low tables that required them to “sit” in a semi-reclined position on a low couch. At some point in the evening, a woman came in and broke open the seal on an expensive jar of perfume worth almost a year’s worth of wages. In an act of worship, she poured it on his head and anointed him. The woman here is unnamed.

Many believe that it is Mary, sister of Lazarus, as she anointed his feet several days earlier as mentioned in John’s gospel. Where did she get the nard? Some theorize that it may have been her dowry, that (if she was Mary) she had originally bought it for Lazarus’ funeral, or that she was rich and just had it laying around. In any case, this woman was making a very costly statement about who she thought Jesus was and what he was there to do. The act of anointing Jesus’ head with nard symbolized mourning over his upcoming death. She had heard and believed his

prediction of his upcoming crucifixion and mourned it with everything she had. There may have even been a custom at that time of anointing the Passover lamb 6 days before on the feet and 2 days before on the head. She recognizes his role as Messiah and acts accordingly. However, the disciples, well, not so much. They scolded the woman for not selling the perfume to benefit the poor. But what did Jesus say?

14:6-9 Jesus Praising the Woman for her Love

Jesus knew her heart, her motives. He knew that she did this in mourning over his death. He tells the disciples that while they should do good for the poor, that does not come ahead of worshiping him. Jesus is about to die; everything else should be second to that. The woman is commended for her action, and two thousand years later is still being remembered for it. The woman is nameless, and while it is possible that Mark didn't know or forgot it, I believe that it was very intentional. Leaving the character nameless allows us to see ourselves in them. Do YOU believe in Jesus as the Lamb of God, come to take away the sins of the world? Do YOU mourn that our rebellion against God caused his death on the cross? Do YOU worship your Savior sacrificially? Do YOU see your resources as a way to serve God? But not everyone felt like Jesus did about it.

14:10-11 Judas Begins to Betray Jesus

John tells us that Judas regularly stole from the moneybag. Maybe he owed people money. Maybe he hoped Jesus would bring him financial stability. When he saw that Jesus was not going to make him rich, he went to the people plotting Jesus' death and offered to betray him for money- Matthew tells us 30 pieces of

silver which was about a month's worth of wages. Luke and John tell us that the Devil/Satan put it into his heart to betray Jesus. The title Satan means "adversary or accuser." That comes out clearly in one extra detail John provides in his account.

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." John 8:44-45 (ESV)

Here we have a group of Pharisees who refuse to believe Jesus' word despite the miracles and obvious power of his words. Jesus tells them the reason they don't accept him as Messiah is because they aren't truly the descendants of Abraham- but of the devil. Notice what Jesus says the devil's primary tactic is- lies. And this is what he used on Judas. The fact that Judas' betrayal comes immediately after a perceived financial setback along with the fact that he had stolen before tells us that the devil had convinced him of a lie: that money is what is most important. The lie of greed was so deep in him that he could not stand the "waste" of using the perfume for Jesus. All of us believe lies, too. All of us are capable of leaving Jesus' way because we believe the lies more than we believe him. The answer to the confusion is always Scripture. What does Jesus say is truth? Anything else is a lie. In this account, an unnamed woman has more faith in the words of Jesus and more sacrificial worship in her heart than Jesus' own chosen disciples. Let this be a warning and encouragement: God looks on the heart.

Study Questions:

1. What other women have been highlighted in Mark's account?
2. Who are some women that have set a strong example for you?
3. How do you think Judas felt after this rebuke from Jesus?
4. Why did the disciples protest this use of the spices? How would you have answered their argument?
5. What is one way you can worship God sacrificially, and recognize with your actions his great worth?

Mark 14:12-52

The New Covenant Inaugurated

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus' faithfulness, Jesus' power, Jesus' strength, and Jesus' service fuels our own service, lifts us from our failure and sets us back into his kingdom work.

Context:

With the woman's worship and Judas' selfishness still echoing in the disciple's ears, they now hear Jesus' powerful declaration of the New Covenant. A New Covenant that was bound up in the terms of his sacrificial death for them. This death was quickly approaching, just as the mob began to head his way for the arrest and trial to come. Jesus is faithful, but as the coming sections show, he is alone in that trait.

XXI The New Covenant Inaugurated (14:12-51)

- A Preparing and Participating in Passover (14:12-21)
- B The Lord's Supper (14:22-26)
- C Denying Their Future Denial (14:27-31)
- D Watching, Praying, and Sleeping (14:32-42)
- E The Arrest of Jesus and Abandonment of his Disciples (14:43-52)

Long ago, a massive ship, weighing more than 52,000 tons, slipped into the waters of the Atlantic. It was so large that it couldn't even fit into the dock of one city, and so powerful it nearly sucked another ship right into its path as it was leaving the harbor. This massive vessel, the crown jewel of the seas, was luxury personified. Everything looked perfect, more than perfect in fact. Its state-of-the-art engineering had many bragging that it was unsinkable. Those boasts, however, would soon prove wrong.

Can you guess the ship's name? The *Titanic*.

The Titanic is legendary today, not for its luxury, not for its size, not for its beauty, but for the empty boasting and groundless claims. During its very first voyage to New York City, it struck an iceberg, the ship sank, and over 1,500 people, over two-thirds of those sailing, died. Its legacy is one of broken promises and empty boasts, both of which ended in utter tragedy.

We don't like it when promises are broken. We get ticked when the internet goes down, when the power goes out, when the coach promises food on the way back from a game, but then backs out.

If our phone company keeps going in and out, with spotty coverage, we may think about switching. If the restaurant never can get our order correct, we start to eat elsewhere. If a friend keeps lying to us, we stop trusting him or her. We are constantly on the hunt for something dependable. We prize that quality of faithfulness. We long for things that we can trust in, lean to, and believe in.

It hurts when people, when companies, or when services, let us down. We want something dependable and faithful. Something certain.

Tonight, we're going to see that contrast, between faithfulness and failure. But first, let's talk about some food. Because that's what's on Jesus' mind.

12-21 Preparing and Participating in Passover

Echoing much of the language of the earlier adventure borrowing the donkey, Jesus once again is sitting outside of Jerusalem, and sending two disciples in for something. Once again, Jesus gives them something to look for. Not a donkey, now. But a man carrying water.

Which was rare, as usually the ladies hauled water. But notice the planning here, this man will "meet you." He will lead them, and once again, the disciples are told to say something very specific. Last time, it was that the Lord needed the donkey. This time, "the teacher" needs the upper room.

The disciples begin to prepare things, no doubt buying the food and cooking the meal. Later, Jesus and the 12 enter the city to finally eat together. So far, the disciples are trusting him and following his orders just fine. But we already know Judas has turned against Jesus. Mark 14:10-11 made that clear. In fact, Jesus already knows it, and may be acting this way for a reason. The prepared room, the code word, the odd servant with water. It may be that Jesus had already arranged all of this but purposefully didn't tell the assembled group of disciples.

Remember, Judas was looking for a private way to betray Jesus away from the massive crowds. This dinner would have been perfect. One scholar suggested Jesus purposefully hid his plans and didn't tell anyone where they were going so that he would have plenty of time to have the Lord's Supper, then go to the garden and pray. Judas knew they were heading for the Garden eventually so that was his soonest opportunity. Perhaps.

Look at Vs. 17-21. Whatever planning, or lack of planning, went down with dinner, the disciples certainly were not expecting the next words out of his mouth. One of the twelve would betray him! More than just a stranger. One of his closest friends would do it.

What Jesus leaves out for a bit longer is the fact that every disciple would abandon him. He'll mention that later. For now, the news of a single traitor was enough to worry about. Each one wondering "surely not I?" Each one, except Judas. He had already determined his betrayal. He was just waiting for the opportunity. Like an undercover agent, Judas is play-acting, pretending, passing off that he's a true following. But even now, his mask was being ripped off. Jesus gives a few more details, no doubt calling on Psalm 41:9: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." (ESV)

After this, they begin to eat. I'm sure things were a little awkward at this point, but Jesus isn't done introducing shocking elements to this meal.

22-26 The Lord's Supper

Jesus takes bread, breaks it, and associates it with his body. He then takes the cup, the fruit of the vine, and associates that with his blood. But then he adds more.

He's referring to texts like Exodus 24:8, and Zech 9:11. Each of these references the phrase "blood of the covenant." Hebrews 9:18-20 later summarizes that idea well by mentioning that the first covenant, God's loving contract with Israel, was sealed with blood. That's like signing the dotted line; making it certain. Now Jesus is setting out a new contact, a new agreement, a new covenant.

Luke 22:20 explicitly refers to this as a "new covenant." But it's a covenant that goes all the way back to Jerimiah 31:31-34. It's also poured out for "many." Not just Israel, but as Mark 13:10 proclaimed, the Gospel will be preached to all nations! Mark 11:17 also said that the temple would be a house of prayer for all nations. Following that, Jesus says he won't drink of the fruit of the vine again until his kingdom comes.

This means the supper's events point not just to the fact of his death but also to his coming kingdom! Even in his prediction of his death, Jesus was proclaiming the power of his kingdom and resurrection. Even though the disciple's idea of God's kingdom would be shattered, Jesus assures them that his kingdom will come and will prevail in time.

With that comfort, they begin to leave for the eventful night. They sing, then leave for the Mount of Olives.

Tradition would indicate that this song or hymn that they probably sang Psalms 113-118. 113-114 before the meal, then 115-118 after. Several of those lines have incredible ties to these events.

Psalm 115 cries out that the LORD is “their deliverer.” (NET)

Psalm 116 declares the LORD’s rescuing from the deepest despair and lifting one up to new life when death seemed all but certain.

Psalm 117 trumpets the theme of praising God for his enduring love!

Psalm 118, as we’ve already seen, mentions Jesus as the cornerstone, (22) contains the cry “blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD” (26) and begins and ends with more shouting about God’s faithful love. But this sense of triumph would soon give way to the deep doubts and weaknesses ahead that night for Jesus and his band of followers.

27-31 Denying their Future Denial

This is a sad section. Once again, Zechariah is quoted, this time 13:7. It’s important to note that this is the third reference to Zechariah during this final week of Jesus’ humility.

1. Mark 13:7 - Zech 11:1-10 - Jesus rides in on a donkey
2. Mark 14:24 - Zech 9:11 - Jesus talks about His blood of the covenant. (The latter part of that verse also invoking Isaiah 53)

3. Mark 14:27 - Zech 13:7 - Jesus speaking about being the shepherd who is struck down.

Notice that the shepherd seems innocent. He is “the man who stands next to me” (CSB) and therefore, he is close to God himself. However, God is the one calling for the sword. Mark makes it obvious with his phrasing “I will strike the shepherd.” But wait, God didn’t kill Jesus, did he? Well, it is mankind that tossed him on the cross, but God was behind it all. When God struck Jesus, got him arrested and tried and finally killed, the sheep, Jesus’ followers, would scatter. There’s a lot going on, but we’ll see it all playing out soon. But don’t forget V. 28.

Even before all this goes down, Jesus once again reminds them that he will rise from the dead! More, he will regather the scattered disciples, restoring and uniting what their fears and doubts had destroyed.

He will bring them to Galilee, that place they called home, that safe area, that region where he ministered most, and where he first called them. Jesus wouldn’t let them stay scattered and alone and broken. He was going to bring them back and restore them. I don’t think I caught that before.

Peter, however, didn’t seem to catch it even then. He opens his big mouth and proclaims: “I will never leave you!” Here’s his big, giant mouth letting loose with a boast that will only end in tragedy. My faith will never sink, my loyalty will never go under! But that’s easy to say before he runs into the cold, shivering iceberg of persecution and difficulty. So, Jesus, coming

right off the prophecy of bringing everyone back together, gives Peter a few more details. Not only will he scatter. Not only will he deny Jesus three times, not only will it be that very night, But Jesus gives a sign, a rooster will crow twice, and before that second crow sounds, Peter's abandonment of Jesus will be complete.

This doesn't negate Jesus first saying. Jesus will still gather even Peter together and restore even him. That's awesome! Lest we pick on only Peter too much, all the disciples join in. (V. 31) And even in his rebuke, Jesus offers hope. "I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Jesus again dropped a hint of his resurrection, even if it was missed at the time.

Jesus continues, and then, just as he faces his greatest challenge, his disciples will face a challenge of their own. And then he goes on, drops off most of the disciples, takes the inner three, (James, John and Peter) goes further, then stops them, and he goes alone further still.

32-42 Watching, Praying, and Sleeping

Jesus was facing grief. The CSB has a note that this could also be translated "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow." He's grieved to the point of death.

Often in our knowing the whole story, we forget the intensity of this moment. The most painful.

Humiliating, shameful, degrading death lay ahead of him. His divinity knew every strike of the whip that would fall, and every piece of flesh that would be ripped away. He knew the pain, the agony, the sorrow, the loneliness that he faced. Moreover, he was God.

At any moment he could have stopped the pain.
At any moment he could have walked away from it all.
At any moment he could have snapped his fingers and made it all go away.

It would take some massive surrender, some unimaginable self-control, some unearthly determination to follow through. Jesus knew what was ahead. He begged for relief.

Father! He cries out, “take this cup away from me.” Cups were often signs of God’s judgment. Over and over, Scripture refers to judgment being poured out with that metaphor. (Psalms 11:6; Isaiah 51:17,22; Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 23:32–34; Mark 10:38–39; John 18:11) Those are words we have echoed as well. “Not what I will, but what you will” These are much harder words to say. They bring to mind John 6:38. Jesus had come to accomplish the Father’s plan. But it wasn’t an easy one.

Jesus then returned to his disciples, the ones he has commanded to stay away. They had fallen to the temptation and weakness facing them. Just as Jesus was praying for strength to do God’s will, to obey his plan, they were too weak to obey Jesus’ plan. And in V. 37 he confronts Peter.

The one that claimed undying loyalty to Jesus was found fast asleep. Jesus rebukes him, telling him to stay awake and pray. Then, Jesus turns and does just that. He prays a second time, finds them asleep again, then prays a third time, and finds them asleep once more. Only one person is faithful to his task. Only one is alert

and ready for what's coming. Only one is obedient to the Divine task he was given.

The disciples were already sinking. The signs of failure were already there. They were already drowning in the vast ocean of unconsciousness and their empty boasts sank into the depths of neglect. It wouldn't take long for the last traces of their loyalty to wash away.

Unlike Jesus, they wouldn't be faithful. Finally, the time is up. Jesus wakes up the remaining disciples and walks to his betrayer. The time has come.

43-52 The Arrest of Jesus and Abandonment of his Disciples

We're familiar with this. The mob comes, led by the Temple Guard sent from the chief priests. Not even named in V. 44, this man is simply "the betrayer." He kissed Jesus, a sign of respect and friendship, almost like a handshake or a hug would be in ours. And with that, he betrayed Jesus.

One of the disciples, we learn elsewhere that it was Peter, cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Some claim it was a wild swing from an unskilled swordsman, evidence of clumsiness and stupidity that he only cut off the ear, and not his entire head. Others have a more thoughtful thesis.

This was the servant of the High Priest. To serve in the Temple, to attend to priestly business, you needed to be physically whole: no defects, no deformities, no missing fingers, or missing toes. Certainly no missing ears. Once that ear was missing, he couldn't enter the

Temple, couldn't serve the high priest, and couldn't keep his job. Perhaps the swordsman, Peter, was trying to communicate that arresting Jesus was so shameful, so wicked, so awful, that the servant should be disqualified from the Temple for this.

Sending a message that failure to honor Jesus, failure to follow him, failure to be loyal to him, was disqualifying from serving God.

This continues the themes already mentioned. The disciples were about to scatter, about to abandon Jesus, about to desert him. The only person in this entire chapter that is faithful in serving God is Jesus. Everyone else is unworthy.

They resist Jesus, correct Jesus, deny Jesus, betray Jesus. They don't care about him. That's not the way true disciple's act, that's not the way good followers act, that's not the way loyal apostles should act. Nobody is being faithful to God except Jesus. Nobody is "qualified" to follow God in this story. And nobody does. Except Jesus.

Being disqualified from Temple ministry, from the service of God, would be a logical step for those that resist, abandon, and try to arrest Jesus. Mark's account stops there, but in other Gospels, Jesus reaches down, picks up the ear, and heals the servant. Just as Jesus has already promised to meet his disciples in the future. No matter their failure, their disloyalty, their disqualification by any reasonable standard, Jesus has the power to restore, renew, and remake us and take

those who have failed him and turn around, and use them in his service once again.

He can, and does, re-qualify those that have abandoned him. It is his faithfulness, his power, and his goodness that qualifies us for God's service, not our own. But that doesn't stop Jesus from rebuking their hostility to him.

But before anything else happens, Jesus rebukes the mob. They were treating him like a criminal, and soon, he would be hung between two criminals. What a shameful way to treat the teacher, the perfect, wonderful Rabbi.

Yet, the shame of the mob would pale in comparison to that earned by the disciples. After the initial zeal and sword-swing, Verse 50 happens.

It's hard to read Vs. 50-52. They are so sad. Everyone, every single follower of Jesus runs. They desert him. The promises of fidelity forgotten; they dashed off into the night like frightened deer. Abandoning Jesus to his fate. One, a "certain young man" runs off too. We don't know who this was. Some claim it was Mark. An early church witness, Papias indirectly rejects that idea by claiming Mark never met Jesus,⁷² but he may be mistaken.

Honestly, we don't know. We know this, rather than leave all to follow Jesus, this follower left everything to get away from Jesus, to avoid being near him, to abandon him. Just the opposite of a disciple. Jesus sets

⁷² Eusebius Ecclesiastical History 3.39.15.

the example of faithfulness. Even when, in our strength, we fail, Christ is faithful. Our own power brings nothing but the empty boasts of the Titanic. We, like Peter, make grand promises to God, high and lofty goals to him, and all these big ideas.

Yet, a few days after camp, a week or two after hearing that message, a few hours after that devotional time, we fail him, we fall, we mess up, we sin. We break our promises. We slip up in the Bible reading. We sin in that way that we promised we'd never do again. We mess up in so many ways, big ways, and small ways, that we can easily think "we aren't qualified" that "Jesus doesn't want us" and that "I can't serve him."

That's where Jesus comes in! His sacrifice on the cross gave us salvation. His faithfulness to follow God opened the door for us. His submission to the will of God rescued us. His staying true, keeping his promise, following God's plan, made the difference!

He died, he rose again, he paid the price, he did it all, he went the distance, he finished his course, he was steady through it all. And through his love, he offers us that victory as well. We learn, in the closing verses of Mark, that Jesus returns, meets with his followers, commissions them to spread the Gospel to the world, and they do, and there's this awesome phrase "...they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them..." (CSB)

Jesus' faithfulness, Jesus' power, Jesus' strength, and Jesus' service fuels our own service, lifts us from our failure and sets us back into his kingdom work. That's

what we remember when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. That Jesus died for us, Jesus saved us, and Jesus will bring his kingdom forward.

This passage constantly flip-flops between the failure of the disciples and the faithfulness of Jesus. That's why we have a Christ-centered religion. That's why we point people to Christ. It's why we need to remember, constantly, what he has done for us.

And remember, just as often, his incredible love for us.

Study Questions:

1. How does it make you feel when something promised doesn't come? When somebody lets you down? Have you ever been guilty of breaking a promise?
2. Have you heard about the Old Testament connections of the Lord's Supper before? How does that sharpen or deepen your understanding of these events?
3. Some celebrate the Lord's Supper with deep solemnity, like a funeral. Others celebrate it with deep joy, remembering the victory Christ's death won. How do you think it should be celebrated? Why?
4. Consider reading some of those Psalms listed above and trace just how many references in them could match Jesus and his earthly mission. What did you find there?
5. Christ was faithful, even when his disciples failed. Our hope is in him, not just for salvation, but for the strength to live our Christian lives. How does his consistency encourage us to lean on him?

Mark 14:53-73

Jesus Is Faithful, Even When Peter Fails

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus meekly submitted himself to God's plan, even when it meant injustice, mocking, and abandonment.

Context:

Jesus' prediction that he would be abandoned comes true, and he alone is found faithfully doing what he needs to do. Now, he watches quietly as the furious machinery of the Jewish council tries to condemn him and humiliate him in any way possible. Peter's denial adds insult to injury as Jesus prepares to face his fate on the cross in the next section.

XXII Jesus Is Faithful, even when Peter Fails (14:53-73)

- A Peter Follows Jesus Inside (14:53-54)
- B The Mockery of Justice in the Trial of Jesus (14:55-59)
- C Jesus Responds, Sending them into a Rage (14:60-65)
- D Peter Denies Jesus (14:66-73)

The last few lessons, we have been asking these questions: Who is Jesus? What did he come to earth

for? Today we will be asking this question: Who did Jesus claim to be? Did he actually claim to be divine, or did he think of himself as a prophet? Today we are going to look at Jesus' own words when asked. Mark 14.

14:53-54 Peter Follows Jesus Inside

Here we are in Jerusalem the day before Passover. Judas has betrayed Jesus' position to a religiously zealous mob and had him arrested. The disciples desert him, although a few follow him from a distance. They take him before all the chief priests, elders, and scribes, and the high priest. Peter is following at a distance, trying to blend into the crowd. John knew the high priest personally and got access to the courtyard for himself and Peter. There, because it was cold, Peter warmed himself at the fire with high priest's servants. While he is there, the Sanhedrin is questioning Jesus.

What was the Sanhedrin? This is a group of 71 priests who judged the hardest questions and debates about the Law.⁷³ The one in Jerusalem is commonly called the "Great Sanhedrin" to differentiate it from the smaller ones that existed all around Israel and judged smaller matters. This governing authority was supposed to meet in the temple during "business hours" to pass judgment on already established cases. The high priest would read the accusation and bring forward a minimum of two witnesses to confirm it. The defendant would then have the chance to defend himself and bring forward his own witnesses. When all testimony was presented, the matter would be decided,

⁷³ Levertoff, Paul. "Sanhedrin." Ed. James Orr et al. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia 1915: 2688. Print.

and judgment/penalty imposed. Under Roman law, the Sanhedrin could not impose the death penalty, but had to bring the offender to them to be executed. The high priest is to function as an impartial judge, not defending or accusing. With that in mind, let's read what happened in Jesus' case.

14:55-59 The mockery of justice in the trial of Jesus. They clearly do not have a real charge to bring because everything Jesus has taught has agreed with the Scripture. They have no evidence of false prophecy, so they try to twist his words to make it sound like he threatened to destroy the temple. They are referring to Jesus' first cleansing of the temple, which is recorded in John's Gospel.

“So the Jews replied to him, “What sign will you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.” Therefore the Jews said, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.” John 2:18-21 (CSB)

But they couldn't even get these witnesses to agree on their accusations, probably because they were categorically false.

John tells us that this part of the proceeding was at Annas' residential complex and he wasn't even the current high priest! He was removed from office in AD 15, and only led in an unofficial capacity, though some believe he still held the title of president/high priest of the Sanhedrin. When Annas can't come up with

anything, he sends him next door to Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who IS the current high priest.

14:60-65 Jesus Responds, Sending Them into a Rage

Jesus is keeping silent despite all the accusations against him. He is not dignifying their wild accusations with an answer. He is not getting angry or threatening them, even though practically everything in this “hearing” is illegal. If given a direct question, he answers, otherwise, he is quiet. Caiaphas asks him directly about his identity. Of course, just asking this question is improper since the president is supposed to judge not accuse. But Jesus answers: Yes. Then he quotes two OT prophecies about the Messiah: Psalm 110 and Daniel 7. Let’s read them.

“I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. He was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed.”
Daniel 7:13-14 (CSB)

*“Yahweh says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand
Until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.”*
Psalm 110:1 (LSB)

You may remember that Jesus called himself the Son of Man quite often and had taught before that Psalm 110 was referring to the Messiah. Who is Jesus saying he is? God, Messiah. What was Caiaphas’ response? He tore his clothes and declared Jesus a blasphemer. The

punishment for a false teacher who blasphemed God was death, and that is what they condemned Jesus to.

Then the men began to mistreat Jesus by blindfolding him, spitting on him, and slap him while mocking him. All these were meant to humiliate and degrade Jesus, to break his spirit and body with abuse. But Jesus is calm and does not retaliate. When remembering this later, Peter wrote this:

“For you were called to this because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth; when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.” Peter 2:21-23 (CSB)

This brings to mind the prophecy in Isaiah:

*“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,
That for the transgression of my people, striking was due to Him?”*

Isaiah 53:7-8 (LSB)

If you are a disciple of Jesus, you are to walk in his steps. We have all been insulted or suffered injustice to some degree. Do we handle it like Jesus did? Let's see

how Peter, Jesus' handpicked apostle handled it. The storyline returns to Peter in verse 66.

14:66-73 Peter Denies Jesus

Peter is trying to blend in with the group of servants and guards, but it isn't working very well. A maid recognizes him as an apprentice of Jesus and calls him out. He denies it and goes to stand at the doorway. She doesn't believe him and starts bringing attention to him. He denies it again. A man in the group (who John tells us is a relative of the servant whose ear was cut off) says that he had to be a disciple of Jesus, since he was from the same area. Matthew tells us that Peter had a strong Galilean accent which made it easy to distinguish him from the Jerusalem natives. Peter begins to curse them (calling on God to punish them) and to swear (promise by God to be honest) that he doesn't even know Jesus. I think it is important to note that he is not "swearing" as in saying R-rated words. He is calling on God to vindicate him even though he is lying. Then the rooster crows, and Peter remembered Jesus' prediction of his own denial. Luke adds that Jesus (either through a window, or as he is leaving the room) makes eye contact with Peter. Peter, overwhelmed with his own failure and cowardice, leaves the courtyard and weeps bitterly in his grief and shame.

When Jesus called his disciples, he told them to take up a cross, deny themselves, and follow him, right? Yet here is Peter, in the moment of crisis, is denying Jesus!

I want you to notice WHAT Peter is denying, though. He is NOT denying that Jesus is Messiah, he is denying any connection to or knowledge of Jesus. This is not a

theological issue, but a relational one. Peter is confused about what has happened. He has stopped trusting Jesus. He is in survival mode and has forgotten Jesus' warnings. He is afraid!

Have you ever been afraid to say something about Jesus? Have you ever denied your relationship with Jesus? When Jesus sent the disciples out two by two to declare the gospel earlier in his ministry, he sent them out with this admonition in Matthew 10:16-39.

Do you want life? Do you want the peace and joy promised you? Then you have to acknowledge Jesus as Lord not just in your mind but in your body as you live out what you believe. Most of us won't suffer physical persecution here in the US. What we will face is pressure to act as if we don't know Jesus. You will encounter situations where it is easier to tell a white lie than to be honest. Where it is easier to ignore injustice than to challenge it. Where it is easier to be silent than to correct false ideas about God.

Jesus did not come to bring peace between believers and non-believers- he came to bring peace between us and God. It's up to you whether you will deny him or acknowledge him in your everyday actions.

Study Questions:

1. Why do you think the Jewish Leaders were so eager to bypass their normal procedures and wiggle around the typical due process to prosecute Jesus?
2. Jesus is obviously being charged with lies and in a mockery of justice, but that's also something we face. Can you think of a time when somebody has mocked you or judged you for being a Christian, but had completely wrong ideas about you, or Christianity?
3. In chapter 13, Jesus warned his disciples not to be afraid, yet here Peter is, afraid. Have you ever buckled under pressure as well and found yourself denying your own connection to Jesus?
4. What are some ways you can clearly communicate your allegiance to Jesus to your friends and family?
5. How do you think Peter felt about this denial after the fact?

Mark 15:1-39

It's About the Cross

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Jesus suffered it all for you and me.

Context:

The moment has finally come when Jesus will face the consequence chosen for him by the Jewish crowds. As he is led to the cross, he is mocked and rejected by nearly all. Yet, he expresses hope in God through Psalm 22, even to his dying breath. The next section shows his burial, but also completes Jesus' predictions by showing his rising from the grave!

XXIII It's About the Cross (15:1-39)

- A Trial and Sentence (15:1-15)
- B Mockery by Soldiers (15:16-20)
- C Crucifixion (15:21-32)
- D Final Moments (15:33-39)

If there is one Bible story, and one alone, that people should know, it's this one. Not David and Goliath, not Jonah and the Whale, not even the one where Jesus walks on the water. It's this one. Jesus has concluded his 3 years of teaching and preaching, he's seen blind healed, the lame walk, the dead rise back to life, he's fed multitudes, and he's done incredible miracles. But

all that, all those mighty deeds, pale in comparison to the work he does in this chapter.

When the Gospel of Mark began, it loudly proclaimed “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (CSB) The “Gospel,” the “Good News” wasn’t one of physical healing, it wasn’t one of providing unlimited free food, Jesus wasn’t there to just be a miracle worker, we saw that.

Jesus hadn’t come for that.

“Mark’s Gospel reworks Old Testament and Jewish messianic expectations: the Messiah’s reign and his kingdom are marked not by political and physical triumph but by suffering and defeat. Those who follow him will follow in the Messiah’s footsteps. Jesus has come to liberate his people from their sins and bring them into the new creation.”⁷⁴

But he wouldn’t do that by raising his flag over the field of his slain enemies, he wouldn’t do that by the mighty triumph of a mighty army. He would win by losing. He would only gain that greatest victory by suffering the worst defeat. He would rescue from death by dying. Jesus suffered it all for you and me.

15:1-15 Trial and Sentence

Jesus is hauled before the authorities. First, a meeting of the Jews, then, hauling him to Pilate. The Romans

⁷⁴ A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized. United States, Crossway, 2016.

would typically begin their days with court cases, and the Jews wanted to be the first in line.

“King of the Jews” was a troublesome title. Herod had it, the Herod that tried to kill baby Jesus in Bethlehem. After his disastrous and deadly reign, the Romans ripped that title away from his family, the ones that later ruled. Officially, the Jews had no king. Only Rome was allowed a king. No competition would be tolerated.

Jesus initially replies with the neutral “you say so” but offers little else. Bringing to mind Isaiah 53:7. This fulfilled Scripture, and it amazed and frustrated Pilate. Roman law tried not to execute innocent men. It also didn’t like condemning those that went undefended. It wanted to give people a chance to offer an explanation. In V. 6 Pilate thinks he has found a solution.

While open rebellion against Rome was worthy of the highest punishment, Pilate didn’t want to kill Jesus. His questions revealed nothing condemning. And he didn’t like being manipulated by the Jewish leaders into doing their bidding. He had a habit, as a show of great kindness, to release one prisoner a year, no matter their crime, at Passover. Pilate planned on pushing the crowd to call for Jesus, letting him release the prisoner. But it didn’t go as planned. The chief priests stirred up the crowd against Jesus. They cried out for Barabbas, another crowd favorite.

Barabbas was a rebel. A radical zealot that wanted to overthrow Rome and free Israel. He was a natural choice anyway, and the priests leaned into that. Pilate lost the vote. Barabbas, the murderer, and sinner and

vile one was set free, while the innocent and quiet Son of God would die in his place. Death would come, yet through it, life would be spared. And Jesus is prepped for crucifixion.

15:16-20 Mockery by Soldiers

These soldiers were vile. Like the depraved mob that they were, they called in their buddies to add to the mocking and pain. “King of the Jews” was the title they heard, so they twisted it, mocked it, and scorned it.

A king would need a crown, yes! So, they made one of thorns and jammed it into his head. A king needs a robe! So, they ripped his coat away from his bleeding flesh and tossed on something royal and purple. A king needed a scepter, so they found a reed and began beating him with it. A king needs honor! So, they knelt and bowed and “worshipped” him. They took the king of ages, the king of kings, and treated him to mockery and humiliation. With their work done, they sent Jesus to the cross.

15:21-32 Crucifixion

The Bible doesn't focus on the physical pain of Jesus as much as the utter rejection of Jesus. The passersby mocked him. They bring up the same saying from Mark 14:58, the same accusation. John 2:19 records when Jesus said it. They assumed he meant the Temple, the building, the very structure that he prophesied would be torn down only a couple chapters before. Yes, the Temple would fall. But, the Temple, ultimately, was the dwelling place of God. And Jesus was talking about raising a greater dwelling place, not a building, but a body.

Jesus would allow the temple of his body to be destroyed, that was happening even as the fiery darts of digression were being cast in his face. He wouldn't come down from the cross, though he certainly had the power to do it. His bodily temple would die.

Three days later, things would change.

The priests couldn't help but gloat in their moment of triumph. "He saved others, but he cannot save himself!" At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus turned and asked the Pharisees "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, or save life or to kill?" Mark 3:4 (CSB) Since that time, Jesus has been saving others, even proclaiming "your faith has saved you" on two occasions. (Mark 5:34, 10:52) Jesus is in the business of saving others, yet here, they mock him.

"An ancient Jewish saying carried the idea "before you ask another to save you, see if they can even save themselves." Almost like Jesus earlier proverb "with the blind leading the blind, both will fall into the pit."⁷⁵

Like jumping into the water to save someone is useless if you can't swim yourself. Here, they are mocking the very idea that Jesus can even save others, laughing at all those who trusted in him and followed him. They then pick up the same line of the soldiers earlier. Turning his titles, King of the Jews, and King of Israel, and the Messiah, into sarcastic insults. "Come down!" they

⁷⁵ Lane, William L.. The Gospel of Mark. N.p., Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

cried. “So that we may see and believe.” With everything Jesus had done, they hadn’t believed yet.

Later, after Jesus rose again, an even greater miracle than coming down from the cross, many still didn’t believe! They lacked faith. Finally, the others being killed mocked him. Their taunts echo in Jesus’ ears. Mark doesn’t mention the one that eventually repents, Mark’s point is to highlight the rejection, the hatred, the utterly vile and upside-down world that killed its own creator. Jesus’ death was one without much comfort or help. He was suffering alone. But they didn’t realize that he was suffering for those that were mocking him. And he was suffering for you and me.

15:33-39 Final Moments

It was a dark time. From noon until 3pm, the land suffered under a supernatural darkness. This was no eclipse. It was a sign of the judgment of God. It is a foreshadowing of the darkening of both sun and moon when Jesus returns. (Mark 13:24) Darkness had fallen on Egypt (Exodus 10:22) Darkness clouded God’s presence on Sinai (Deut 5:22) Darkness would again fall with God’s judgment. (Rev 16:10) Darkness fell when the Light of the World was dying. (John 1:4-5) But in this darkness, there was hope.

Jesus cries out in anguish! His words echo out, forlorn and unforgettable. Many see here an abandonment, the first abandonment between God the Father and God the Son. The only moment when Jesus did not, would not, could not communicate with the Father that turned his back on him. Repulsed by sin, the Father steps away in disgust, breaking the communion that

had existed into eternity past. Or that's how some would present it. That's the scene set by many, actually.

However, there could be something else going on here.

Jesus found hope in the Psalms. Jesus quotes the opening words of Psalm 22. The words clash in our heads. God, forsaking, abandoning, leaving his own Son! How could this be? But many of the words and ideas of that Psalm are coming up, not just the opening line.

Psalm 22:1 - Mark 15:34 - With the feeling of abandonment.

Psalm 22:7 - Mark 15:29 - With mocking and scorn.

Psalm 22:18 - Mark 15:24 - With the theft and gambling for his clothes.

This sounds so much like what Christ is going through! The mockery, the humiliation, the living on the brink of death, even the thirst and piercing and casting lots. So much parallels Christ!

In the 1st century, Rabbis would frequently quote the first line of a passage as shorthand for the whole thing. This is common today. If we say "The Lord is my Shepherd" our minds flash to the entirety of Psalm 23. If you say "These are the voyages..." to a Star Trek fan, they will fill in the rest of those famous lines. Jesus was calling to mind the rest of the suffering, pain, rejection, and hurt that was coming. But the Psalm doesn't stop there.

Keep reading.

Jesus was calling to mind that feelings of being forsaken, those feelings of despair, but the Psalmist learned that God has never left, God would deliver, and that God would save in such an incredible way that the very ends of the earth would learn of it and proclaim God's goodness!

The ending of this Psalm very much calls to mind victory and triumph and the faithfulness of God. God seemed silent, God felt far away, but God was working in it all and Jesus was verbalizing his trust in God's plan. God would deliver, in this case, by resurrection. God's victory over the grave would echo out to the whole world. The resurrection of Jesus would be proclaimed all around the globe! And they would declare the righteousness, the goodness, the mercy of God.

That's what Jesus is clinging to in his most desperate moments.

Even in this time, God uses some people to show mercy in a seemingly merciless situation. Some had mercy, but the mockery still continued. Some misheard him. They thought he was calling for Elijah. Many still cling to the hope that Elijah would come before the Messiah. But they missed the fact that Elijah had already come, in John the Baptist. Others came to help. Perhaps this one is gentler. They offer something to drink to him, and seem, perhaps to offer a wistful hope for him, no matter how remote. But no help came, and Jesus died. At his death, some wild things happened. The Temple Curtain ripped in half.

What is up with this?

The Temple chamber, the innermost one, was the Holy of Holies, the place where God's presence was said to dwell. Nobody was allowed to enter God's presence except with a sacrifice, and that, only once a year.

The Day of Atonement.

In fact, provisions were even made for if the priest was struck dead while inside the chamber on this day. This was a serious, solemn, sacred place for a serious, solemn, sacred occasion. Not just anyone could enter into God's place. Not just anyone could approach him. Sin and uncleanness drove mankind away. Ever since the garden, mankind has been fallen, corrupt, and crooked. They could not stand before a perfect God. The way was shut. But, at Jesus' death, the price of sin was paid, the punishment was suffered, and the innocent one died for all mankind. Sin's payment was done, the sentence carried out, and the wrath was satisfied. No more would sin keep mankind at bay. That sin was killed on the cross. Now, through Jesus, the way to enter God's presence was open!

It was ripped from top to bottom. Why is that significant? Heaven had reached down and torn open the way, removing the barrier, and calling all mankind to come to him. Atonement was made, and access to God was opened to all! But that's not all.

The Roman proclaimed his true identity. Mark 1 opened with declaring Jesus is the Son of God. We've seen similar titles on the lips of demons, but here is a

Roman, a pagan, coming to grips with everything that has just happened. He is realizing who Jesus is. He is connecting the dots. Jesus' ministry isn't limited to Jews, or to only good people. This was a Roman, in fact, the very Roman that hours before had ordered his men to crucify Jesus. But now, after seeing Jesus for who he truly is, the only words from his mouth are words of worship.

This is incredible. The women saw it all. We'll talk about them next time. They saw this, but they would see more, much more, soon. Jesus' death was anything but ordinary. Jesus suffered it all for you and me. In Mark 8:31, Mark 9:31, and Mark 10:34 it mentions, in driving detail, the mockery, the hatred, the spitting, the death. Psalm 22 only highlights that even more, with explicit detail. But both offer hope. Both speak of a future for the dead Messiah. Both speak of something beyond death, something utterly indescribable in power and majesty. Something to be proclaimed to many generations to come, something that will change the very course of history itself. Something that would echo out to the far reaches of the earth, something encompassing the mocking priests, the hardened criminals, the cruel Roman soldiers, and even you and me.

The Centurion cried out "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39) The thief repented and begged for Jesus to remember him. (Luke 23:42) The priests, many of them, ended up believing in Jesus. (Acts 6:7) And you, even you, have the opportunity to believe. (John 3:16)

Study Questions:

1. How does this passage demonstrate the radical difference between Jesus' mission, and the false expectations many had about the Messiah?
2. Mark emphasizes mockery and insults and rejection over and over, from all directions. Why do you think he emphasizes that, instead of the raw, physical pain that so many modern preachers emphasize?
3. Read Psalm 22. How has it helped your appreciation of the Psalm, and of Jesus' death, by comparing the two passages?
4. Once again, faithful women are highlighted. Why do you think Mark mentions them, and their role in Jesus' ministry, now?
5. We closed noting how many of the people mentioned that had rejected Jesus later turned and embraced him. Can you think of somebody you know who has rejected Jesus, and even mocked him? Take a moment to pray for them and think of a way to point them back to Jesus. They are not beyond his mercy!

Mark 15:40-16:8

The Day Everything Changed

Elisabeth Pritchard

Main Idea: The worshipful service of devoted servants gave way to astounded fear when Jesus came back from the dead.

Context:

Following on the account of his rejection and death, Jesus followers finally return to the story to bury their Lord. Yet, that incredible dedication is rewarded as those very women are the first to see him alive! They rush to tell others, but the final section of the book reveals the disciples once more falling into their old habits of unbelief.

XXIV The Day Everything Changed (15:40-16:8)

- A The Women Around the Cross (15:40-41)
- B Jesus Body is Laid in the Tomb (15:42-47)
- C The Women Return to the Tomb (16:1-3)
- D Jesus is Alive! (16:4-8)

Who is Jesus? What did he come here to do? When we left the story last time, all those things had been called into question: everything was upside down. Jesus had been tried, sentenced by his own people, who should

have accepted him. He is crucified, and everyone saw it happen. He dies yet is believed on by the last person you would expect: the Roman, gentile soldier. At the same moment, the temple veil (which separated the mercy seat and ark of the covenant) was ripped from top to bottom as though by God. The strange darkness which covered the area from noon till now suddenly lifted, and everyone was greeted with the sickening sight of a dead rabbi hanging on a cross between two thieves who were still fighting for breath.

Now imagine a movie camera panning from this gory sight down to those standing around and witnessing this execution. If you didn't already know the story, who would you expect to see standing there? Let's look. Mark 15, verse 40.

Mark 15:40-41 The Women Around the Cross

You do not see Jesus' apostles kneeling for a last word from their rabbi. You see three devout women who have left their homes to care for the needs of the Messiah. The three women named here are Mary of Magdala out of whom Jesus cast 7 demons, Mary wife of Clopas and mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John and sister of Jesus' mother. Notice that Mark tells us they followed Jesus. This may seem like "duh" to us, but at that time, women were not allowed to apprentice to or "follow" a rabbi.

It is important to note that the Scripture did not prevent it, only Jewish tradition. Jesus' allowing women to follow him was bringing back the truth that male and female were created in the image of God and both

of equal value. And to add further weight to that, here we are at the crucifixion where the only people brave enough to watch are the women who believed in Jesus. There are 3 of them: this mirrors the “inner three” of Jesus’ male disciples (Peter, James, and John) who got to see certain miracles and the transfiguration of Christ. Here we have the “inner three” of Jesus’ female disciples. From here on out, Mark’s gospel is going to focus on the role of these women in the resurrection story.

There is another symbolism here- that of the woman’s seed crushing the serpent’s head. Back in Genesis, after the first sin of humanity, God promises that eventually there will come a man born of woman who will strike/crush/bruise Satan’s head even as Satan strikes his heel. Now here on the cross, Jesus is nailed through his hands and feet- Satan has “won”! But the women who having been waiting for the Messiah to come are going to be the ones that witness his victory.

Mark 15:42-47 Jesus’ Body is Laid in the Tomb

It’s the day before the Sabbath, and the Sanhedrin did not want the bodies on the cross on the Sabbath. Jewish law also required that any dead person be buried before sunset, and Jesus was already dead. It could take the other men days to die, and they did not want it to “ruin” their day of worship. John tells us that they requested that all three men have their legs broken (which would cause them to suffocate). But Jesus was already dead, so they pierced his side with a spear. Upon hearing this, Joseph of Arimathea goes and asks Pilate for Jesus’ body. He was part of the Sanhedrin which we learned about last time, but also secretly a

disciple of Jesus. We see here that he was looking forward to what? The thing that Jesus was bringing to earth. But Jesus is dead now, and Joseph wants to give him a decent burial.

Pilate is shocked that Jesus is already dead, it would normally take days. He checked with the centurion in charge of the execution (the one who declared Jesus the Son of God), and upon confirmation, allows Joseph to take the body. This is astonishing because Jesus had been executed as an insurrectionist and blasphemer. Part of that punishment was to be buried in a shallow grave with no marker as a mark of shame. Yet Pilate, either as a favor to Joseph, or because of his own guilt, allows the corpse to be buried with honor.

Joseph takes the corpse off the cross and wraps it in strips of linen cloth. Then John's gospel tells us that Nicodemus (another religious leader) brings an extremely valuable gift of 75 pounds of burial spices with which they together anoint the body for burial. This is an act of humility and worship: it was considered a great honor to bury a religious scholar, but normally the anointing would be done by a family member. The Law stated that bodies had to be buried before sundown, so Joseph hurried and placed Jesus in his recently finished tomb which located in a garden outside of Jerusalem. This brings to mind another Old Testament quotation.

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.”

Isaiah 53:9 (CSB)

Joseph rolled a large stone over the entrance and hurried back home before the Sabbath curfew. Two of the ladies had followed and took note of the exact location of the tomb and then hurried home themselves.

Imagine the emotions being experienced right now. Maybe the men were wondering why they hadn't spoken on Jesus' behalf: could they have stopped the execution? Maybe the women were wondering if this was the Messiah after all: did they leave their homes for nothing? They might have been afraid of being arrested themselves for being associated with Jesus. The 12 were! They spend the Sabbath day mourning together in secret.

Mark 16:1-3 The Women Return to the Tomb

As soon as the mandated Sabbath rest was over, the three women went and bought burial spices to anoint Jesus' body. I also want to mention that the other gospels name Joanna and other women as being there as well. However, Mark focuses on these three as he has introduced them earlier. Now why did they do bring spices when Joseph and Nicodemus had already done this? There are at least three ideas why: the women didn't know that the men had already anointed with spices, the men had not completed the work because of time constraints, and the women wanted to contribute as an act of respect. So early Sunday morning, as soon as the sun was up, they went to the tomb. They were unaware that the Romans had placed a guard, so they were wondering how they would open the door to the tomb as it was large.

Mark 16:4-8 Jesus is Alive!

Let's just say that this is NOT what they were expecting! What were they expecting? What did they see instead? The stone door is rolled open, so they enter. They were frightened to see a young man sitting there. Matthew describes him as an angel with surreally white clothing and a bright countenance. What does he tell them? Don't be afraid! He tells them he knows who they are looking for, but he is risen. He prompts them to look at the spot where his body had been placed which is now empty. Luke tells us that the linen cloths he had been wrapped in were laying there neatly.

Then he commands them to go tell the other disciples (and Peter) that Jesus will meet them in Galilee like he had told them before. Notice how he differentiates between the 10 disciples and Peter. Why do you think he did that? Peter had publicly denied Jesus. John tells us that he even went back to fishing. But is God done with Peter? No. This message is for him as well.

So, the women ran from the tomb, amazed and shaken. They speak to no one along the way, but immediately return to the group of disciples hiding in the city. Next lesson, you will learn how Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and others, but let's just recap all that happened here.

After 3 years of public ministry, Jesus declared himself as Messiah and was received by cheering crowds on Palm Sunday. He spends several days teaching and showing himself in Jerusalem and angers the religious leaders. They have him arrested after the Passover dinner and condemn him to death in the highest

religious court of the land. Most of his followers are in hiding, and his right-hand man Peter denies him publicly. Jesus is brought to the Roman authorities for execution, and after some persuasion, they agree. Jesus is nailed to a cross and dies after 6 hours while his mother and a few followers watch. His body is hurriedly wrapped and placed in a nearby tomb; then all the Jews go home to observe Sabbath. After Sabbath is over, several of his closest female followers return to the tomb to anoint the body, but he is gone. An angel tells them Jesus is risen and will meet them in Galilee. They run back to the other disciples: afraid.

Why were they afraid? They had seen a glimpse of the power of God. They had seen a being from heaven itself. Their teacher had been resurrected, but they did not see him. While what they saw was good news, it terrified them nonetheless. However, that fear did not paralyze them; they ran to do as they were commanded. We have a very similar command: Follow Jesus and tell others about him. May we do so as bravely as these women did.

Study Questions:

1. Why is it significant that women were not only highlighted before the resurrection, but became the first witnesses to it?
2. What do you think helped Nicodemus finally step out and publicly aid the mission of Jesus?
3. How do you think everyone felt once Jesus was dead, and stayed dead for several days?
4. Why were the women afraid? Do you think this was a bad fear/terror, or more like the “fear of the Lord” often mentioned in the Old Testament?
5. Have you ever had an experience where your fear, despair, or pain were suddenly turned around by God?

Mark 16:9-20

Passing the Baton to the Disciples

Shelby Pritchard

Main Idea: Rather than wallow in disbelief, disciples of Jesus should embrace the reality of his resurrection and continue his mission of preaching the Gospel to all creation through the power of the God.

Context:

Closing the book brings many things full circle. The women proclaim Jesus' resurrection as the last section hinted at, but the disciples once more fall into unbelief. This time, Jesus' appearance and speech seem to give them new strength, and his promise of power and miracles prepares them for the incredible task ahead of continuing Jesus' mission by proclaiming his Gospel to the entire world.

XXV Passing the Baton to the Disciples (16:9-20)

A Trust Him! (16:9-14)

B Obey Him! (16:12-13)

C God's Power is on the Move! (16:17-20)

“Because” is a very powerful word. You should have milk and Oreos together *because* they pair well. You should workout and practice your skills at home *because* that'll make you a much better player on the field. You should put deodorant on *because*, well, I shouldn't have

to elaborate on that one. But if you've ever been to a summer church camp, you should know why.

“Because” can easily change the game. The right reason or the right motivation can make all the difference.

So far, through the book of Mark, we've seen a lot of doubts and problems with the disciples. From empty boasts, to the outright rebuking of Jesus, and even flatly refusing to get the message, the disciples have failed Jesus over and over. They failed to perform miracles, failed to understand who he was, and failed to stay loyal to him. But all that changed because of something.

Because of what? Let's take a look.

9-14 Trust Him!

This whole section cries out for the belief and trust that the disciples, so far, have been lacking.

9-11 Mary and her Testimony

We saw last time this incredible and mysterious image of an angel just chilling at Jesus' open, and empty, tomb. But there wasn't a sign of Jesus yet. This lesson, that changes! There's a little flashback to fill us in. That morning, that wonderful Sunday morning, Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene and told her to tell the others that he's alive.

Apart from the tail end of chapter 15, Mary's been completely absent from Mark's account, so he provides a few extra details here. Jesus, at some point, had rescued her from seven demons. We don't know how

long she had been following Jesus. She first appears in Luke 8:2, 3 and makes appearances in all four Gospels. While the Bible does tell us that Jesus healed her from seven demons, Scripture never portrays this event, nor even elaborates on it. (So, *The Chosen's* dramatic scenes were entirely invented for the TV show, along with many other scenes and entire storylines.) We do know she was one of the few present at his crucifixion. Even when his disciples had run off she stayed faithful!

Perhaps as a reward for that, or for another reason we'll talk about in a second, she gets to see Jesus! Like any conversation with Jesus, it's life-changing! Mark doesn't tell us what either said, but we don't have to guess. John records this conversation in his Gospel. (John 20:11-18) Even without the exact words, Mark's readers no doubt could easily guess at the contents. Then, she dashes over to announce it to the disciples. This was news that shouldn't be kept secret! But what about those disciples?

Those guys were unfaithful, un-loyal, unhelpful, and consumed by grief and sorrow. Reflecting yet again their hard hearts and stubborn sinfulness. Their sorrow didn't need to last forever, but there was a problem. They didn't listen. They refused to believe. And it won't be the last time they do that. Scripture doesn't tell us why, but we could speculate a couple of reasons. Perhaps they didn't trust her, perhaps they thought she was confused or hallucinating or even lying for attention. But God is rich in mercy, and he sends another witness to their doorstep.

12-13 Emmaus Road disciples and their testimony

Here, we get an abbreviated version of this familiar story. Two disciples encounter Jesus, dash back into town, tell the disciples, but what does the end of V. 13 tell us? The disciples didn't believe these guys either. After all Jesus has done, after he predicted his death three times, after two independent appearances, they still don't think he's alive. Much like a flat-earth adherent today, their minds are made up and no amount of evidence will change it. These disciples are only wallowing in the muddy waters of their own doubt, and have, so far, rejected the incredible news that had come their way. Yet, God is still rich in mercy.

Now, we may wonder why Jesus didn't appear first to the disciples. We may wonder why Mary got to see him first, then the other two, who also didn't seem to be part of the 11. (Remember, the 12th, Judas, is now dead.)

One commentator has an interesting thought: "The Apostles may have been allowed to hear of the Resurrection before seeing the risen Christ in order that they might know from personal experience what it was to have to depend upon the testimony of others, as would be the case with their converts."⁷⁶ While Paul boasts of a number of individuals that had seen the risen Jesus, it wouldn't take long for the church to continue on, and the march of time to slowly rid the church of all the original eyewitnesses. Even in their day, not everyone would have actually seen the risen Lord, and the disciples needed to understand the

⁷⁶ Plumer, Alfred. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1914. Page 372

importance of testimony, of speaking the good news and bringing it to others. They needed to know how it felt to hear of a resurrection from the lips of others. They needed to embrace the reality of Jesus' resurrection, and how to tell others about that. Even if, so far, they haven't. Finally, Jesus does appear.

14 Jesus rebuked their unbelief

This account is quite a bit different than the stories we're used to. No details about "Doubting Thomas," no eating food to prove he's real, no offering to stick fingers in his side, none of those familiar elements. It's the same occasion, but a totally different emphasis. Jesus enters and rebukes them. Like, that's it. Yet again, Mark doesn't give us Jesus' exact words here. He's content to explain the whole encounter up through V. 14.

15-16 Obey Him!

These words bring to mind the Great Commission that closes out Matthew's Gospel. And rightly so! Looking at the end of the chapter, these may have been spoken on the same occasion, and either way, hit the same themes beat-for-beat. Preaching the Gospel, baptism, and as we'll see in a moment, God's enduring power being with them the entire time. They can go from unbelieving, weeping, faithless cowards to brave, powerful, courageous preachers of the Gospel!

Because! Because of Christ.

Abe Kuruvilla once commented: "God's grace enables disciples to be restored in times of failure and such disciples respond in faithfulness, extending the mission

of Jesus by resuming the Trip of Discipleship. This is a crucial aspect of following Jesus, for failure will happen; it is inevitable - everyone is fallible. Disciples need to know that all is not ended if they do fail.”⁷⁷ Or, more briefly, “Disciples can overcome spiritual failure only by meeting their risen Lord and fainting strength from him.”⁷⁸

Christ fully expected them to overcome it. Why? Because of his command in V. 16. Christ was commissioning these failures to go and preach the Gospel. God hasn't given up on them! Christ didn't think they were useless, Christ still had plans for them! How convicting, then, when we are so quick to write others off and abandon them.

But, like us, they probably heard this with a large helping of self-doubt. Just like us, they probably felt skeptical about their ability to follow through. Yes, there's that whole saying about “try, try again,” but if we're honest, we don't like failure. We don't like messing up, and if we can keep from that, if we can stay away from that, we will. The easiest way to avoid failing a task is to never take it up. That way, you know your own weaknesses don't even have the chance to fail.

Sadly, that's how too many of us operate. But, even if they were thinking that way, Jesus addressed that idea. Even before they had time to protest and remind him

⁷⁷ Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers*. United States, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012. Page 359

⁷⁸ Osborne, Grant R.. *Mark (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*. United States, Baker Publishing Group, 2014. Page 320

about their own powerlessness, Jesus informed them where the true strength, the true power, the true and lasting success would come from.

Their power? Nope. That already messed up. Their strength? What strength? Their ability, loyalty, and hope? No. That has already proven to be false and weak and cowardly. Instead, Jesus chooses something better: his power. But before we get into that, we have a rather interesting, and slightly confusing, verse to handle. Verse 16 is the first of a series of several highly abused, oft dismissed, and potentially misunderstood verses.

Verse 16 covers the twin subjects of belief and baptism in two basic phrases. Because this verse has been so twisted, it's vital to cover them together, rather than rip them apart as many, even if unknowingly do. The first phrase mentions belief, baptism, then salvation, all in that specific order. This seems, at first, to present the idea that baptism is required for salvation. It takes belief, then baptism, to achieve salvation. Stephen Hughes, a minister at Rutherford Church of Christ, made this abundantly clear in his statement: "What that verse teaches is what you need to do to be saved: believe and be baptized.⁷⁹" In fact, it's this thinking that has led several to making a similar mistake.

"In the profession of faith prescribed by Pope Innocent III in 1210, we read: "We believe that all sins are remitted [taken away/paid for] in baptism, both

⁷⁹ Hughes, Stephen. "The Suffering Servant." Sunday Class. Sunday Class, 30 May 2021, Rutherfordton, Rutherford Church of Christ. <https://www.rutherfordtonchurchofchrist.com/mark87/>

original sin and those sins which have been voluntarily committed.”⁸⁰

Others, like the Church of Christ, may claim: “...that baptism is a work that God requires before He grants salvation. For the Church of Christ, baptism and confession are no different from faith and repentance—they are what God requires before He grants salvation to a person.”⁸¹

Two problems arise with that interpretation. First, which baptism? We know that the Holy Spirit, at salvation, renews us, restores us, and begins to indwell us. This is sometimes called the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and is separate from the Baptism by water. Perhaps it’s talking about that. It’s unlikely, and I’m uncertain of any commentators that go that route, but it may be conceivable.

Second, look at the end. The condition for avoiding condemnation is belief. Only belief. In V. 11 we get the reference to unbelief, and in V. 17 we get another mention of believing. This matches the unnumbered multitude of verses in Romans, John, Ephesians, and many other NT writings that proclaim believing as the condition. (Like John 3:16!) Additionally, the Thief on the cross is an example of salvation without baptism!

⁸⁰ The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church. United States, Encyclopedia Press, 1913.

⁸¹ GotQuestions.org. “Is the Church of Christ a Good Biblical Church?” GotQuestions.org, 7 May 2008, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Church-of-Christ.html>.

(Luke 23:43) Thus, we can easily conclude that the deciding factor is not, in fact, baptism, but belief, and belief alone. Something the Reformation made abundantly clear in their beautiful cry of “*sola fide!*” (Faith alone!)

Additionally, verse 17 starts out with the very telling: “And these signs will accompany those who believe:”(LEB) The condition moving forward, the prime determining factor is belief. But speaking of that, let’s continue on to the next section.

17-20 God’s Power is on the Move!

17-18 God’s power would authenticate that message
If verse 16 is a single battleground, 17 and 18 are an entire region devastated by war. From wild-eyed charismatic televangelists to snake-handling Appalachian congregations, these verses have been used to promote quite a few wild, dangerous, and utterly stupid activities. But, as an interesting quirk of Divine Providence, these are only the only verses bringing in truly unique Markian material. Nearly everything else in the Longer Ending is echoed, in more or less detail, in other places. Yet, here, Mark gives us something that is unique, and well worth our time discussing.

The context is set by the start of V. 17. What’s cool is that this starts with the same theme that’s run all through this chapter. Belief. Previously, the Disciples had failed to believe. Then, Jesus rebuked them for unbelief. Then, belief was set as the requirement for salvation, and now, we see belief is the precursor to even more. While the word is less common in Mark’s

gospel, signs have nevertheless been a hot button issue. The Pharisees demanded signs in 8:11-12, Mark 13 speaks of the sign of these things happening (13:4) and the signs of the false prophets. (13:22) And finally, Judas gave a sign to the mob by kissing Jesus. (14:44) So far, that word hasn't exactly landed in the best of contexts.

Jesus, however, has done plenty of positive and helpful signs. (Even if Mark rarely used the word for Jesus' actions, sometimes opting for "miracles" instead, like in 6:2,5 and 9:39.) Either way, these actions were done to authenticate the message of Jesus, and now, the followers of Jesus. While they've performed signs before (Mark 6:12, 13) this contains several echoes, but also several new aspects. Like in Mark 6, Jesus promises power to those he is sending out to preach. Power that he specifies will manifest in various ways.

Mark 6 speaks about casting out demons, and healing with oil. Mark 16 also speaks of casting out demons, (an action we see echoed in the book of Acts) but then continues off into a new direction from there. Driving out demons is self-explanatory, and hardly unexpected as they had done that before, and it was a large part of Jesus' ministry.

Speaking new tongues will quickly come into play at Pentecost, (Acts 2) the early church (Acts 10) and echo into the Corinthian church as well. (I Corinthians 12-14) Though, it should be noted this is the only mention of the gift of tongues in the Gospels.

Charismatic believers would gladly latch onto these verses as enduring norms for all believers, often citing

their own experiences with ecstatic babblings, and Cessationists would be quick to clarify these statements with other Biblical passages on the subject, Mark brushes past any sort of debate into far, far stranger territory. His focus is not on that debate. Passing out of the realm of commonly referenced spiritual gifts, Mark then cites two more signs that have proven far more decisive and confusing.

While an NPR report in 2013 found around 125 snake-handling churches in the US,⁸² the reputation of these churches far, far outweighs their actual influence. Perhaps, in part, to documentaries like *Snake Salvation*, a National Geographic production that followed several snake-handling pastors around for a time. (One of the featured pastors sadly died from snake bites shortly after the series aired.⁸³) Commonly the subjects of ridicule, from both inside and outside Christendom, these churches believe it is a sign of faith in God to deliberately handle snakes in their services. Every service, at some point, the congregants will take love poisonous snakes out of their cages and sing, preach, dance, and more with several snakes in hand. They claim this is demonstrating their complete faith in God's promise here.

⁸² Burnett, John. "Snake-Handling Preachers Open up about 'Takin' up Serpents'." NPR, NPR, 4 Oct. 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/10/04/226838383/snake-handling-preachers-open-up-about-takin-up-serpents>.

⁸³ Bacon, John. "Family, Friends Say Goodbye to Snake-Handling Pastor." USA Today, 19 Feb. 2014, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/02/19/snake-handling-pastor-funeral/5609843/>.

But is that a valid look at this passage? Is deliberately carrying around poisonous snakes each and every service really what God intended for his people? Let's take a look. Like the first two signs, the poison of snakes does show up in Acts. Paul is briefly shipwrecked, and while gathering wood and dealing with a campfire, a snake leaps out and bites the Apostle. He shakes it off, goes about his day unharmed, and God uses that as a sign to the Islanders of God's power.

Notice the differences! Paul wasn't deliberately handling the snake. He didn't willingly put himself in danger. This wasn't a worship time or a church service. He didn't taunt the snake, toss the snake, purposefully grab the snake. Nope. Not at all. Also, this particular gift isn't otherwise mentioned in the Gospels, or Acts, or anywhere else in the Bible.

We'll talk more about sign gifts in general later, but already, there's enough difference that we should be very skeptical. Additionally, some commentators would lean into a bit more allegorical interpretation as an alternative to the snake-handlers' assertions. "If Satan is a snake, then his children are also snakes. So then, I take it that our 'snakes' are human beings who have chosen to serve Satan, who have sold themselves to evil. I conclude that the 'snakes' in Luke 10:19 are the same as those in Mark 16:18.⁸⁴" While I find that too allegorical and needlessly symbolic, it shows that the charismatic view is far from the only one purposed.

⁸⁴ Pickering Thm, Wilbur M.. God Has Preserved His Text!. N.p., Amazon Digital Services LLC - KDP Print US, 2022. Page 226

The final gift is perhaps the most puzzling. Drinking poison isn't something we see in Acts or the Gospels at all. There is one early church account that matches these qualities. Eusebius (4th century) says that Papias (2nd Century) told this story: "And he tells another wonderful story of Justus, surnamed Barsabbas: that he drank a deadly poison, and yet, by the grace of the Lord, suffered no harm"⁸⁵ This man, mentioned in Acts 1:23, was a candidate for taking Judas' place among the Apostles. We don't have enough information to know much, but it seems he also didn't deliberately expose himself on a regular basis to poisons but was rather saved on a single occasion.

"All these signs: exorcisms, healings, protection from poisons, are in the same category. [They are for] Additional evidence for the establishing of the proper church doctrines. It's not for every believer. It's not for every season."⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:12 shows that certain signs were primarily focused on, and were categorized by, the Apostles. Those signs were not for being a constant, common, continuing Christian experience, but rather, exactly as the text says, in Mark 16:20, "confirming" the word and work of the Apostles.

⁸⁵ Eusebius of Caesaria. (1890). *The Church History of Eusebius*. In P. Schaff & H. Wace (Eds.), A. C. McGiffert (Trans.), *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine* (Vol. 1, p. 172). New York: Christian Literature Company.

⁸⁶ Mike Winger, written notes for Winger, Mark, "Interpreting the Longer Ending" Mark Series, YouTube, August 2021

Providing an initial foundation for the church. (Eph 2:20)

Mark's Gospel has emphasized, over and over, that following God will result in suffering, hurt, pain, and rejection. These gifts were not designed to be an invincibility cheat-code, but rather, occasionally outbursts of God's power for the laying of the foundation of the church by the Apostles and those of their generation. Most importantly, these gifts were not to draw flashy attention to the person, but to exalt God and God's Word and work. Speaking of that, Jesus has one last thing to finish up here.

19 Jesus ascended and sat at God's right hand.

Jesus ascends, taken up by God, and sitting down at God's right hand. His work was done. He bought redemption, and "it is finished." He is now enthroned in power, eagerly waiting for his return. But just as his work is done, he has passed the baton to his disciples.

20 The Disciples obeyed, and God empowered their evangelism

At the beginning of Mark, John the Baptist preaches, suffers, dies, and the baton is fully passed to Jesus. Jesus' own ministry grows, he preaches and heals, then dies and rises again. He then, having run his course, passed the baton to his disciples to labor in God's plan. As they grew old and passed on, they passed the touch to the next generation, and they the one after them. Now, it's our turn.

Here's the awesome part. These cowardly, unbelieving disciples were changed! Jesus' power has transformed them, empowered them, and provided for them! Now, they have launched out, boldly preaching, teaching, and helping those around them to learn more about Jesus. Finally, they fully step into their role of true disciples. Finally, they are faithful to their Rabbi. Finally, they are ready to serve God well.

And God is working through them at every step. And he is the same God that works through you, too.

Carry the Torch!

“At the end of the Gospel, this striking and open challenge to the reader/disciple assumes critical importance: Will the baton be faithfully carried by the next generation of disciples?⁸⁷ Will you carry it?

The question is asked: Will you pick up the torch and faithfully suffer for God, or will you remain in stubborn unbelief? Rather than wallow in disbelief, disciples of Jesus should embrace the reality of his resurrection and continue his mission of preaching the Gospel to all creation through the power of the God.

While God may not give you the exact same gifts as he did the Apostles, God has given you the tools you need to serve him. He will work through you, and he will use you to change the lives of others. He will empower you and aid you and comfort you through your service to him.

⁸⁷ Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers*. United States, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012. Page 358

Embrace him, embrace his mission! Commit to tell others about him! We started this lesson speaking about the word “because.” It’s a powerful motivator. You can be bold in telling others about Jesus, even if it means suffering, BECAUSE God will empower you and help you.

Because God is for us, we will win. Because God works in us, we don’t need to be afraid to serve him. Because God is in us, we can commit to his work. Because God is for us, we can endure suffering for his name and cause, knowing it is worth it all in the end.

Because of God we must abandon our doubt, our fears, and our failures, putting them behind us and looking ahead to the work of God.

Study Questions:

1. In what ways have you failed to believe God? How has he helped you overcome that unbelief and gain confidence in him and his plan?
2. Have you ever heard anything about these verses on poison and snakes before? What did you think previously? How has this helped clear up, or potentially muddle, your understanding of those verses?
3. Jesus passes on the torch to his disciples, then leaves. How are you fulfilling his commission to spread the Gospel to others?
4. How have you seen God work in your life to promote spreading the Gospel?
5. What are some incredible miracles you've seen or heard God do for his people?
6. What are some of the biggest lessons you've learned over this entire study?
7. How do you view the Gospel of Mark differently now, then before?
8. What actions have you changed over this study, and how have you seen God bless because of that?
9. What have you learned about God over this study?

The Ending of Mark

Addressing the Controversy

As any observant reader would already know, the last section of Mark has some curious questions around it. While older translations, like the KJV, include verses 9-20 without any note or controversy while newer translations and modern study bibles aren't so simple.

Nearly all newer translations have footnotes casting doubt on the authenticity of Mark 16:9-20, which is where most readers would first encounter this claim. These footnotes often speak of "some manuscripts" omitting the text, as well as mentioning "other endings." Because the standard printed Greek texts used today (NA28 and UBS5) place these verses in brackets, and many well-respected scholars are adamantly against their inclusion, some commentators and pastors refuse to address these verses and end their works at Verse 8.

I, obviously, did not. Partly, because I do think they are authentic, and partly because there is a severe lack of exegetical work on those verses, leaving those Christians that do accept these words without sufficient study tools and aids. If for no other reason, I'd want to help those brothers in Christ in their further studies as they explore that text.

I also want to take a few moments to explain why I believe it is authentic. Word of warning, this section is going to be far more technical and footnote heavy than the previous lessons. This wasn't taught in this form,

and the information here is for extra study. I'm sorry if you get lost in the specialized terms but specificity is necessary in these kinds of things.

The Art of Textual Criticism

All throughout modern Bibles, and especially in the New Testament, are footnotes explaining slight manuscript differences. Often saying something similar to “some manuscripts add” or “the majority of manuscripts omit” or something similar. What's up with this?

If you haven't ever heard the term “Textual Criticism” don't freak out.

I'd highly recommend that you check out several resources on the subject if you are interested in learning more.

- **Video Series:** Textual Confidence Collective⁸⁸
- **Book:** An Introduction to the Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge⁸⁹
- **Class Lectures:** Dan Wallace's class on Biblical Training⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Berg, Timothy, et al. “Home.” The Textual Confidence Collective, 22 Aug. 2022, <https://textualconfidence.com/>.

⁸⁹ Jongkind, Dirk. An Introduction to the Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge. United States, Crossway, 2019.

⁹⁰ Wallace, Daniel. “Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism.” BiblicalTraining.org,

The Ending of Mark

While we often associate “criticism” with a negative, harmful, bias attitude, that’s not the way it’s meant here. It’s meant similarly to a film critic today, a person who deeply analyzes, examines, and expresses what is good and bad about a film. In our case, it’s experts that gather, study, analyze, and speak about the textual data for our Bibles.

Until the printing press was invented in the Middle Ages, all documents were copied by hand, chapter by chapter, word by word, letter by letter. This included Bibles. Of course, Bibles are really, really long documents, and scribes are, like us, human. So, in the over 5,000 surviving Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, we see typical human behaviors. A misspelled word there, a repeated word there, or even a missing word here. Very, very, very few of these errors are remotely concerning. After all, several ways of spelling “John” or “Mary” are no concern for the message of the text. One expert even stated “perhaps as few as 0.2% of textual variants are both meaningful and viable.”⁹¹

But every once in a very, very, long while, these differences between the handwritten manuscripts are a bit more dramatic. This passage is one of only two very dramatic passages. And don’t worry, we’re getting to the evidence.

<https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/institute/nt605-textual-criticism>.

⁹¹ Wallace, Dan. *Fragments of Truth*. Faithlife Films, 2018

This study isn't meant to be exhaustive by any means, but to give a quick survey of the evidence for those teachers and readers curious about the subject. Also, it's meant to help curb the unfortunately high amount of misinformation spread about this passage.

The Data

Greek Evidence

Beginning with the language that the New Testament was written in, Greek witnesses are considered to be the primary evidence in matters of textual debate.

Textual Scholar James Snapp helpfully sums up the data: "At last count, 1,653 Greek manuscripts include Mark 16:9–20. (Some of them are damaged but show that they had the whole passage when they were pristine). Three Greek manuscripts end the text of Mark at 16:8. Eight Greek manuscripts have the so-called Shorter Ending (given above in italics from the ESV footnote). And all eight proceed to include 16:9 (a few of these eight manuscripts are fragments which, due to damage, do not have all twelve verses)."⁹²

Specially, those Greek witnesses omitting the verses are: α , B, and 304. The first two are the famous, well-respected, and ancient. They are Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Both are regarded as very old and very reliable and their testimony shouldn't be dismissed

⁹² Snapp, James. "A Case for the Longer Ending of Mark by James Snapp." Text & Canon Institute, Phoenix Seminary, 1 June 2022, <https://textandcanon.org/a-case-for-the-longer-ending-of-mark/>.

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lightly. The last, 304, is a far later medieval manuscript with commentary. Vaticanus, however, curiously has a very strange blank space, more than large enough to fit the long ending, after verse 8.

Quotations

Other sources of evidence for textual analysis are sermons and letters at the time. Often vastly predating our earliest manuscripts, these quotes not only record the text, but also show the attitude that the earliest Christians had towards this passage.

Bruce Metzger notes “Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius show no knowledge of the existence of these verses.”⁹³ But Metzger later retracted the last name as Eusebius quotes from these verses three times. He does, however, note the controversy regarding their authenticity. Clement and Origen both had a habit of neglecting Mark’s Gospel, commonly quoting only from the other three. Clement, for example, only seems to quote from four of Mark’s sixteen chapters,⁹⁴ so his not quoting from Mark 16 is hardly strong evidence for its exclusion.

However, Jerome (early 400’s) while including it in the Vulgate, noted that very few of the Greek Manuscripts

⁹³ Metzger, Bruce Manning. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. United Kingdom, Clarendon Press, 1964. Page 226

⁹⁴ Cosaert, Carl P.. *The Text of the Gospels in Clement of Alexandria*. United States, Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.

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he knew of had it.⁹⁵ He wasn't the only one to note the controversy regarding the text.

For the longer ending, Tatian (172, in his Diatessaron), and Irenaeus (c. 184, in Book 3, chapter 10 of *Against Heresies*) use material from Mark 16:9-20.⁹⁶ Both of these far predate the two Greek manuscripts lacking the Longer Ending, and show no sign of the later controversies mentioned by Jerome.

Dean Burgon argued extensively for the inclusion of the Longer Ending based on evidence from early Christian writers, though his 1871 work is unable to access more recent discoveries and evidence.⁹⁷

Ancient Translations

Other witnesses include Bible translations in other languages.

“The oldest Old Latin manuscript (VL 1 = Codex Bobiensis, from the fourth or fifth century) concludes at Mark 16:8 with a version of the Shorter Ending and lacks 16:9–20. The oldest Syriac manuscript (the Sinaitic Syriac, from the fourth century) ends at 16:8. The oldest Sahidic manuscript (sa 1 = P. Palau-Ribes Inv. Nr. 182, from the fifth century) ends at 16:8. The earliest evidence we have for the Christian Palestinian

⁹⁵ Elliott, Keith, et al. *Perspectives on the Ending of Mark: 4 Views*. United States, B&H Publishing Group, 2008.

⁹⁶ Winger, Mike “100+ hours of research. Is the longer ending of Mark authentic?” *Mark Series*, August 23, 2021

⁹⁷ John W. Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark* Oxford, England: James Parker and Co., 1871

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Aramaic version of Mark (Codex Sinaiticus Rescriptus in St Petersburg, Syr. No. 16) ends at 16:8. The oldest Armenian manuscripts (going back to the ninth century) end at 16:8. The oldest Georgian manuscripts (translated from the Armenian) end at 16:8.”⁹⁸

Unfortunately, some sources claim Ethiopic sources also omit the passage based on Bruce Metzger’s claims, but Metzger later corrected himself and admitted all three manuscripts the claim was based on do, in fact, include it.⁹⁹

The aforementioned Codex Bobiensis, an ancient Latin translation, is missing the verses, but is also the only intact Latin manuscript to omit them. The penman also made numerous unique, and quite poor, errors in the passage, leading some to question how reliable its witness truly is.

It is also worthy to note that “earliest/oldest” can be a somewhat misleading statement. As one noted: “If “ancient” manuscripts are defined as manuscripts produced before the death of Charlemagne (in 814), then two ancient Greek manuscripts, one ancient Latin manuscript, one ancient Sahidic manuscript (the production-date of which is far from certain), and one ancient Syriac manuscript do not contain any part of

⁹⁸ Head, Peter M. “A Case against the Longer Ending of Mark.” Text & Canon Institute, Phoenix Seminary, 14 June 2022, <https://textandcanon.org/a-case-against-the-longer-ending-of-mark/>.

⁹⁹ Metzger, Bruce M. “The Gospel of St. Mark in Ethiopic Manuscripts.” *New Testament Studies (Philological, Versional, and Patristic)*, 1980.

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Mark 16:9-20. All other ancient copies of Mark 16, whether Greek or non-Greek, include at least part of this passage, showing that it was in those copies when they were in pristine condition.¹⁰⁰

Even when speaking accurately about the dating of relevant manuscripts, false statements can easily arise. For example, John MacArthur once claimed that Latin Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta copies “all say the same thing”¹⁰¹ when compared to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus in omitting the verses, his statement is categorically false, as both translations, apart from a single Syriac manuscript and single Latin manuscript, both mentioned above, include the text.

Sadly, this kind of misstatement tends to categorize the debate on this particular passage.

It’s not one sided either as James Snapp once confidently claimed Justin Martyr showed knowledge of the Longer Ending, yet his evidence was Justin’s use of a mere three words in common. Those were three words not even in the same order as Mark 16:20!¹⁰² Three associated words, not even in the same order, is hardly the mighty case he claims. Nevertheless, once

¹⁰⁰ Snapp, James. “The ESV Study Bible and Mark 16:9-20.” *The Text of the Gospels*, 19 June 2012, <https://www.thetextofthegospels.com/2012/06/esv-study-bible-and-mark-169-20.html>.

¹⁰¹ Macarthur, John. “The Fitting End to Mark’s Gospel.” Sunday Service. Sunday Service, 5 June 2011, Sun Valley, Grace Community Church.

¹⁰² Head, Peter M. “A Case against the Longer Ending of Mark.” Text & Canon Institute, Phoenix Seminary, 14 June 2022,

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the dust settles from the misunderstandings and mistakes, the case becomes far clearer just how overwhelming the manuscript evidence is in favor of the Longer Ending, even if a few early manuscripts do omit it.

The “Endings”

So far, our attention has completely been focused on the differences between the so called “Long Ending” (Verses 9-20) and the abrupt ending at V. 8. But as several footnotes point out, there are some other textual options.

The “Freer Logion” is a small addition found in only a single extant manuscript. (Codex Washingtoniensis, from the 4th or 5th Century) It is, first, totally inappropriate to call this addition an “ending” as it is included between Vs. 14 and 15, with the remaining verses trailing afterwards as normal. Thus, this text is also a witness to the “Longer Ending.” While certainly a variant, and an addition, it is neither an ending, nor is it even vaguely viable as a possibility as the original ending to the book. Jerome, however, notes that it was present in some Greek manuscripts of his day.¹⁰³ The NLT footnote claims “some manuscripts”¹⁰⁴ add this ending, and Jerome would seem to confirm that claim

¹⁰³ Jerome. “Against the Pelagians.” St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works. Ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley. Vol. 6. New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893. 468. Print. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series.

¹⁰⁴ Holy Bible: New Living Translation. Tyndale House Publishers, 2015.

that others, at some point, had it, but we only have a single manuscript today with it, which is why the ESV footnote making similar claims to the NLT note was recently removed to better reflect known evidence.

Finally, the “shorter ending” does show up in 6 manuscripts, (Sadly, the NET Bible note¹⁰⁵ accidentally cites the same manuscript under two different names, giving the impression there are more including this section, since designations 083 and 0112 refer to the same manuscript.) One of which was the aforementioned Latin Codex Bobiensis, which is the only one that doesn’t go on to include the longer ending as well. Again, no scholars believe that the shorter ending is a viable candidate as the original ending, and its evidence is far too slender to be seriously considered.

Internal Evidence

“Internal evidence” refers to evidence within the message of the text, as opposed to the “external evidence” that regards manuscripts and other outside sources and quotations.

Some claim that the vocabulary, structure, and content make it clear that Verses 9-20 are written by another, far later hand and needlessly added to the proper ending at V. 8. But “the strength of their conclusions often greatly exceeds the evidence from which the

¹⁰⁵Biblical Studies Press. The NET Bible First Edition Notes. Biblical Studies Press, 2006. Print.

deductions are extracted.”¹⁰⁶ However, even that recent study eventually agreed with the common consensus that Mark 16:9-20 is considerably different than the rest of his Gospel.

While it’s possible Mark wrote the ending years later, as D. A. Black argues,¹⁰⁷ or for some other unknown reason, his style rapidly shifted, his authorship of these verses isn’t necessary for them to still be Scripture. Other books of the Bible are compiled, accepted, and embraced with multiple authors. (Even Moses, the writer of the Pentateuch, could not have easily written about his own death. Thus, another editor/writer must have added the ending to Deuteronomy, yet we still accept it as Scripture!)

However, the internal evidence cannot be ignored, even if, in my opinion, we should weigh the external evidence more heavily. Even if the internal evidence determines Mark wasn’t the author, further proof would need to come to light to confidently affirm that it was a non-inspired and late addition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I feel the evidence is strongly for the Longer Ending. Not only the overwhelming majority of manuscripts in all languages, but the near universal acceptance of Christians across all ages. I am not the

¹⁰⁶ WILLIAMS, TRAVIS B. “Bringing Method to the Madness: Examining the Style of the Longer Ending of Mark.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20.3 397–417. Web.

¹⁰⁷ Black, David Alan. *Why Four Gospels?* Energion Publications. Kindle-Version. Position 1261

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only one to note the weight of that reasoning, as Peter Head, after writing an entire article attempting to refute the authenticity of the Longer Ending, said this: “But on other days, I think of the 99 percent of Greek manuscripts which contain the Longer Ending, I consider the breadth and depth of Christian reception of the Longer Ending in the Church Fathers from the time of Irenaeus, and its ubiquitous presence in primary historical vernacular translations of the New Testament...”¹⁰⁸

Even those against it recognize the massive weight of evidence for it, both in manuscript form, and from pastors, scholars, theologians, and preachers, throughout Christian history. But I also agree with Mike Winger that both sides today tend to vastly overstate their case and can easily slip into misusing evidence in favor of their position.

Whatever your choice, I pray it is made carefully, honestly, and wisely.

¹⁰⁸ Head, Peter M. “A Case against the Longer Ending of Mark.” Text & Canon Institute, Phoenix Seminary, 14 June 2022, <https://textandcanon.org/a-case-against-the-longer-ending-of-mark/>.

The Theology of the Shorter Ending

I mentioned before that I wished to comment on the longer ending, not only because of my belief that it is authentic, but because those in favor of it have very few commentary resources explaining the passage. My own study found quite a few commentators outright ignored it or obviously phoned in some few lines of text.

While I do not accept the Gospel as ending at V. 8, I do not want to be guilty of the same mistakes those commentators made. I shall, therefore, endeavor to include a few comments towards the ending of the Gospel, should it have stopped at V. 8.

The shorter ending provides some incredible elements of symmetry with the beginning of Mark's Gospel. It also accomplishes the incredible task of forcing readers to truly grapple with the text and the message of Jesus.

“The Gospel of Mark ends just at the point when it becomes possible to fully understand the assertion that Jesus is the Messiah who suffered, died, was raised from the dead, and will return as the Son of Man.¹⁰⁹”

¹⁰⁹ Barry, John D. et al. Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print.

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All of Jesus' promises of death, burial, and resurrection have now come true. Ending at Verse 8, while certainly odd, would force readers to ask the question: "What next?" That question would lead them to examine everything Jesus said about the future, about his resurrection, and about his eventual coming again in great power. Just as the disciples were in a place of doubt until his resurrection proved his word true, so too, we are left a bit puzzled at the end, but with Jesus' incredible promises, and the evidence of the empty tomb.

While readers would have shortly before been rightly critical of the disciple's fear and abandonment of Jesus when under the pressure of his arrest, readers are called to face similar feelings of fear and doubt at the end, thus calling them to a higher service and greater faithfulness. The book ends on a slightly uncertain note, with many details and answers not yet given, yet we are called to trust God and his plan, just as the disciples were.

God doesn't always reveal every answer we would like, and the shorter ending of Mark calls on its readers to consider everything that has come before and have a deep faith even in the face of uncertainty.

As one commentator wrote: "This is the end of Mark's story, because it is the beginning of discipleship."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Hooker, Morna D.. *Gospel According To St. Mark*. United Kingdom, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001.

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This statement draws on themes we elaborated on in the very first section. There, John was following God, calling people to the kingdom, suffered persecution, then faded off the scene. Next, Jesus stepped up, called people to the kingdom, suffered persecution of his own, and faded off the scene. The disciples had spent the whole book growing into their role of stepping up, facing some persecution of their own, and were to continue in that role, taking up the mantle of the main witnesses after it was passed from John to Jesus to them. That's also the call to modern disciples!

They must follow the pattern set at the very beginning, the pattern that calls them to walk in the footsteps of their master. But there's more. "The abruptness of such a conclusion matches the abruptness of Mark's beginning as compared with the other Gospels."¹¹¹

Mark's Gospel doesn't begin with an elaborate birth narrative, or an extended genealogy. The first chapter launches readers into the middle of John's ministry and quickly sums up the beginning of Jesus.' By the end, Jesus is in full swing with preaching, teaching, and healing, hardly giving readers a change to catch their breath. It's appropriate, then, that the Gospel ends with some of his followers breathlessly running, continuing that unrelenting pace into the future.

"Here is Mark's final irony. In the rest of the story, Jesus has commanded men and women to say nothing

¹¹¹ Perrodin, John, and Alan Hultberg. "Mark." *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*. Ed. Sean McDowell. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017. 1249. Print.

about the truth they have glimpsed, and they have frequently disobeyed. Now that the time has at last come to report what has happened, the women are silent.”¹¹²

Now, some critics, pointing out that Mark was probably the first Gospel fully composed and circulated, gleefully declare that there’s no resurrection of Jesus in the book, only an empty tomb that could mean any number of things. However, to state such a thing is simply horrible reading. Mark 8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:33-34, 14:28, and 16:6-7 all predict, or directly declare, that Jesus will rise again. Then, he does!

Much like earlier in the book, when Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1, the rest of the Psalm seems to be on his heart and mind. He’s not quoting it in isolation but allowing others to finish the quotation and think about the rest of that Psalm, even the parts he doesn’t verbally express. So too, Mark’s Gospel, if it ends at V. 8, calls readers to take what they should already know and not see it in isolation, but to fill in the non-expressed material with the all-too-obvious answer.

What answer? That Jesus is risen, just as he said! “If the Gospel of Mark ends with 16:8, as some believe, Mark

¹¹² Hooker, Morna D. *The Gospel according to Saint Mark*. London: Continuum, 1991. Print. *Black’s New Testament Commentary*.

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intentionally emphasizes the mystery and awesomeness of the Resurrection.¹¹³”

Yet, Mark’s Gospel isn’t the only book of the bible to end suddenly, as Jonah’s account also finishes on a divine rebuke with no hint of Jonah’s response, or the continued state of the city, or even how the prophet got home! II Chronicles ends with the decree by Cyrus that proclaims the liberty for God’s people to return to Israel...yet ends without any mention of any of them actually doing it! In the New Testament, Acts also ends with no hint of Paul’s fate, the result of his trial, or what any other Apostle is up to.

Every one of these books asks you to consider everything that came before, consider the predictions and patterns that have dominated those works, and consider the God behind it all. Mark’s Gospel is no different.

¹¹³ Wessel, Walter W. “Mark.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. Vol. 8. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984. 788. Print.

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Recommended Resources

Of the many commentaries, studies, resources, and articles that I consulted for this series, some stood out as especially helpful to teachers. Others stood out for far less desirable reasons. Here are a few quick thoughts on several of those resources.

Commentaries

William Lane's New International Commentary (NICNT)

Following in the footsteps of the rest of the series, I really can't imagine looking at a text without glancing at the New International Commentary volume on the book. It's your typical expository commentary, with a decent balance of textual details, background information, and scholarly interaction, but all in English and easily accessible without being needlessly wordy.

Lane, William L.. The Gospel of Mark. N.p., Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.

Abe Kuruvilla's commentary

I'd highly recommend picking up Kuruvilla's commentary, even if I have my disagreements with him at times. His "World in Front of the Text" (A fancy way of stating the main idea the author was communicating in that pericope.) can sometimes miss the mark, but Kuruvilla's

Recommended Resources

overall approach is fresh, unique, and very thoughtful. He writes with the preaching of the text in mind, which cannot be said about many other commentaries, and often brings out structure details and elements other commentaries overlook. However, sometimes he can get too caught up in the trees and miss the forest. He's a fantastic balance to more traditional commentaries. His value is found more in forcing you to meditate on his view and points he brings up, rather than directly taking his conclusions without question.

Kuruvilla, Abraham. Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers. United States, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012.

Ben Witherington's Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (SRC)

Similarly to Kuruvilla, this commentary doesn't come off as your typical exegetical commentary. It's filled with information and perspectives that others can easily gloss over, resulting in a book that often offers something new and helpful. I found that its focus on rhetoric and argumentation, plus extensive work on the culture of the day, was a very welcome addition to my study.

Witherington, Ben, III. The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001. Print.

Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures (ACCS)

This is a compilation of various church father's comments on Mark. However, there is a little snag. Most fathers didn't comment heavily on Mark. This led the editors to grab comments that are on synoptic passages, comments that addressed similar themes, or comments that in some other way are somewhat related to the text. These notes also obviously range wildly in interpretation and hermeneutics. All these factors lead to the book being somewhat hit and miss. When commentators addressed the text well, the quotes and insights were stellar. But when comments were absurdly allegorical, most irrelevant, or only vaguely addressing the passage, it was disappointing. However, at the end of each quote is all the information for tracking down the complete sermon and doing so often yielded more helpful material than the commentary itself included. I consistently referenced this commentary but found it uneven.

Oden, Thomas C., and Christopher A. Hall, eds. Mark (Revised). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. Print. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture.

Mark Strauss' Zondervan Exegetical Commentary (ZEC)

Recommended Resources

I found this to be the most helpful of the traditional commentaries. Besides the usual detailed comments on every verse, this series contains sections proclaiming main ideas, a special section on the context of each pericope, and ends each pericope with various theological insights. Additionally, the typesetting and design are top-notch and lend themselves to an easy read. At times, the author seems to say very little with a whole lot of words, and the pericope divisions, I feel, are far too small, often leading to very similar big ideas stretched across several pericopes. But the value of the comments far outweigh these minor concerns.

Strauss, Mark L. Mark. United States, Zondervan, 2014.

Grant Osborne's Teach the Text Commentary (TTCS)

In many ways, the TTT is like the annoying little brother to the ZEC. It likewise has a very pretty layout (with pictures!) also has main ideas highlighted, also has a section on context, also ends with a special section highlighting aspects of the passage, and also repeats the error of far too small pericopes. However, the TTT is also far, far less robust, offering far fewer comments on the passage, little attention to necessary details, and the ending section on application and illustration is often absolutely terrible.

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From various interviews, it seems that final section on illustration was often handled by one of the editor's staff, rather than the scholar himself. Across the board, this series displays a complete mishandling of the "main idea" and far too often defaults to a generic "God is powerful/God is sovereign" assertion, rather than finding what that unique passage is uniquely communicating. While occasional help can be found, this entire series is severely disappointing, and the several top-notch scholars involved seem very uncomfortable within the series formatting. It's since been put out of print, and until the aforementioned problems can be addressed, I'd agree with that assessment.

Osborne, Grant R.. Mark (Teach the Text Commentary Series). United States, Baker Publishing Group, 2014.

Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

Sadly, I didn't have this in my possession until the series was basically done. I sure wish I had it all the way through! This would have been a game changer. I highly recommend getting this for any New Testament series. It carefully and comprehensibly studies the use of every OT quote in the NT. It looks at how the author is using it, any issues with how that interpretation may or may not seem

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obvious from the texts, and a ton of cultural and exegetical context that proved helpful time and time again. This is a must buy!

Carson, D. A., Beale, G. K. "Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament." United Kingdom, Baker Publishing Group, 2007.

Study Bibles

While Study Bibles are sometimes disparaged for not being very deep or being poor resources, I found the following to be notable. They often found ways of succinctly summing up the data and providing handy quotes. They often stated in one or two memorable sentences what other resources struggled to say in several paragraphs. They should not ever replace larger resources, but certainly have their place within the teacher's toolbox.

Faithlife Study Bible

Probably the most helpful of all these study Bibles, the high scholarship and masterful condensing of important data helped this become one of my go-to resources every lesson to quickly gain a big-picture look at the passage. This one often even handedly discussed various views and offered very quick summaries of major passage difficulties. It's a pity the unabridged version isn't available in print. Pairing this with the LEB in a physical format would be a must-buy for me!

Barry, John D. et al. Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016. Print.

Recommended Resources

ESV Study Bible

I got this one late in the process, but it's reputation should precede it. A strong resource for sure.

ESV Study Bible. United States, Crossway, 2008.

CSB Study Bible

This delightful detailed, and refreshingly conservative study Bible did an excellent job. While not as extensive as the Faithlife Study Bible, when it did comment more extensively, it was always worth reading.

Blum, Edwin A., and Trevin Wax, eds. CSB Study Bible: Notes. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017. Print.

Ancient Faith Study Bible

This was a severely disappointing volume, and I'd lean away from using it. The notes are often far too brief, and too few, to offer much help. What notes there were also seemed divided between the fairly good, to the absurdly allegorical, meaning much of the material was utterly useless and a waste of space. Additionally, the notes are simply copied from the Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures, which means no new data is added here. If you wish to consult the Church Fathers, grab the commentary, or simply look for their

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entire sermons to get the whole context. These short, sometimes irrelevant comments are a poor way to encounter the passion and drive of the Church Fathers.
CSB Ancient Faith Study Bible, Holman Bible Publishers, 2019.

Other Resources

Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary

This is an excellent and very conservative resource that consistently offered detailed help while avoiding some of the more liberal tendencies of other dictionaries.
Brand, Chad et al., eds. Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary 2003. Print.

Lexham Bible Dictionary

Boasting incredible scholarship and detail, this was also a must-read if I had any questions about certain topics or characters. It's a wonderfully extensive resource that also stays on top of current scholarship and research. This also does a great job (usually) fairly representing the various sides in scholarly debates without needlessly demeaning one or the other. This helped in trying to sort through instances when commentators disagreed.
Barry, John D. et al., eds. The Lexham Bible Dictionary 2016 Print.

The Church Fathers

It was also fascinating to observe the comments of the church fathers. While I did consult the above commentary, and study Bible, this was my preferred source, as it contained not only far more material, but included the full sermons and other writings in their entirety. I recommend picking this up, especially in Logos Bible Software. Gleaning from our Christian heritage is a continually encouragement and help, even if comments are not always helpful in exegesis, the passion and dedication of these fathers is contagious.

Schaff, Phillip. Ante-Nicene Fathers: Fathers of the Early Church 1996, Hendrickson Pub. Print

Appendix: Mark's Use of the Old Testament

Mark, like the other New Testament authors, makes liberal use of the Old Testament Scriptures. While other resources will offer far more details on exactly how he handles the textual and interpretive issues involved, here is a simple list that may help you begin such a study of your own.

As you may have noticed in the lessons, we've addressed some of these from time to time. A translation like the NASB, LSB, NET, or CSB will clearly mark when the New Testament directly quotes the old, though sometimes those resources differ when it comes to allusion-type material and may not always agree on what to mark as a quote. This chart includes those direct quotations as well as a number of textual allusions and useful cross references that we noted in the lessons. It's by no means exhaustive but should prove helpful.

Mark 1:2 – Malachi 3:1, Exodus 23:20

Mark 1:3 – Isaiah 40:3

Mark 2:26 – I Samuel 21:1-6

Mark 4:12 – Isaiah 6:9-10

Mark 4:32 – Ezekiel 17:23

Mark 4:39 – Psalm 89:8-9, 104:3; 135:7; 107:23–30

Mark 6:18 – Leviticus 18:16

Mark 6:48 - Exodus 33:22

Mark 7:6-7 – Isaiah 29:13

Mark 7:10 – Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16,
Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 20:9

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- Mark 8:18 – Jeremiah 5:21, Ezekiel 12:2
Mark 9:11 – Malachi 4:5-6
Mark 10:4 – Deuteronomy 24:1-3
Mark 10:6 – Genesis 1:27, Genesis 5:2
Mark 10:7-8 – Genesis 2:24
Mark 10:19 – Exodus 20:12-16
Mark 11:7 – Zachariah 9:9
Mark 11:9-10 – Psalm 118:25-26
Mark 11:17 – Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11
Mark 12:1 – Isaiah 5:1-2
Mark 12:10-11 – Psalm 118:22-23
Mark 12:19 – Genesis 38:8, Deuteronomy 25:5
Mark 12:26 – Exodus 3:6, 15-16
Mark 12:29-30 – Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Joshua 22:5
Mark 12:31 – Leviticus 19:18
Mark 12:32 – Deuteronomy 4:35, 6:4
Mark 12:33 – Joshua 22:5, Leviticus 19:18, I Samuel
15:22, Hosea 6:6
Mark 12:36 – Psalm 110:1
Mark 13:14 – Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11
Mark 13:24-25 – Isaiah 34:4, Joel 2:10, 3:15,
Ezekiel 32:7-8
Mark 13:26 – Daniel 7:13
Mark 14:18 – Psalm 41:9
Mark 14:24 – Exodus 24:8, Zechariah 9:11
Mark 14:27 – Zechariah 13:7
Mark 14:60-61 – Isaiah 53:6-7
Mark 14:62 – Psalm 110:1, Daniel 7:13
Mark 14:64 – Leviticus 24:16
Mark 15:23 – Psalm 69:21
Mark 15:24 – Psalm 22:18
Mark 15:29 – Psalm 22:7

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Mark 15:34 – Psalm 22:1

Mark 15:36 – Psalm 69:21

Mark 15:46 – Isaiah 53:9