



Village Bible Church
One Church
THREE LOCATIONS

MAN at WORK

The Son of Man paved the way to God.

Mark 1-8 The Servant Who Rules

The Ruler Who Serves Mark 8-16

villagebible.org/manatwork

Small Group Study Guide
2011 - 2012

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Credits:

Weekly Devotionals written by Ray Stedman, www.raystedman.org, used with permission.

Questions: Format and many of the questions drawn from Wordsearch LessonMaker, used with permission.

How to Use this Study

Time: Properly preparing for your small group study will involve about one hour of study throughout your week.

Devotional: At the beginning of each study, you will find a devotional by Pastor Ray Stedman. This one page synopsis will help you to begin thinking about the passage and its implication in your life. Please take time to meditate on this each week.

Study Questions: This study is used to develop an understanding of the passage. It will be broken down each week into the following sections:

Open It: This section is used to get us thinking about the main focus and thrust of the passage. These questions will be used during your small group and will help to break the ice and center the discussion.

Explore It: This section will take very little time and may seem basic, but they will help you see the details of the passage. Don't read too much into the questions – they are observation questions.

Get It: This section will help you to dig deeper into the meaning of the passage. It is here that we begin to look at our own lives in light of scripture.

Apply It: This section will help us to take the passage and apply it personally to your everyday life. These are for personal reflection. While you will not be called on to answer these in your small group, the opportunity to share may be provided.

Group Discussion Questions: At the end of each study, there will be a set of questions that will be used as the main discussion points during your small group. Now before you think you can just do these questions, bear in mind that they find their basis in the questions that precede.

Mark: Man At Work

Introduction

The gospel of Mark is the most translated book of the Bible in all the world. No other book appears in as many languages. Almost all Wycliffe translators, after they have reduced a language to writing, begin their translation of the Scriptures with this gospel. I am sure that the fact that Mark is the shortest of the gospels has something to do with that decision! But it is also a fact that Mark is particularly suitable for introducing people of all backgrounds, classes, and tribes to the Scriptures. It is the one gospel of the four that is aimed at the Gentile ear.

A study of the gospel of Matthew reveals that it is written for the Jew, especially with its focus on the Old Testament and Jewish customs. But Mark was written for the Roman world, for the Gentile, for those who do not know the background of the Old Testament. Therefore, it is an instructive and helpful gospel to use in the initial approach.

Many scholars think that the gospel of Mark is the earliest New Testament Scripture we have. It was probably written sometime in the sixties of the first century, which would make it very early, going back to the beginnings of the Christian story. Scholars differ, however, as to whether Matthew or Mark wrote first, because it is hard to tell who borrowed from whom—Matthew from Mark, or Mark from Matthew.

We do know that this gospel was written by a young man named John Mark. His mother was named Mary, and she was a rather wealthy woman who had a big house in Jerusalem. In Acts 12, we are told that the early disciples held a large church prayer meeting in her house for Peter when he was imprisoned. We know that young John Mark was taken by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, traveling with them to the island of Cyprus. But for some reason Mark refused to go with them when they went on to the mainland of what today is Turkey. Instead, he went back to his mother's house. Paul was upset about that and evidently felt that Mark was a quitter. When it came time for them to go out again, although Barnabas wanted to bring Mark, Paul would not let him come. So they separated. Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas went back to the areas where they had gone before. Then Mark drops out of sight for a time.

The next we hear of him, he is an associate of the apostle Peter, who speaks affectionately of this young man, calling him "my son Mark" in his first letter (1 Peter 5:13). Early church tradition tells us that Mark became the companion of Peter. Eusebius, a church father writing in the third century, says that the early Christians were so entranced with all the things Peter told them that they asked Mark to write them down. Perhaps that is how we got the Gospel According to Mark, for it reflects much of Peter's memories and experiences with Jesus.

Mark is fascinated with two qualities of Jesus that he gives to us in the first words of this gospel: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Jesus of Nazareth, a carpenter, the human Jesus—but also the Son of God, the divine one. Mark seems to be fascinated by that combination: the Ruler who manifests His ability to serve, and the Servant who knows how to rule.

That, by the way, is how the book is organized. Mark is easy to outline, because the author gives us certain natural divisions, as we will see as we go along. It falls readily into two halves.

Man At Work

Week #1

Mark 1:1-13

Like A Dove

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove (Mark 1:10).

There is no greater need that we have as individuals than to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to live as we long to live and are able to overcome the power of sin and guilt and fear within us. Therefore, the primary, elementary, most fundamental need of guilty people is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when Jesus began to take our place, there was immediately given to Him the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is not the first time Jesus had the Spirit. It is recorded of John the Baptist that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. And certainly if that was true of John, it was also true of Jesus. He lived by the Spirit during those quiet years in Nazareth. He submitted Himself to His parents, grew up in a carpenter's shop, and learned the trade. And through those uneventful days, Jesus lived by the power of the Spirit in His life.

Then what is happening now, when the Spirit comes upon Him like a dove? The answer is that He is given a new manifestation of the Spirit, especially in terms of power. To use the language of Scripture, Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at this point. In Old Testament times kings and priests were anointed by pouring oil upon their heads, committing them to the function and office in which they were to serve. This is the picture of what is now occurring in Jesus' life. He is being anointed by God through the Spirit with power—power to meet the demands of the ministry upon which He is about to launch.

Do not think of this as something remote from us. All these things that happened to Jesus can happen and, indeed, must happen to us. That is the whole thrust of this teaching. He was taking our place; therefore, what happened to Him must happen to us. That is why Jesus, standing with His disciples after the resurrection, said to them, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1:8). The Spirit of God must come upon us.

This is not so that we can perform dramatic acts, but, rather, so that we can have a new quality of life that is beautiful and resistless, yet quiet and gentle. Notice the symbol of the kind of power that is given here—it is a dove. Athletic teams sometimes use birds as emblems, signs of their power and ability. We have the Falcons and the Eagles—even the Ducks. But did you ever hear of a team called the Doves? No team would ever use a dove as a symbol of its power. A dove is a gentle, non-threatening bird, one that does not fight back and yet is irresistible.

This is the power that Jesus is describing—the power of love, of course—love that can be beaten and battered down and put to death and yet can rise again, until it wins the day—that amazing love Jesus released. The greatest force in the world today, without a doubt, is love. And yet it is the kind of power that does not threaten or break apart or destroy; it gathers and heals. It is rejected, turned aside, and beaten down; yet it rises again and again. So the dove is an apt symbol of the new life our Lord came to teach.

Lord, fill me with the Holy Spirit. May the Spirit Manifest through me the power of love.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #1 Mark 1:1 – 1:13

Open It

1. How would you prepare for a home visit from your boss or another important person?
2. How do people typically show approval of others?

Read It

Mark 1:14-39

John the Baptist Prepares the Way - Mark 1:1-8

Explore It

1. What do Mark's first words tell us about his Gospel? (1:1)
2. Who sent the messenger? Why? (1:2-3)
3. What were the two aspects of John's ministry? (1:4)
4. What had to happen before John could baptize a person? (1:5)
5. What was the theme of John's message? (1:7-8)

Get It

1. What does the message of Jesus offer to people?
2. What usually prevents us from being Christ's witnesses?
3. How can we ensure that our lives focus attention on Christ, and not on ourselves?

Apply It

1. What step could you take this week toward becoming a better witness for Christ?
2. With whom can you share God's promise of forgiveness of sins? How?

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus - Mark 1:9-13

Explore It

1. What does Jesus' baptism tell us about His character? (1:10)
2. How were the three persons of the Trinity present in this event? (1:10-11)
3. Who sent Jesus into the desert for forty days? Why? (1:12-13)
4. What happened to Jesus in the desert? (1:13)
5. What role did angels play in this event? (1:13)

Get It

1. Life Application: What power is symbolized by the dove at Jesus' baptism? How does it compare with the power promised the believer by which we can daily demonstrate His love?
2. In what ways can we imitate Jesus' attitude of humility and submission?
3. What difference does it make to you that the Holy Spirit allows you to be tempted?
4. What temptations are difficult for you to resist?
5. How can we depend more on the power of God to help us resist temptation?

Apply It

1. What concrete steps can you take this week to resist temptation?
2. How can you remind yourself that Jesus understands the temptations you experience, and that He can help you resist them?

Group Discussion

1. In what ways can we “prepare the way of the Lord, making straight paths for Him”?
2. What do we learn about John’s method and message? How does that compare to that of the evangelical churches of today?
3. In Mark 1, we see Jesus example of the importance of baptism. In light of this, what prevents so many Christians from pursuing baptism themselves?

Discuss the different aspects and symbolism found in baptism.

On the previous page, in Matthew 28, Jesus presents baptism as a first step of discipleship. What is it about baptism that makes it so crucial to our faith?

If you have been baptized, what were the circumstances of your baptism? When, where and why?

4. Read Matthew 4:1-11. In what ways was Jesus tempted and how can we use his example to find victory in our times of temptation?

Man At Work

Week #2

Mark 1:14-39

Meeting Life's Demands

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35).

After this full day—and what a full day it was, what a heavy ministry our Lord had that day with all the healing He did in the evening!—Mark records that early in the morning, before it was daylight, Jesus went out on the mountainside, and there, by Himself, He prayed. But even there He was not safe. His disciples interrupted this communion, told Him that everyone was looking for Him. And Jesus reveals the heart and substance of His prayer in what He says in reply: Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. This is what He was praying about—that God would lead Him, doors would be opened, and hearts prepared in the cities to which He would go next.

Why did Jesus seek the Father's face like this, in these hours of pressure? The only answer we can come to is that He wants to make clear that the authority He had was not coming from Him. This is what our Lord is trying to get across to us so continually in the Scriptures—that it was not His authority by which He acted; He had to receive it from the Father.

I do not know any more confusing doctrine in Christendom today—one that has robbed the Scriptures of their authority and power in the minds and hearts of countless people—than the idea that Jesus acted by virtue of the fact that He was the Son of God, that the authority and power He demonstrated were due to His own deity. Yet He Himself takes great pains to tell us this is not the case. The Son can do nothing by himself (John 5:19). Why do we ignore His explanation and insist that it is He, acting as the Son of God? He tells us that it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work (John 14:10). And all the power that Jesus manifested had to come to Him constantly from the one who dwelt within Him.

Jesus stresses this because this is what He wants us to learn. We are to operate on the same basis. Our response to the normal, ordinary demands of life and the power to cope with those demands must come from our reliance upon Him at work within us. This is the secret: All power to live the Christian life comes not from us, doing our dead-level best to serve God, but from Him, granted to us moment by moment as the demand is made upon us. Power is given to those who follow, who obey. The Father is at work in the Son; the Son is at work in us. As we learn this, then we are given power to meet the demands and the needs that are waiting for us in the ministry yet to come.

Thank You, Father, that the same power is available to me today, making me ready so be your instrument in any and every situation in which demand is laid upon me.

Life Application: What is the source of authority and power we need to respond to the ordinary and extraordinary demands of life? Shall we try to wing it, or expectantly pray for this gift?

~ Ray Stedman

Study #2 Mark 1:14 – 1:39

Open It

1. What is most difficult to you about praying?
2. Describe a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone to serve God?

Read It

Mark 1:14-39

The Calling of the First Disciples - Mark 1:14-20

Explore It

1. How did Jesus want people to respond to the fact that the kingdom of God was near? (1:15)
2. What did Jesus tell the people they must do besides believe His good news? (1:15)
3. How did Jesus get people to follow Him? (1:17)

Get It

1. What does Christ expect us to give up to follow Him?
2. What does it mean for a person to sacrifice personal achievements, friends, or even family for the sake of Christ?

Apply It (Personal)

1. Simon, Andrew, James and John “immediately” left their nets to follow Jesus. What might Jesus be calling you to leave “immediately” in order to follow Him more faithfully?
2. What prevents you from following Jesus wholeheartedly?

What action is necessary to eliminate these hindrances from your life with Christ?

Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit - Mark 1:21-28

Explore It

1. Why were the people amazed at Jesus' teaching? (1:22)
2. What do the evil spirit's words tell us about Christ? (1:24)
3. Why did the news about Jesus spread so quickly over the region? (1:27-28)

Get It

1. What does this story tell us about evil spirits and Jesus' power?
2. According to Jesus, how should Christians respond to people controlled by sin?
3. What area of your life do you need to place under Jesus' power and authority?

Apply It (Personal)

1. What is one way you can show submission to Christ's authority in your life throughout this week?
2. What could you do this week for someone who is sick or discouraged?

Jesus Heals Many - Mark 1:29-34

Explore It

1. What did Jesus do with His companions after teaching in the synagogue? (1:29)
2. How did Jesus respond to the problem He was faced with? (1:31)
3. What was Jesus' response to the crowds of sick and demon-possessed people? (1:34)

Get It

1. What does this story tell us our attitude should be toward helping people?
2. What excuses do we use to neglect serving other people?
3. What difference should it make in our lives that Jesus has the power to heal the sick and deliver the demon-possessed?

Apply It (Personal)

1. What specific area of your life do you need to turn over to Jesus for His healing touch?
2. What concrete step can you take to serve or help someone else this week?

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place - Mark 1:35-39

Explore It

1. Where did Jesus go, and why did he go there? (1:35)
2. Why wasn't Jesus able to pray alone? (1:37)
3. What did Jesus plan to do after He was finished praying? (1:38)

Get It

1. The quiet and solitude of verses 35-39 are quite a contrast from the previous events. What do these verses reveal about Jesus' priorities?
2. How should we follow Christ's example of praying?
3. What role do you think solitude should have in the Christian life?

Apply It (Personal)

1. When and where can you pray on a regular basis this week?
2. What can you do to increase your consistency in prayer over the next month?

Group Discussion

1. To be a disciple means accepting Jesus' demands unconditionally. Jesus requires absolute obedience and sacrifice. Discipleship in Mark is not a part-time volunteer work on one's own terms and convenience. One must be prepared to leave everything to follow Him.

How would you respond to the idea of leaving everything to follow Jesus?

What does (or would) that mean for you?

2. How does Jesus' command, "follow me", summarize the essence of discipleship?
3. Imagine the scene in Mark 1:21-28. What would be going through your head? What does the people's response (v. 27-28) tell us of the spiritual leaders of the first century?

Why is it important for our leaders to teach with authority and what might this look like today?

4. After a full day of ministry one might desire to take it easy. What does verse 35 tell us about the importance of times of prayer amidst a life of hecticness?

How important was prayer in your life during the past 7 days?

Discuss ways we can make prayer a greater priority?

What steps will you take this week to make prayer a greater priority?

Man At Work

Week #3

Mark 1:40-2:12

Impressive Faith

Jesus saw their faith... (Mark 2:5a)

The obvious thing Mark underscores for us here is the determined faith of these five men. They stand as an encouragement to us to exercise this kind of faith. There are three remarkable and beautiful aspects of it here.

These men dared to do the difficult. That is where faith always manifests itself. It was not easy to bring this man to the Lord. They had to carry him, perhaps a great distance, through the streets of the city. When they found the doorway blocked, they had to carry him up an outside stairway to the roof. We do not know how heavy he was, but it is not easy to carry a full-grown man up a flight of stairs. Yet these men managed this difficult task. They dared to do the difficult. What an illustration this gives us of bringing people to Christ!

Then, notice that they dared to do the unorthodox. They were not limited by the fact that it was not at all customary to break up a roof. When they found that the door was blocked, they did not sit down, as we probably would have done, and appoint a committee to research the various ways to get to Jesus. No, they just did what was necessary and risked the disapproval not only of the owner of the house but also of every person there by interrupting the meeting in order to get their friend to Jesus. The remarkable thing is that Jesus never rebuked them. He never does. There is never an incident recorded in which Jesus got uptight or disturbed about an interruption by someone intent on receiving something from Him and pressing through to Him despite the disapproval of those around. These men dared to do the unorthodox.

Finally, they dared to do the costly. Somebody had to pay for that roof. Imagine the face of the owner, sitting there at the feet of Jesus, when he hears this scratching on the roof. He looks up, and, to his amazement, the tiles begin to move. Then daylight appears, and suddenly he has a large hole in his roof! I do not know what his thoughts were. He probably wondered if his homeowner's policy would cover it. Or maybe he was mentally adding up the bill to present to these men. But somebody had to pay that bill, somebody repaired that roof, and surely it was one, if not all, of these men. They dared to do the costly. That is faith! They laid it on the line--at cost to themselves. What a witness this is to what it takes to bring people to Christ!

Lord, grant to me the faith to move out in ways that are difficult, unorthodox, and even costly to bring men and women to you, the only true healer of hurts.

Life Application: A life lived by faith has at least three identifiable characteristics. Are we growing up into the quality and vitality of faith that can be used to bring others to Jesus?

~ Ray Stedman

Study #3 Mark 1:40 – 2:12

Open It

1. Who are some of the "untouchables" in our society?
2. Jesus ran into people who couldn't accept his new ways of doing things. How do you generally react to changes in your plans, routine, or way of life?

A Man With Leprosy - Mark 1:40-45

Read It

Mark 1:40-45

Explore It

1. What do the man's words to Jesus tell us about his attitude or spiritual condition? (1:40)
2. Why did Jesus heal the man who came to Him? (1:41)
3. What happened to the leper? (1:42)

Get It

1. Looking at the leper's example, what attitude seems crucial to receive healing from the Lord?
2. Why do you think God sometimes heals people miraculously yet at other times chooses not to?
3. Besides being touched, and cured of his physical condition, what was another wonderful aspect of the leper's healing?
4. In addition to the leper, who else was this miracle for?

Why do you think Jesus asked the man to not tell anyone?

Apply It (Personal)

1. How often has some well-meaning, but disobedient, thing we've done hindered the ministry of Jesus as did the disobedience of the leper?

2. To what person in your church or community could you reach out this week? How?

Group Discussion

1. What three ways did Jesus proclaim himself as God in the time he healed the man with leprosy?

2. How is Jesus' ability to forgive this man's sins connected to what he's going to do on the cross?

Jesus Heals a Paralytic - Mark 2:1-12

Read It

Mark 2:1-12

Explore It

1. What dilemma did the paralytic man and his friends face? (2:2-4)
2. What motivated Jesus to respond to the paralytic man's plight? (2:5)
3. How did Jesus respond to the thoughts of the Pharisees? (2:8-9)

Get It

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to forgive the man's sins before healing him physically?

2. What connection is there between a person's faith and God's working in his or her life?

Apply It (Personal)

1. What broken area of your life will you ask God to heal?
2. Following the example of the paralytic man's friends, how could you go out of your way to help another believer who is experiencing pain or suffering?
3. Jesus simultaneously forgave the paralytic's sins and freed him from his paralysis. What sorts of sins may psychologically or spiritually "paralyze" us? Is there any "paralysis" in your life from which you might be free if you asked Jesus to forgive you?

Group Discussion

1. Whom do you know who is helpless, who cannot get up and do anything about a paralyzing situation in his or her life? How can we carry such people to Jesus today? When have you been the one lying powerless on a pallet? Upon whose faith have you relied?
2. What seemed to provoke Jesus' declaration of forgiveness? What does this passage say to you about the importance of community in our spiritual journey?
3. If you had been in the place of the teachers of the law, how would you have reacted? What was their root problem?
4. The paralytic's friends provide a model of caring. What are some practical ways we can follow their example?
5. For the sake of God's kingdom, what steps can we take as a church to reach out to today's "unlovely" or "unreachable" people?

Man At Work

Week #4

Mark 2:13-3:6

Scandal Maker

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him (Mark 2:15).

This evidently was a farewell dinner Matthew gave for his friends, his tax-collecting buddies. He was saying farewell to his work and friends and leaving to follow Jesus, the one who would travel from place to place. It was also an opportunity to introduce them to his newfound Lord.

What a collection of rascals must have been there that day! All the tax collectors of the city, all the sinners, all the despised social outcasts were sitting there. As the scribes of the Pharisees passed by, they saw that right in the midst of it all, among the beer bottles and the poker chips, sat Jesus. And they were absolutely scandalized! It was obvious that He was the friend of these men. He was not lecturing them. He was sitting among them and eating and drinking with them. The scribes were simply appalled at this and called the disciples aside: Why does he do things like that? Doesn't he know who these people are?

Jesus' answer is very revealing. He actually agrees with their remarks. He says, in effect, "You're right, these are sick, hurting, troubled men. Their style of life has damaged them deeply. They don't see life rightly; they are covering up many evils; they are false in many ways. You're right, these are sick men. But where else would a doctor be?"

He says something to them that rightly focuses their attention and turns their gaze back toward themselves. He says, I came to call not the righteous, but sinners. That is, those who think they are righteous, as these Pharisees did, are actually more needy than those they regard as social outcasts. These Pharisees were actually more deeply disturbed than the tax collectors and sinners, but they did not know it. But Jesus was saying to them, To those who think they're righteous, I have absolutely nothing to say. But to these who know they're sick and are open for help, I am fully available as a minister to their souls.

Our Lord made several things emphatically clear by this reply. First, He indicated strongly that **when people think they have no need of help from God, they are in no position to be helped**. There is nothing to say to them. But our Lord always put His efforts where men and women were open to help, where they were hurting so much they knew they needed help.

The second thing our Lord reveals is that people are more important than prejudice. Prejudices are preconceived notions formed before we have sufficient knowledge, usually mistaken or distorted ideas with which we have grown up. When prejudices are in opposition to the needs of people, they are to be swept aside without any hesitation. We Christians must learn to treat people like this--regardless of what their outward appearance may be. That is the way Jesus approached people everywhere.

Father, thank You for Jesus' courage, which dared to challenge human traditions. Grant that I may see myself and others as You see us--sick people in need of a physician.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #4 Mark 2:13 – 3:6

Open It

1. Think back to when you were young and you tried to get out of doing something you were supposed to do, like a chore around the house or an assignment at school? What tactics did you use to try to get out of it?
2. What role, if any, does Sabbath play in your life?

The Calling of Levi - Mark 2:13-17

Read It

Mark 2:13-17

Explore It

1. What did Levi stand to lose by leaving his work to follow Jesus? (2:14)
2. Why is it significant that Jesus went to Levi's house for dinner? (2:14-15)
3. What was it about Jesus' life-style and attitude that made the Pharisees so uncomfortable? (15-17)

Get It

1. Why do you think Jesus chose to ask Levi to be one of His followers?
2. Why do you think that people of ill repute were so attracted to Jesus?

Apply It

1. When have you ever acted the same way that the Pharisees did in this story?
2. How can you follow Jesus' example of associating with people of low reputation?

Group Discussion

1. What do we learn about Jesus from the fact that He calls a tax collector in the same way as He called the fisherman in 1:16-20?
2. How do churches tend to treat people like tax collectors?
3. In calling and eating with sinners, is Jesus saying their sin doesn't matter? Explain.

Jesus Questioned About Fasting - Mark 2:18-22

Read It

Mark 2:18-22

Explore It

1. What dilemma puzzled the people who came to Jesus? (2:18)
2. How did Jesus' story of the wedding feast answer the people's question about why His disciples did not fast? (2:19-20)
3. What do the old garment and the old wineskins stand for? (2:21-22)

Get It

1. How were Jesus' and the Pharisees' views of piety different?
2. What new insights into what it means to be a Christian does this story give you?

Group Discussion

1. *Salvation is not a partial patching up of one's life; it is a whole new robe of righteousness.* Describe what partially patching up one's life is like.

Lord of the Sabbath - Mark 2:23-3:6

Read It

Mark 2:22-3:6

Explore It

1. According to Jesus, why were the disciples of both David and Jesus justified in breaking the Sabbath? (2:25-27)
2. What was notable about the way Jesus performed this miracle? (3:3)
3. What do Jesus' actions in this story tell you about His concerns? (2:23-3:6)

Get It

1. How was Jesus' spirituality different from that of the Pharisees?
2. Explain some of the parallels between what Jesus and his disciples were doing in the cornfield and the story He cited about David and Abiathar. What clear implication would first-century hearers draw (Mark 2:23–27; 1 Samuel 21:1–6)?

Apply It

1. Where have you seen rules-only spirituality in the church today?
2. When have you ever experienced a time when the requirements of your Christian faith seemed to conflict with a human need?

Group Discussion

1. *The Pharisees were passionate about living holy lives for a holy God. They represented an attitude that approached sin from the preventive side. They wanted to make and enforce rules that would safeguard people from becoming pure and immoral. Jesus represented an attitude that approached sin from the creative side, seeking to reclaim the impure and immoral.*

How do Christians today use rules to safeguard people from becoming immoral? What do you see as the pros and cons of doing that?

2. How can we guard against mere rule-keeping when it comes to spiritual disciplines such as fasting?

3. Things get really nasty when Jesus critiques the Pharisees' interpretation of Bible passages about the Sabbath, because He implies that they've misread the Scriptures completely. Essentially He asks, "Which is more important, rules or people?"

How do the Pharisees treat rules as more important than people in 2:23-3:6?

Are there any ways in which Christians today put rules ahead of people?

4. In most of the Western world, society as a whole no longer observes the Sabbath as it did in past generations. How can we learn to live in a rhythm of work and rest without becoming legalists in the process?
5. How do Jesus comments in verses 27-28 rebuke both too rigid and too lax a view of the Sabbath? How is a day of rest, set aside to honor God, still a good idea for us?
6. Why do you think Jesus felt anger and grief when the Pharisees would not answer him in the synagogue? What is "hardness of heart"? What did the Pharisees love more than the compassion of God? Why?

Man At Work

Week #5

Mark 3:7-35

Scandal Maker

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all He was doing, many people came to Him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon (Mark3:7-8).

We have difficulty grasping the size of this crowd. This was not just a few people, or even a few thousand. There were literally tens of thousands of people, undoubtedly, in this crowd. They came from all over this country and beyond. They flocked out from all the cities to hear this amazing prophet who has risen in Galilee and was saying such startling things.

You can see how Mark traces the emphasis upon the crowd throughout this division. In verse 20 he says, “and again a crowd gathered, so that He and His disciples were not even able to eat.” Then, in verse 32: “a crowd was sitting around Him.” And in chapter 4, verse 1: “Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around Him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the Lake...” And then, in verse 36, Mark says, “Leaving the crowd, they went across to the other side of the lake.” In chapter 5, verse 21: “When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around Him while he was by the lake.” And in verse 24: “A large crowd followed and pressed around him. So this is the period when Jesus is pressed by the great masses of people, the period of His greatest popularity.”

For many, this has been the measure of Jesus' success, as it would often be in evaluating a successful person today. Anybody who can achieve a great crowd-following is regarded as a success. Today we call these people stars—there are star actors, star athletes, star singers, star politicians—various people who have attained what in our day is a mark of success. No wonder the title of one of today's most popular musicals is Jesus Christ, Superstar. He is the one who drew all these great multitudes out from the cities of His day.

But as you read this account through, you see that Mark's intention is to underscore the weakness of popularity; the empty, hollow worthlessness of being popular; and how much damage and danger popularity produced in our Lord's ministry. One of the worst things that can happen to us, as this account makes clear, is to become caught up in a popular movement. False forces arise out of it. That is the whole thrust of this section. Mis-emphases easily spring into being—and wrongful attitudes arise readily in a popular movement. Popularity, therefore, ought to be watched carefully. And when a movement is popular, as Christianity is popular in many places today, we must be careful that we are listening to the voice and the Spirit of God.

Father, thank You for the truth as it is in Jesus. Help me to beware of the perils of popularity.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #5 Mark 3:7 – 35

Open It

1. Who would you go out of your way to see and why?
2. What is it like to be lost in a huge crowd (such as in a store, airport, or stadium)?

Crowds Follow Jesus - Mark 3:7-12

Read It

Mark 3:7-12

Explore It

1. Why did Jesus want to leave? (3:7)
2. Why were the crowds so interested in following Jesus? (3:7-12)
3. What do the details of this story tell us about Jesus' priorities? (3:7-12)

Get It

1. For what reasons do you follow Jesus?
2. How would it make a difference in your spiritual life if you had more confidence in Christ's power and authority?

The Appointing of the Twelve Apostles - Mark 3:13-19

Read It

Mark 3:13-19

Explore It

1. What is the setting of this story? (3:13)
2. What did Jesus want His apostles to do with their time? (3:14-15)
3. What was unusual about some of the men Jesus chose? (3:16-19)

Get It

1. What can we learn from Jesus' example of choosing apostles to be with Him and to help Him? Why do you think Jesus wanted the apostles to spend time with Him?
2. What does the fact that Jesus chose as apostles both Simon the Zealot, a political extremist, and Matthew the tax collector, a traitor working for the occupying government, tell us about the kingdom of God?
3. How has the call of Jesus Christ in your life changed your attitude toward people with whom you previously would not have associated?
4. What difference does it make to you that Jesus chose imperfect people to share in His ministry? What criteria do you think Jesus used to choose His apostles?

Apply It

1. How can you personally become more involved in teaching and helping others serve Jesus?
2. What would be your first step toward learning from a more mature believer in our church? From what other more mature believers can you learn?
3. What specific steps can you take this week to help one other person use in God's service a skill that God has given him or her?

Group Discussion

1. Notice that mark lists the apostles by name. Jesus' call is a personal one. Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus knows your name? How do you think it would feel to hear Jesus speak directly to you?
2. List several words that describe how you see yourself as a follower of Jesus Christ. Do you think other people see you in that way? Why or why not?

Jesus and His Opposition - Mark 3:20-35

Read It

Mark 3:20-35

Explore It

1. Where had Jesus' detractors come from? (3:21-22)
2. How did Jesus refute His opponents' accusation? (3:23-27)
3. Whom did Jesus designate as His "family"? (3:34)

Get It

1. Why do you think Jesus' family thought He was "out of his mind"?
2. How has your commitment to Christ affected your relationship with your family?
3. When, if ever, have you been thought of as "out of your mind" by other people because of your efforts to live a Christian life?
4. According to Jesus' response to the scribes, what proves that his activity is not generated by satanic power? What do you think the unclean spirits' knowledge about Jesus indicates (3:11)? What conclusions to you reach about Jesus' power over Satan?

5. What was the "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" of which Jesus spoke? (3:29-30)

Apply It

1. For Jesus' disciples, what were the hard parts of being with Him? (See, for instance, 3:20-22)

What are the hard parts of truly being with Jesus (as opposed to hanging around with Him) today?

2. What could you do or say to help your family understand your faith in Christ?
3. What can you do each day to cultivate a kindred spirit with Christ?

Group Discussion

1. Jesus' teaching and behavior caused him to be seen as different from His culture and even his own family. Do you think others see you as being different because you are a follower of Christ? How so? (ref. Matthew 5:11-12)
2. When we are opposed or rejected by those who are closest to us, what comfort can we receive from Jesus' words in verses 33-35?
3. How can Christians today act as family to one another?

Man At Work

Week #6

Mark 4:1-29

Seed Thoughts

He also said, This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how (Mark 4:26-27).

This is a secret of the kingdom of God, and to me it is one of the most encouraging of all the parables Jesus ever uttered. He is speaking of how this rule of God increases, how it grows in a life. He explains it as a coming to harvest by a patient expectation that God will work. The key of this whole passage is, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. That is, there are forces at work that will be faithful to perform their work—whether a farmer stewes and frets about it or not. Farmers do what they can do, what is expected of them. But then God must work. And God will work. And in the confidence of that, this farmer rests secure. As Jesus draws the picture this farmer goes out to sow. It is hard work as he sows the field, but this is what he can do. But then he goes home and goes to bed. He does not sit up all night biting his fingernails, wondering if the seed fell in the right places or whether it will take root. Nor does he rise the next morning and go out and dig it up to see whether or not it has sprouted yet. He rests secure in the fact that God is at work, that He has a part in this process, and He must do it; no one can do it for Him. But he will faithfully perform it. So the farmer rests secure, knowing that as the seed grows there are stages that are observable: first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. It is only as the grain is ripe that he is called into action again. When the harvest is ready, then he is to act once more.

This is exactly what Paul describes for us in that passage in 1 Corinthians 3:9a: For we are God's fellow workers. This is the way we ought to expect Him to work. It involves a witness first, perhaps a word of teaching or exhortation to someone—or to ourselves. And then an inevitable process begins, one that takes time and patience and allows God to work. One of the most destructive forces at work in the church today is our insistent demand for instant results. We want to have immediate conversions, immediate responses every time we speak. We tend not to allow time for the Word to take root and grow and come to harvest.

I have been watching a boy in our church grow up since grade school. I watched him come into adolescence and enter into a period of deep and bitter rebellion against God. I watched his parents, hurt and crushed by his attitudes, yet nevertheless praying for him—saying what they could to him—but above all holding him up in prayer. I watched the whole process as the seed that had been sown in his heart took root and began to grow. There were tiny observable signs of change occurring. Gradually he came back to the Lord. And as an adult young man, he asked me to fill out a reference for him to go to seminary. That is the Word growing secretly. The sower knows not how it happens but can rest secure in this.

Our Lord is teaching us the fantastic truth that God is at work. It does not all depend on us!

Thank You, Lord that I can trust that as I do my part and sow the seed of Your Word wherever I can, You will do the rest.

~ Ray Stedman

Study Skills – Interpreting Parables

The word *parable* comes from the Greek *parabole*, which signifies something which is “set alongside” something else in order to make a comparison between the two. The parables of Jesus come in many forms, including stories, riddles, and even jokes. In each case Jesus talks about something with which His listeners are familiar, then “sets it alongside” the spiritual truth He seeks to communicate.

The parables in Mark 4:1-34 all center around the theme of the Kingdom of God (4:11). As we seek to understand them, the following points should be kept in mind:

1. A parable is designed to communicate one central truth. It differs from an allegory in that not every detail of the parable needs to have a “spiritual” meaning. For example, in the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32) one ought not to seek a “spiritual meaning” for details such as the tree branches and the birds. Such details are “window dressing” to enliven the parable, so that the main point will be driven home with greater impact.

Jesus did attach meaning to certain details in some of His parables, the best example being the Parable of the Sower (see Mark 4:14-20). Even then, however, He did not seek to define every detail (the sun, for example). When interpreting a parable, then, we should take care not to press every detail too far, unless (a) the meaning is clear from the immediate context, or (b) Jesus Himself interprets the details.

2. The one central truth of a parable often calls for a response. For example, the Parable of the Sower (which may more accurately be called the Parable of the Soils) confronts Jesus' listeners with the question, “What sort of soil are you! How will you respond to the coming of the Kingdom of God?”

3. Since a parable refers to events and experiences familiar to its original audience (in this case, first-century Palestinian farmers), the modern-day interpreter must know something of the culture back then in order to grasp the full impact of the message.

4. The parables are not “eternal truths” dropped down from heaven, but rather teaching devices addressed to specific situations. They must therefore be read in light of His ministry, and not as general religious or moral maxims which have meaning apart from His person and work.

5. A parable seeks to communicate truth indirectly. In so doing it requires the listener to ponder the meaning of the story, rather than giving the meaning directly.

At times, Jesus' disciples could understand a parable only by asking Jesus for its meaning (Mark 4:10). Many other listeners did not bother to ask Jesus about the parables, however. Thus, Jesus used parables not merely as a device to communicate a message, but also as a catalyst to draw people to Himself. To those who responded by following Him, he gave further insight. To those who did not inquire further into the meaning of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus' words remained clever stories, but little more (Mark 4:11).

LifeChange Series: Mark, Navpress, pg 49-50.

Study #6 Mark 4:1–29

Open It

1. What experiences have you had with growing plants from seeds?
2. What does it take for plants to grow, and where do you get the things you need?

The Parable of the Sower - Mark 4:1-20

Read It

Mark 4:1-20

Explore It

1. When did Jesus use parables instead of saying directly what He meant? (4:2)
2. What are the four scenes described in this parable? (4:3-10)
3. To what was Jesus referring when He said, "The farmer sows the word"? (4:14)
4. Put this parable into your own words, describing from your experience examples of each kind of soil-seed combination.

Study Skills – Interpreting Parables

Read the Interpreting Parables Study Skills sheet on the previous page.

Get It

1. What are some obstacles that prevent people from accepting the gospel or hanging on to their faith? (4:15-19)
2. Why do you think Jesus explained the "secret" only to his disciples and not to the crowds in general?

3. How does Satan "take away the word" before it has a chance to take root?

Apply It

1. Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be a follower of Jesus but whose actions seemed to indicate otherwise? Is following Jesus a matter of faith, a matter of action, or both? Explain.
2. How can you make sure that the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the other desires of the world will not choke the life out of your Christian walk?
3. The farmer was not being foolish in sowing the seed where he did. He was following the standard practice of the day - sowing then plowing. Only as time passed did each kind of soil reveal itself for what it was. What encouragement does this give you to "sow widely" as you share the good news of the kingdom with others?

Ask God to make you the kind of soil that serves His kingdom.

A Lamp on a Stand - Mark 4:21-25

Read It

Mark 4:21-25

Explore It

1. Why did Jesus warn us to "consider carefully" what we hear? (4:24)
2. What will happen to those who use or put into practice what God has measured out to them? (4:24-25)
3. What will happen to those who neglect or misuse the truth God has already revealed to them? (4:24-25)

Get It

1. How would you rewrite this parable to fit our modern-day culture, yet get the same message across?
2. What is the meaning of this parable?
3. What responsibility do you have before God in light of the truth or knowledge God has already revealed to you?
4. Why do you think some believers remain immature Christians for a long time?

Apply It

1. Describe a time when you carefully considered the men of a Bible passage and applied it to your life.
2. How does the saying, "Use it or lose it" apply to our use of Scripture? Give an example of how that might be true.
3. Consider the amount of energy you use in contemplating God's Word. If God used that same measure in dealing with you, what would be the result?

The Parable of the Growing Seed - Mark 4:26-29

Read It

Mark 4:26-29

Explore It

1. How did the seed in the parable sprout and grow? (4:27)
2. How did the man get the seed to grow? (4:28)
3. At what point did the man get involved in the plant's growth after he planted it? (4:29)

Get It

1. What encouragement can believers glean from this parable regarding their own spiritual growth?
2. How does the message of this parable help believers evangelize and teach?
3. What can you do in your life, and in the lives of others, to create conditions where the Word of God will grow?

Apply It

1. What specific steps can you take to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to change others when you tell them about Christ?
2. What is one way you can spread God's Word this week to help God's kingdom grow?
3. We have the privilege of sowing the fertile seed of the gospel. Do we trust the sovereign work of the Spirit to produce a harvest, or rely on our own effectiveness?

Man At Work

Week #7

Mark 4:30-34

Secrets Revealed

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand (Mark 4:33).

This verse presents one great rule of revelation in the words as much as they could understand. Jesus teaches people only as they can take it. This is the rule upon which God works with us. He does not show us everything at once. If He did, He would destroy us.

One man who attended a pastors' seminar held at Peninsula Bible Church was a great big man. He was drinking in all that was given to him, and at our closing meeting it was amusing to watch him. He was like a child around a Christmas tree, so turned on by all he had discovered that he was just glowing, going around hugging everyone he met. He told me, Oh, this has been so great! I'd like to go home and take my Bible and get into it and find so much more of this. Then he stopped himself and said, "But I suppose if I did, it would kill me! I just couldn't handle it." And he was right; he could not have handled it. It would have been too much. And God knows that and does not show you any more than you are able to handle.

That is the glory and the wonder of the Scriptures. They are put together in such an amazing way that it takes both the Word and the Spirit to understand the Bible. You can read the Word, and if you are not ready for them and open to them, those words will not say a thing to you. But if you are open, you will learn something from them. The next time you can come back, read the same words, and learn something more. Each time you will learn something more. It never ceases to refresh your spirit and instruct your mind and to open and expand your capacity to receive from God. That is the way God teaches us truth--as we are able to bear it.

And this is true also of His revelation to us about ourselves. One of the things about Scripture is that it shows you who you are and who you have been all along. God is gracious to us that way. He does not just rip the veil off, and suddenly you see the whole ghastly thing. If He did, we would be wiped out. But He lifts it little by little. You shake and tremble and say, Is that the way I've been? You are aghast at the way you have been treating people, and you think, Thank God that's over! The next week He lifts it a little higher. You shake and tremble and go through it again and say, At last we got to the bottom! Then God lifts it high enough for you to see more, and you are wiped out again. But you handle it, little by little. Because, along with the revelation of yourself, He also reveals Himself and His adequacy to handle your inadequacies.

Is it not wonderful that He understands us that way and deals with us like that? If He revealed the glories of heaven to us suddenly, everyone of us would be running out to jump into the ocean, to get there as fast as possible. But He lifts the veil only a little at a time, as we are able to bear it.

Open my eyes, Father, that I may see glimpses of truth you have for me. Help me to understand what I read and to search out what I do not understand.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #7 Mark 4:30-34

Open It

1. If Jesus Christ had been sent to earth during our generation, how do you think He would have chosen to tell us His message?
2. What are some examples of something small that grows into something big?

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - Mark 4:30-34

Read It

Mark 4:30-34

Explore It

1. In what ways is this parable different from the previous one Jesus told? (4:30-31)
2. How is the kingdom of God like a mustard seed? (4:32)
3. What promise is given in this parable? (4:31-32)
4. Why did Jesus use the smallest seed known to the Galilean farmers in His audience as the example in this parable? (4:31-32)
5. How did Jesus' approach to teaching the crowds differ from the way He taught His disciples? (4:33-34)

Get It

1. In what ways does this parable encourage you to persist in your faith?
2. What does this parable teach you about sharing the message of Christ with your non-Christian friends?

3. What difference can it make in your everyday life that Jesus' kingdom will prevail over the sin and corruption of this world?
4. While we don't know for certain, what do you think the birds might symbolize in verse 32?

Apply It

1. How can you get involved this week in spreading the Good News and participating in the growth of the kingdom of God?
2. Who is one person with whom you could share the promise of the kingdom of God?
3. Are we willing to accept God's timing as He brings us to mature understanding of His will and ways? Are we perhaps pushing for instant maturity or avoiding the process?
4. Jesus was happy for people to listen openly and be curious about what He was saying, to have those on the inside ask for more and go more deeply, as is suggested in Mark 4:10-11. Sometimes we feel the pressure to explain the whole gospel all at once to people. How might we instead help them become curious and be motivated to go more deeply into what Jesus is all about?
5. Jesus doesn't call us to be successful. He calls us to be faithful, to persevere through discouragement in doing the work of the kingdom, to avoid the allure of grand success, knowing that God will make sure that seemingly insignificant seeds will produce the great harvest. How does that apply to your life this month?

PRAY: Thank God that you can participate in His Kingdom. Then ask him to help you tell others about him and his coming kingdom in such a way that they will want to be part of it too.

Man At Work

Week #8

Mark 4:35-5:20

No Faith

Do you still have no faith? (Mark 4:40c).

This is why people become afraid--because they lose faith. Faith is the answer to fear. Faith is always the answer to our fears, regardless of what they are. Jesus put His finger right on it: Do you still have no faith?

Well, evidently they did not. They had forgotten all the things He said to them in the Sermon on the Mount about the extent of God's care for them: Are you not much more valuable than flowers and birds? God cares for them; will he not much more care for you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:30). Here Jesus was in the boat with them; their fate would be His fate; and yet they had forgotten this.

How would these men have acted, do you think, if they had faith? Suppose their faith had been strong--their faith in Him and in God's care and love--what would they have done? One thing is certain: they would not have wakened Him; they would have let Him rest. He was tired and needed the rest badly. They would have done so because their faith would have reminded them of two great facts: First, the boat will not sink; it cannot sink when the Master of ocean and earth and sky is in it. Second, the storm will not last forever.

A good friend of mine, a handsome young evangelist from another country, told me about all the troubles he and his wife were going through. He was dejected. She was struggling with severe physical problems, ill health arising from asthma and bronchitis, which constantly kept her down. They had gone through years of struggle with this condition of hers already, and it seemed to pull the bottom out of everything he attempted to do. Here they were planning to go back to their own country, and now she was sick again. He came to me discouraged.

I remember turning to this incident in Mark and reciting this story and saying to him, Remember, the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever. That is having faith--to remember those facts. He thanked me, we prayed together, and he left. I did not see him for a couple of months; then we ran into each other. I said, How are things going? How is your wife? He said, Oh, not much better. She's still having terrible struggles. She can't breathe and can't take care of the children or the house, and we have a hard time. But I do remember two things: the boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever! So I prayed with him again.

After a while I received a note from him. He and his family had gone back to their country, and there they had found the answer. A doctor discovered a minor deficiency in his wife's diet that needed to be remedied. When that was done, the asthma and bronchitis disappeared, and she was in glorious, radiant health, and they were rejoicing together. At the bottom of the page he had written, The boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever.

I thank You, Lord, that You are here with me to comfort and strengthen me, to reassure me, and to take me through whatever storms may come. I know You are not here to stop the storms from coming, but to take me through them.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #8 Mark 4:35–5:20

Open It

1. How do you tend to handle stress—thrive, panic, seek out distractions, procrastinate, etc.?
2. When was the last time you had such wonderful news that you could not wait to tell someone about it?

Jesus Stills the Sea - Mark 4:35-41

Read It

Mark 4:35-41

Explore It

1. Retell this story in your own words
2. Why did the disciples take Jesus along "just as He was"? (4:36)
3. Why did Jesus rebuke His disciples? (4:40)
4. What did the disciples learn about Jesus from this event? (4:39-41)

Get It

1. Does it surprise you that the fishermen were afraid? Why or why not?
2. This is the first time the disciples as a group worshiped Jesus. Something is different about this miracle – something personal. What is it?
3. When have you ever felt as the disciples did—distressed at events out of control?

4. How has God helped you handle your fears and frustrations during difficult times?
5. What difference does it make to you that Jesus has authority over all the powers and forces of our world?

Apply It

1. In the devotional (“No Faith”) on the first page of this lesson the following comment is made, “The boat will not sink, and the storm will not last forever.” Do you agree or disagree with that? Why?
2. How can you trust God this upcoming week with situations that get out of control or seem hopeless?
3. When could you pray regularly this week for the needs in your life?
4. How would we respond to our fears if we acted on the basis of faith in God's sovereignty? Today's circumstances allow us to see our lives from His point of view.

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Man - Mark 5:1-20

Read It

Mark 5:1-20

Explore It

1. Where did the events of this story take place? Was this a Jewish or Gentile (non-Jewish) area? How do you know? (5:1)
2. What does Mark's record say about the power and number of the demons who controlled the man? What was their effect on him?

3. How had the townspeople coped with the demon-possessed man Jesus met? (5:4)
4. How did Jesus treat the man He met? (5:8-20)
5. What do Jesus' actions tell us about His character? (5:8-20)
6. How did Jesus treat the demons? (5:13)

Get It

1. Describe the man who met Jesus when he got out of the boat. Try to go beyond an external description to a description of his self-esteem and his conception of his place in the community.
2. During the storm, the disciples were desperate to be saved from drowning. What signs of desperation does the demonized man display in 5:2-12?
3. The Gerasene people opposed Jesus even though He helped them; why? Why do people sometimes oppose Christians today?
4. What are some ways that Satan tries to keep Christians from sharing the message of Christ with others?
5. What are some concrete ways we can turn over control of our lives to Christ?
6. At the end of this incident Jesus seems to reverse strategy. For the first time he tells someone to go and tell others about his healing. How is this man different from others? (See 1:21-26; 1:40-45; 3:7-12)
7. How does the man's actions after Jesus delivered him from demon-possession serve as an example to us?

Apply It

1. What kind of treatment had the possessed man received at the hands of the townspeople before Jesus arrived? How do we treat afflicted people in our community? How well do you think the Church communicates Jesus' authority and compassion?
2. What can you do this week to bring the message of Christ to a friend or coworker?
3. What is one area of your life that you can ask God to heal?

Man At Work

Week #9

Mark 5:21-6:6

Seeing Through

He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. (Mark 6:5-6)

We can gather up the meaning of this whole account in just a few words: Limited views mean limited lives. That is, if your view of life is so narrow and crabbed, so withered and shrunken as to include nothing but what you can see and feel and taste and smell and hear and reason, then your life is going to be horribly deprived and poverty stricken. This is how it was in Nazareth. Jesus had been in Nazareth the year before. They tried to kill Him on that occasion because He would not do what they wanted. Now He comes back again and teaches in the synagogue, and they are astonished. They ask the right questions: Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to Him? What mighty works are wrought by His hands!

But their answers to their own questions are horribly limited. Who is this? Is this not the carpenter? Why, He made the table in our house. I remember when we used to feed Him tea and sandwiches for lunch when He came to help us build the house where I live! He was just a carpenter! And His brothers and sisters live here--we know the whole family! Why, He couldn't be this powerful a man! And they did the incredible--they took refuge in that final resort of all weak and small minds--they ridiculed Him. They took offense at Him and began to discount all He had done.

Therefore, Jesus pointed out to them that this is characteristic of fallen human nature. There was no recognition of His worth, no honor accorded Him in His own hometown. And as a result, there was no mighty work done there. He responded to the few who had faith, but there was nothing the town could boast of. And is it not amazing that through all these centuries, though Nazareth has never been forgotten as the town in which Jesus grew up, yet to this very day it is regarded in Palestine with some sense of embarrassment! They missed their great opportunity.

What is this all saying--this entire account of the healing of the woman, the raising of Jairus's daughter, and the reception given him by the people of Nazareth? It is saying to us today, Lift up your eyes and look beyond the visible to the realities of God. Live in the full dimensions of life, as God intended life to be. Life can never be explained entirely in terms of the natural. We are left impoverished and despairing if all we have to depend on is our natural resources, natural power. But God is rich in grace, rich in power, rich in inward strength and sympathy, and His cry to us is, "No longer be unbelieving, but believe and have faith that I am at work, and I will enrich your life beyond your wildest dreams."

Teach me, Lord to respond with the touch of faith--not the thronging of admiration, but the touch of faith--to this Blessed One who, now in our midst, is ready to meet our need.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #9 Mark 5:21–6:6

Open It

1. How did your mother take care of you when you were sick?
2. What does the cliché “*Familiarity breeds contempt*” mean?
3. What is one piece of advice your parents gave you that you ignored growing up?

A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman - Mark 5:21-43

Read It

Mark 5:21-43

Explore It

1. Who was Jairus, and why did he want to see Jesus? (5:22-23)
2. How would you compare the faith of Jairus with the faith of the woman in the story? (5:23, 28)
3. What was Jesus’ immediate response to the woman’s action? (5:30-32)
4. Why did the woman fall down? Of what was she afraid? (5:33)
5. What happened while Jesus was still speaking to the woman? (5:35)

Get It

1. Compare the emotions and attitudes of Jarius and the bleeding woman. What does this tell you about how we are to approach Christ? What do these two stores teach you about prayer? About faith? About grace?

2. What connection is there between a person's faith and whether God heals him or her of a sickness?

3. How do you suppose Jairus felt when the bleeding woman delayed Jesus' arrival? When have you experienced similar feelings?

4. How did the delay in reaching Jairus's home affect Jesus' ultimate purposes? What does this teach us about God's timing in events and circumstances?

5. Think of a time when hurriedness caused you to miss an opportunity for ministry. How does Jesus' treatment of the woman with bleeding provide insight for spiritual growth in this arena?

6. Why do you think the bleeding woman was afraid to admit she was the one who had touched Jesus?

7. How does Jesus' treatment of the sick woman and Jairus offer comfort to us today?

Apply It

1. What factors led to the woman's desperation? How has desperation led to faith in your life or in the life of someone you know?

2. Many people pressed against Jesus in the crowd, but only one woman was healed. What does it take to really reach Jesus?

3. In what situation in your life do you need to heed Jesus' words, "Don't be afraid, just believe"?
4. List the different ways that contemporary society offers freedom from suffering. Name the ways you have spent your strength and your abundance but have not been made whole or free. How can we touch Jesus' garment today?
5. What is one fear that you can ask the Lord to help you face this week?

A Prophet Without Honor - Mark 6:1-6

Read It

Mark 6: 1-6

Explore It

1. Why were the people of Nazareth amazed by Jesus? (6:2)
2. Why did the people of Nazareth react negatively to Jesus' visit? (6:2-3)
3. What did Jesus say to the people who scoffed at Him? (6:4)
4. What prevented Jesus from doing more than a few miracles in Nazareth? (6:5-6)

Get It

1. What can we learn from this story about the cost of following Christ?
2. In what ways do you think we prevent Jesus from working miraculously in our own lives?
3. How could your local church step out in faith, believing that the Lord rewards those who trust Him?

4. What prevents us from listening to the people we know well?

5. How can we make ourselves more open to the insights of parents, siblings, or others who are close to us?

6. What dynamics of a “hometown” would have made it difficult for the people of Nazareth to take Jesus seriously?

7. How was Jesus’ visit to Nazareth different from his time in other towns? What effect would the admission that Jesus was more than a carpenter have had on the townspeople?

Apply It

1. With what specific step could you turn over one area of your life to the Lord as an act of faith in Him?

2. Are we responding with life-changing faith as we encounter the living Jesus in the pages of Scripture? Is our life vision being expanded by His indwelling presence?

Man At Work

Week #10

For Small Group Discussion 1/8 – 1/14

Mark 6:7-52

Who Is This?

Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. (Mark 6:51-52)

We cannot understand this last miracle unless we see it as a kind of examination period given to these disciples after the feeding of the five thousand. Our Lord had sent them out, had given them power. They had seen their ministry confirmed and authenticated by the hand of God working through them. They had come back excited and turned on by all they had seen and done. They had now been taught that Jesus was the one who was coming to fulfill the expectation of a Messiah to be given to Israel, promised throughout all the prophetic centuries. But somehow they seemed to miss it all.

So He gives them an examination, a test, to see how they are doing. He sends them out into a storm, but this time it is different. He is not with them in the boat. He sends them out alone, deliberately, and He goes up into the hills to pray. How many of the storms of our life are made up of these two elements--trouble that comes to us and seems to be overwhelming us, and the seeming absence of the Lord? Nevertheless, there is One up on the hillside praying for us.

After the storm has blown for several hours and the disciples are in deep distress, Jesus comes to them, walking upon the water. When they see Him they are scared out of their wits because they think He is a ghost. He has to reassure them: It--that thing you see that scares you to death--it is I; don't be afraid. How many times does He have to say that to us? That thing that scares us, frightens us--It is I; be not afraid. He got into the boat, and they were absolutely flabbergasted! This indicates the grade they got on this exam. It was F. It was a total failure, but it astonished them. For the second time, now, their eyes are opened to begin to question: Who then is this? And they begin to listen. This opens the door for some of our Lord's greatest teaching to His disciples regarding why He came.

And this is our Lord's question to us: Who is this? Who sends the storms into our lives? Who tests us? Who makes provision for our needs and then tests us on it? Who gives us a promise and then sends us out to see if we believe what we teach or what we say? It is the Lord Himself. This is what He is doing with us, as he did with His disciples. He is training us, teaching us, preparing us, building into our lives, as He built into their lives, so that we might be men and women of faith, confident and calm and able to cope with life.

Thank You, Father, for what You are doing with me. Though I live in the midst of perilous times and travel among troubled seas, I know who You are--the King of kings and Lord of lords.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #10 Mark 6:7-52

Open It

1. What is one lesson you had to learn the hard way?
2. In what ways have you ever had to depend on others for some of your needs?
3. When is the last time you remember being in a terrible storm?

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve - Mark 6:7-13

Read It

Mark 6:7-13

Explore It

1. What task did Jesus give the disciples? (6:7)
2. What do Jesus' actions tell us about His attitude toward His men? (6:7)
3. How did Jesus equip the disciples for their job? (6:7-11)
4. What was the central focus of the mission of the Twelve? (6:7, 13)
5. What does this episode tell us about why Jesus came to earth? (6:12-13)

Get It

1. How has God equipped you for serving Him?

2. How can you apply Jesus' advice to your Christian witness at work?
3. How should you react to people who do not respond to the message of Christ?

John the Baptist Beheaded - Mark 6:14-29

Read It

Mark 6:14-29

Explore It

1. What do Herod's actions throughout this episode say about the way sin operates in a person's life? (6:14-29)
2. Why had Herod arrested and imprisoned John the Baptist? (6:17-18)
3. How was John's condemnation of Herod's adulterous marriage related to the central message of John's preaching? (6:18)

Get It

1. How should we as Christians respond to others who malign the name of Christ?
2. When has it been difficult for you to confront someone about sin, as it was for John to confront Herod?
3. How do you think Christians can keep one another accountable?
4. Herod knew John to be a righteous and holy man; how do you think people view you? What do you need to change in your life to have a stronger witness for Christ?

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand - Mark 6:30-44

Read It

Mark 6:30-44

Explore It

1. Why did Jesus want to go away with the disciples to a quiet place? (6:31-32)
2. What problem did the disciples bring to Jesus? Why? (6:35-36)
3. What solution did the disciples suggest to the problem they faced? (6:36)
4. What did Jesus think of the disciples' suggestion? (6:37)
5. What did the disciples think of Jesus' solution? (6:37)

Get It

1. Why do you think God tells us to do things that seem to be impossible?
2. How can we expand our expectations of what God can do through us?
3. How do you think you should react when God tells you to do something that you are sure is beyond your ability?

Apply It

1. How can you show your willingness to give what you have back to God?
2. What can you do this week to increase your confidence in God?

Jesus Walks on the Water - Mark 6:45-53

Read It

Mark 6:45-56

Explore It

1. What problem were the disciples having? (6:48)
2. How did Jesus respond to the disciples' needs? (6:48)
3. Why were the disciples "completely amazed"? (6:51-52)

Get It

1. What did the disciples have to learn the hard way?
2. What can we learn from Jesus' commitment to help people and teach them?
3. In light of this story, how can you increase your faith in Jesus?

Apply It

1. How can you discipline yourself this week to spend time in undistracted prayer each day?
2. How can you make yourself sensitive to the lessons God wants to teach you this week?
3. When our lives are outwardly commendable but our faith and spiritual perception is weak, what things may God use to strengthen us, train us, and make us teachable?

Man At Work

Week #11

For Small Group Discussion 1/15 – 1/21

Mark 6:53-7:30

When Right Is Wrong

He replied, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. (Mark 7:6-7)

Those are insightful words. With our Lord's keen perceptiveness, He plunges right to the heart of the issue, "When the Pharisees ask Him. Why do your disciples not observe the traditions?" He points out to them, first of all, the effect that the observance of tradition has upon our lives. It produces hypocrites. "You hypocrites," He says. I am sometimes amazed as I read through the gospels at the bluntness of Jesus' language! In fact, Matthew's account tells us that the disciples said to Him afterward, "Do you realize that you offended those Pharisees?"

But notice what He is doing here. He is pointing out the result of traditional "worship". And He utilizes the word of the prophet Isaiah to show us what it is like. According to Isaiah, there is that which consists of right words but wrong attitudes. Everything outward is right, but inwardly the mind and heart are wrong. That, Jesus says, is hypocrisy--to look as if you are doing something religious and worshipful and God-related, but inside to have an entirely different attitude.

A few years ago, many of us were puzzled and offended when young people would say to us, in one way or another, We don't want to come to church because churches are filled with hypocrites. Some of us could not understand what they meant. We knew there might be some churches that were filled with hypocrites, but not ours! We had honest difficulty with this. We could not see where there was any hypocrisy in a thoroughly Bible-centered, evangelical church such as ours. But what they were saying was this: "You use great words--wonderful words--but you don't really mean them. You talk about love, but you don't love. You talk about forgiveness, but you don't forgive. You talk about acceptance, but you don't accept." And they were right.

That is what tradition can do to us. It externalizes religion, makes it outward instead of inward. As long as we are fulfilling the prescribed outward form, we think we are acceptable before God. That is the terrible danger of tradition. This particular form that Isaiah mentions here--right words and wrong attitudes--is widespread among Christians. We all suffer from it at times, and we ought to recognize it and admit it. And it has resulted in what is probably the most deadly danger to the evangelistic message of the church--the self-righteousness of Christians--thinking that because we do things in the "right" way, and say the "right" words, and believe the "right" doctrines, we are thus pleasing to God.

Father, I confess the many, many times I have done the outward things with the inward heart far removed. Thank You that You know me, and You have already made provision for my forgiveness. Teach me to worship You in spirit and in truth.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #11 Mark 6:52-7:30

Open It

1. What are some of the traditions in your church? Are they a good or bad influence? Explain.
2. When was a time when you felt like an outsider?

Superstar Retreat - Mark 6:53-56

Read It

Mark 6:53-56

Explore It

1. Where did Jesus and His disciples finally land? (6:53) What can you find out about this town?
2. What did Jesus do after He and the disciples had crossed over the lake? (6:54-56)
3. How did the crowds respond to Jesus when He came to their villages? (6:56)
4. What difference did it make that the crowds welcomed Jesus? (6:56)

Get It

1. Does this mean that if we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers in the way we think they should be met?

Clean and Unclean - Mark 7:1-23

Read It

Mark 7:1-23

Explore It

1. Why were the Pharisees and teachers of the law concerned about what Jesus' disciples were doing? (7:3-4)

2. How were the Pharisees being hypocritical in this instance? (7:9)
3. What example did Jesus give to prove His accusations against the Pharisees? (7:10-12)
4. How did Jesus place tradition in proper perspective? (7:10-19)

Get It

1. Are there any practices in our church do you think might be distracting people's attention from the central concerns of the faith?

Do any stand in the way of non-believers becoming interested in Christianity?

2. Are there any traditions that you hold on to that can go against the commands of God? What about someone else in your family?
3. The Pharisees were caught up in observing religious externals with little concern for inner purity. What are the externals in our church that people may use to judge others?
4. In what ways do you think it is possible to worship the Lord in vain?
5. From the list of "unclean" things that come from within a person's heart (greed, deceit, envy, etc.), which attitude or action do you need to work on eliminating from your life?
6. In areas where you have been trying to make others think you are something you are not, pray for humility. What would you like to be able to stop doing?

The Faith of a Syrophenician Woman - Mark 7:24-30

Read It

Mark 7:24-30

Explore It

1. Who came to see Jesus? Why? (7:25-26)
2. What was this woman's background? (7:26)
3. How did Jesus respond to this woman? (7:27)
4. How did the woman appeal Jesus' decision not to help her? (7:28)
5. Why was Jesus impressed with the woman? (7:28-29)

Get It

1. What was exemplary about the woman who came to see Jesus?
2. Why would you or wouldn't you have gone to see Jesus if you had been in the same situation as this woman?
3. What have you "begged" Jesus to do for you in the past? How did He answer?
4. How would you compare your level of faith with that of the woman in this story?
5. No two of Jesus' healings were exactly alike; how should our witness for Christ be tailored to each situation and person?
6. What concrete step can you take to show your faith in the Lord and your dependence on His power?

Man At Work

Week #12

For Small Group Discussion 1/22 – 1/28

Mark 7:31-8:21

Do You Not Yet Understand?

*Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?
Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? (Mark 8:17b-18)*

In this series of questions, our Lord is suggesting for them, and for us, what to do when we get the spiritual “blahs”. One young man came to me and said, “I'm a graduate of a Bible college. I've been a Christian for a number of years. But I must tell you that I feel so blah, so empty. I've lost all interest in what God is doing, and I just don't have any desire even to get involved in a Bible study anymore. What should I do?” I had just been studying this passage, so I did what our Lord suggests in this passage without telling this young man what I was doing.

The first thing the Lord suggests is to use your mind. “Do you not see or understand?” Stop and think about where you are, about what is happening to you, and why it happened.

Analyze it. Read what the Bible has to say about it. That is what the mind is for. Study the revelations of God to you. Use your mind.

Second, He asks, “Are your hearts hardened?” That is, analyze the state of your heart. Are you dull, or do you respond? Have you forgotten truth? Because if the heart does not respond to what the mind has understood, then it is because you have not really believed it. You may have recognized mentally that it is true, but you have not acted upon it. You do not really believe God is going to do what He has said He will do. This is always revealed by a dull, unresponsive heart. Truth always moves us—when we believe it. It always grips us and excites us. And if we are not excited, it is because the mind has grasped it but the heart has not.

Jesus moves on: “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?” Jesus said these words again and again to the people He taught, and each time He means the same thing. Do not just look at the events you are seeing and think that is all there is to it. It is a parallel to something deeper and more important concerning your spirit. As these men were being fed by the loaves and the fishes, He was saying to them, “Don't think of this merely as a way of getting a good, quick, free meal. Remember that I am telling you that you have a deeper need, a far more demanding need, which needs daily replenishment as well.”

And finally, “Don't you remember?” Hasn't God taught you things in the past through your circumstances? Hasn't He led you through events that have made you understand something about your life? Do you not remember the times He said things like that in the past? Remember them now, and recognize that you are in the hands of a loving Father who has put you right where you are to teach you a very needed truth.

Forgive me, Father, for the dullness of my heart. Help me to give myself every day to this One who is the bread sent down from heaven.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #12 Mark 7:31-8:21

Open It

1. What do you think it would be like to be deaf or unable to speak?
2. How does it make you feel to receive support or help from others?
3. When was a time you misunderstood what someone said or did? What resulted?

The Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man - Mark 7:31-37

Read It

Mark 7:31-37

Explore It

1. Where did the events of this story take place? (7:31) What did we learn about this area previously? (5:1-20)
2. What did Jesus do so that the man would know it was Jesus who helped him? (7:33-36)
3. Why couldn't the people stop talking about Jesus? (7:37)

Get It

1. Has God helped you in a way that met your personal, unique needs, as He did for the man in this story?
2. What can you do this next week to show your thanks to God for His work in your life?
3. How do the events here demonstrate the Gerasene man's success in telling about what Jesus had done for him (5:1-20)?

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand – And the Disciples Forget... Mark 8:1-13

Read It

Mark 8:1-13

Explore It

1. How long had the crowd in this story been gathered? Why? (8:2)
2. How did Jesus involve His disciples in this problem? (8:5-8)
3. How much food went uneaten? (8:8)
4. What announcement did Jesus make to the generation of His day? (8:12)

Get It

1. What can we learn from Jesus' attitude and actions toward the crowds that followed Him?
2. How does God's work in the past encourage you to trust Him with your future?
3. Why do people demand signs from God?
4. Why does God refuse to give us signs or proof of His existence and presence?
5. What sort of things do you think kept the disciples from recognizing who Jesus was? What keeps us from trusting Jesus today?
6. Like the disciples, it seems that we easily forget about God's blessings. He meets our needs, but then when the next problem arises, we complain or become frightened... How can we change that?

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod - Mark 8:14-21

Read It

Mark 8:14-21

Explore It

1. What did Jesus warn His disciples against? (8:15)
2. Why couldn't the disciples understand what Jesus said? (8:17-18)
3. Why was Jesus surprised with His disciples? (8:17-21)

Get It

1. How can we guard against misinterpreting or ignoring the Scriptures?
2. When has your heart been "hardened" to God's message?
3. If Jesus had been speaking directly to us, what negative example might He have warned us to learn from?
4. Unlike our modern yeast, the sourdough leaven used in those days could easily become tainted with bacteria and poison the bread, so in the Old Testament it symbolized the infectious power of evil. What was "the yeast" of the Pharisees? (Look back at Mark 7:6. Luke 12:1 defines it specifically.)

How do hypocrisy, materialism, selfishness, pride, etc. work in a person's life as yeast works in dough?

Recap

Re-Read It

Reread Mark 7:33 and 8:23

Get It

1. Why does Jesus take these two individuals away from the crowds?
2. In what ways does coming away with Jesus facilitate the healing process?
3. How do contemporary Christians come away with Jesus?
4. What does a time alone with Jesus provide that time with Him in larger groups, like church, cannot?
5. We may experience times of spiritual lethargy, but we do not need to settle for that state of mind & heart. In the devotional at the beginning of this section, Ray Stedman shares four helpful ways to combat it and be spiritually restored. What are they?

Man At Work

Week #13

For Small Group Discussion 1/29 – 2/4

Mark 8:22-8:33

The Necessity of The Cross

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

Christianity without the cross is not Christianity at all, but a shabby, slimy substitute. The word of the cross is what makes it Christian. What does it mean? Three elements, which will come out as we continue our study in Mark.

First, it means the end of the natural, the end of what we call “self-sufficiency”. That is the philosophy of the day, and how the world despises this message that it must be done away with! Not only does the world not understand it, it literally despises it! Anyone who preaches it is regarded as preaching nonsense. As Christians, we are called upon either to believe our Lord or the voices that whisper in our ears--one or the other. Which is right? The word of the cross means the end of all our reliance upon ourselves, and we do not like that. It means wiping out the natural life. Nothing that we have by virtue of being born is ever worthwhile or acceptable in the sight of God. A cross wipes people out. It does not improve them, does not better them in any way; it wipes them out.

Furthermore, the second element involves pain and hurt. It always does, because we do not like being cut off. Which of us, if allowed to choose the program by which we serve God, would ever include in it defeat, disaster, despair, disappointment, disillusionment, and death? Yet these are the very elements that God finds absolutely essential to working out His plan for us. Difficulty and danger? Yes, we include them. They challenge the flesh and make it appear to be something when it surmounts these. But defeat? Never! Dishonor? Never! Disaster? Disappointment? No! Death? Inconceivable! But they are what God chooses.

The third element of the way of the cross is that it leads to a resurrection. Is it not strange that the disciples never seemed to hear Jesus when, every time He spoke of the cross, He said that after three days He would rise again? They seemed arrested by the cross and could never get beyond it. They rejected it, refused to listen to it, and so they never came to an understanding of what the glorious event of the resurrection would mean, until it actually happened. But the way of the cross always leads to a resurrection, to a new beginning, on different terms. It leads to freedom, to being set free from natural catastrophe and disaster, to having your spirit peaceful and at rest, despite what is happening to your body or your person. This is what people really want. How we long for and dream of being free, whole, adequate, able to handle life, able to cope with whatever comes, undisturbed at heart.

Father, I ask that You will help me understand that Jesus is in the hurts, in the disappointments, in the disasters, that He is leading me on, setting me free from that which is shackling me--all my self-sufficiency and self-reliance, all my desire to be exalted, to be made much of.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #13 Mark 8:22-8:33

Open It

1. When have you ever succumbed to group pressure when you knew you should not have?
2. In what ways has your life been different from what you expected?

The Healing of a Blind Man at Bethsaida - Mark 8:22-26

Read It

Mark 8:22-26

Explore It

1. What did the people do about the blind man's condition? (8:22)
2. How did Jesus heal the blind man? (8:23-25)
3. What is unique about this healing compared to every other healing Mark recorded in his Gospel? (8:23-26)

Get It

1. What is the connection between this gradual healing and the disciples' slowness to understand who Jesus was?
2. Why do you think Jesus healed people in so many unique ways?
3. When has your "sight" been clouded by circumstances in your life? How has God opened your eyes?
4. How could you help a person you know who needs a "second touch" from Jesus?

Peter's Confession of Christ - Mark 8:27-30

Read It

Mark 8:27-30

Explore It

1. What did people theorize about Jesus? (8:27-28)
2. How did Jesus make this discussion personal? (8:29)
3. What warning did Jesus give His disciples? (8:30)

Get It

1. Why do you think Jesus asked about His identity at this particular point?
2. The blind man needs two touches to bring his physical sight. What two touches did the disciples need to bring the spiritual sight Peter articulates in 27-30?
3. Why would people think that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other prophets?
4. How does the knowledge that one day everyone will know that Christ is Lord affect your attitude about the pressure you feel from the world?
5. How can we stand up for what is right in the face of pressure from others to compromise?

Jesus Predicts His Death - Mark 8:31-33

Read It

Mark 8:31-33

Explore It

1. What did Jesus teach the disciples? (8:31)
2. Who rebuked whom? Why? (8:32-33)
3. In what way did Peter have in mind the "things of man" as opposed to the "things of God"? (8:33)

Get It

1. How does Peter show that his sight is still distorted?
2. Why do you suppose what Jesus says in verse 31 is so hard for Peter to accept?
3. Jesus calls Peter "Satan". What satanic temptation has Peter thrown at Jesus?
4. When have you ever doubted the words of Jesus?
5. In what ways has Christ rebuked you in the past?
6. How can we make sure we "have in mind the things of God"?

Man At Work

Week #14

For Small Group Discussion 2/5 – 2/11

Mark 8:34-8:38

Saving or Losing?

*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it (Mark 8:35).*

Who is not interested in saving their lives, in making them worthwhile, full and rich, worth the living? Deep down within us, every one of us has a hunger for life and a desire to find it, to the full extent of what it was designed to be. This is what Jesus is talking about. If this is what you want, He says, I'll tell you how to acquire it. There are two attitudes toward life that are possible, and you can have only one or the other.

One attitude is to save your life now: hoard it, clutch it, cling to it, grasp it, try to get hold of it for yourself, take care of yourself, trust yourself, see that in every situation your first and major concern is, What's in it for me? That is one way to live, and millions are living that way today.

The other attitude is lose it: fling it away, disregard what advantage there may be for you in a situation, and move out in dependence upon God, careless of what may happen to you. Abraham obeyed God, went out into a land he knew not where, on a march without a map, apparently careless of what would happen to him. His neighbors reproached and rebuked him for not caring about himself. This is to be a way of life, Jesus says. Trust God, obey Him, and put the responsibility for what happens on Him.

There are only two results that can follow. If you save your life, if you cling to it, hoard it, get all you can for yourself, then, Jesus says, you will lose it. This is not a mere platitude; He is stating a fundamental law of life. You will find that you have everything you want, but you will not want anything you have. You will find that all of the life you tried to grasp has slipped through your fingers, and you have ended up with a handful of cobwebs and ashes, dissatisfied, hollow and empty, mocked by what you hoped to get.

But lose your life for My sake and the gospel's, says Jesus, lose your life by means of giving yourself away in the cause of Christ, giving up your right to yourself, taking up your cross and following Me, and you will save it. You will not waste it, but you will save it. You will find contentment and satisfaction, an inner peace, and a sense of worth about your living. You will discover, not just in heaven someday but right now, that even though you may not have all the things others have, your life will be rich and rewarding and satisfying.

This is God's part in the work of discipleship. Jesus did not come to call us to ultimate barrenness, weakness, darkness, and death. He called us to life, to richness, to enjoyment, to fulfillment. But He has told us that the way there means death. Discipleship ends in life, not in death. It ends in fulfillment and satisfaction. But the only way that we can find it is by means of a cross.

Father, help me to make the choice for life, and not for death, that by Your power You will help me find the grace to say yes to You, Lord Jesus, and to enter into life by means of the cross.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #14 Mark 8:34-8:38

Open It

1. When have you tried to teach when the pupils didn't understand what you were teaching?
2. Think of our school days. What was your worst subject – the one you always dreaded, the one you longed to give up?
3. If you are a parent, what are the top 3 things you want your children to learn?

Losing Life to Save It - Mark 8:34-38

Read It

Mark 8:34-8:38

Explore It

1. What did Jesus do after rebuking Peter? (8:34)
2. What did Jesus want His disciples to do? (8:34-35)
3. How did Jesus refer to the people to whom He was speaking? (8:38)
4. How will Jesus come back to earth? (8:38)

Get It

1. How has Jesus denied himself for the sake of others?
2. What is the difference between denying self and self-denial (8:34)?

3. In what ways does society pressure us to “gain the whole world”? (8:35)

How do those things lead people to lose their lives?

4. We can waste our lives or invest our lives in eternal things of God. What are some examples of living as Jesus instructs.
5. If you are a parent, what are examples of ways we can fall into the trap of even encouraging or pushing your kids to “gaining the world”? How can that pursuit cause your child to “lose their own soul”?
6. We don’t deny ourselves in order to shrivel up and disappear. We deny ourselves in order to endure whatever comes with doing the work of Christ in a hostile world. How is God calling you to love, serve, or witness for Christ in a costly way?
7. Peter’s idea of the Christ is laden with selfish, human fantasies. He wants Jesus to defeat his nation’s enemies and rule over a prosperous kingdom, with Peter sharing the power and its perks. What are some of the selfish fantasies that keep a Christian from embracing and living by what Jesus says in these verses?
8. Go back to question #3 and circle those which are a particular temptation to you. Ask God for the strength to turn away from them.

**Our greatest fear shouldn’t be failure
but rather ...**

**succeeding at something
that doesn’t really matter.**

Man At Work

Week #15

For Small Group Discussion 2/12 – 2/18

Mark 8:38 - 9:29

The Glory That Follows

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. (Mark 9:2)

A remarkable event! There are four dramatic occurrences in this account that immediately capture our attention: First, there is the glorious change in the person of the Lord Himself: Suddenly, as they were with Jesus there on that mountain, His countenance altered. His face began to shine, His garments became white, and His whole being radiated glory. What happened to Jesus? We can only understand this when we see that what He did was to slip back into eternity, in a sense, back into his pre-human glory. It is evident therefore that our Lord did not have to die. That is one of the meanings of the transfiguration. It makes clear that He had no reason to pass through death. He could step back across the boundary of time into eternity without passing through death.

The second thing that grips us is the account of the heavenly visitors, Moses and Elijah. The disciples seemed to have no difficulty at all in recognizing instantly who these men were. Jesus did not say, "Now, Peter, James, and John, I'd like you to meet Moses and Elijah." No, they knew instantly who they were. There will be no need for introductions in glory.

The third element of great interest in this account is the proposal that Peter makes. After hearing these men discussing these strange events together, Peter, in his usual manner, interrupts: "Master, it is good for us to be here. This is tremendous! Let's make three booths and live here. Let's settle down here and make this our world headquarters. We'll make one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He evidently has in mind that they would transform that mountain into the headquarters for the worldwide reformation movement that was going to start. They would operate right from that mountain, as the center of all activity. That shows how foolish he was and how little he understood what Jesus had been trying to tell him. Someone has said that there are only two kinds of speakers: those who have something to say, and those who have to say something! Peter was someone who just had to say something. So he makes this proposal that they make this their headquarters for a great campaign to take over the world.

But he scarcely had gotten the words out when he was interrupted, and the fourth dramatic event occurred. Suddenly they were overshadowed with a cloud. It is my conviction that it was the identical cloud mentioned in the Old Testament, which hovered over the tabernacle during the day--the glory of God, called the shekinah. They heard a voice speaking out of the cloud saying, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him." There is no doubt that this is a correction of Peter's brash statement. The Father Himself is saying, "Peter, do not put Jesus on a par with Moses and Elijah. You listen to Him. He is the one of whom Moses and Elijah spoke. He is the one who fulfilled all the predictions of the prophets and the sacrifices of the law. Listen to Him; this is my beloved Son."

Lord. I am grateful for this preview of glory. Teach me to stand back in awe at who You are and what You have planned for me.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #15 Mark 8:38-9:29

Open It

1. When were you last speechless?
2. When was the last time you felt inadequate to do a job you had to do?
3. What sort of suffering in relation to the gospel do you most fear? Why?

The Transfiguration - Mark 8:38 – 9:13

Introduction

Today we come to one of the most dramatic events in Scripture -- ranking perhaps only after the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord -- the transfiguration of Jesus. This event follows his announcement of the cross, and of the way of discipleship -- both what it would cost those who are to be his disciples, and what the blessings would be as well. It is evident from Mark's text that Jesus knew the transfiguration was coming. He announced it at least six full days before it happened. He had led the disciples, all twelve of them, to the foot of Mount Hermon in order that they might prepare for this event.

Read It

Mark 8:38-9:13

Explore It

1. What happened to Jesus on the mountain? (9:3)
2. What did God say to the disciples? What did He want them to do? (9:7)
3. What did the disciples see after the cloud vanished? (9:7-8)
4. What caught the "elite three" off guard and became the topic of discussion as they headed down the mountain? (9:10)
5. Stumper: What are the three occasions in the New Testament when the voice of God spoke directly from heaven concerning the work of Jesus?

Get It

1. STUMPER: If Jesus is not predicting the time of His second coming in verses 8:38-9:1, what could he be predicting?
2. What can we learn from this account about the relationship between God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ?
3. Elijah and Moses were prominent in first-century thought. Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets – the two main divisions of the Jewish Scriptures. Why would God choose these men to appear with Jesus?

How would the presence of Moses and Elijah endorse the claims Jesus had been making about himself?

4. As at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11), a voice from the sky speaks, affirming Jesus as the deeply loved Son we should listen to. (See also Deuteronomy 18:14-22.) What is implied by God's command that we listen to Jesus? How can we listen more closely to Jesus' voice?
5. Jesus' disciples witnessed an eye-opening revelation of the majesty and deity of Jesus. What are the amazing implications for us as we read of His transfiguration?
6. When has a spiritual experience caused you to be speechless or frightened?

The Healing of a Boy With an Evil Spirit - Mark 9:14-29

Introduction

While three of the disciples witness Jesus' transfiguration, the others struggle to carry on the ministry... Jesus gave his disciples authority over evil spirits (6:7). But having tasted success, they have fallen in to their society's belief that power over spirits comes from the exorcist's technique, such as using the right words to tap into divine power. They think they have the gift and can exercise it at will. But they fail publicly.

Read It

Mark 9:14-29

Explore It

1. What had the evil spirit done to the boy it possessed? (9:17-18)
2. What was the evil spirit's response to Jesus? (9:20)
3. How were prayer and faith related in this situation? (9:22-23)

Get It

1. Jesus said that the disciples failed to drive out the demon because they were "faithless". What does that mean?
2. Jesus said "prayer" was the only thing that could drive out the demon. What kind of "prayer" do you think he was referring to? (Verify your response by looking at how Jesus proceeded to drive out the demon.)
 - You have to pray the right words
 - You need to pray really hard when you face a demon like this one.
 - You need to be in consistent prayer, depending on God day by day.
 - You need to pray with firm faith that you will succeed.
 - Prayer with fasting is a good technique that often works.
 - Other: _____
3. How would you define an effective "life of prayer"?

Man At Work

Week #16

For Small Group Discussion 2/26 – 3/3

Mark 9:30 - 50

Who Is The Greatest?

*Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said,
"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all". (Mark 9:35)*

Our Lord evidently knew what these disciples had been talking about. So when they get into the house at Capernaum, He asks them, "What were you discussing on the way?" --a simple, normal question--but He is met by embarrassed silence because they had been discussing who was the greatest among them. Somehow that did not sound right in the presence of Jesus. It would be wonderful if we always had this awareness that what we say and think is being done in His presence. It would make us feel differently about many things.

We are not told how this argument came about. I suspect that it was occasioned by the events of the transfiguration. James, Peter, and John had been chosen to go up on the mountain with the Lord and to observe this marvelous sight. Jesus had strictly charged them to tell no one what they had seen. I believe they kept this charge. But it is quite possible to keep a secret in such a way as to make everybody agog to find out more. When they came back, the others probably asked, "What happened up there?" And they said, "Oh, we're not permitted to say. One of these days perhaps we might be able to tell you, but you ordinary disciples are excluded from this for now." And then, of course, the argument readily arose as to who was the greatest.

To answer this, Jesus gave them a marvelously revealing statement. He told them the truth about ambition. Notice He did not rebuke them for wanting to be greatest. Never does He take them to task because of their desire. God has somehow built into every human heart the desire to succeed at whatever we do. He did not rebuke them, for this is part of our humanity--to want to succeed. What He did do was to tell them the true way to greatness. "It is not by seeking to be first," He said. "It is by a willingness to be last. It is not by getting people to serve you; it is by becoming a servant of all."

There are two kinds of ambition. There is the ambition to be approved and applauded by people, and the ambition to be approved and applauded by God. There are those who want to gain fame and attention and influence and power. The measurement of the ambition to be great before people is always "How many serve me? How much power do I exercise over others? How wide is the extent of my influence?" Who of us has not suffered many times from this desire to be known, to be admired, to be considered great?

But Jesus points out that true greatness is never found there. The measure of true greatness is "How many do I serve? How many can I help?" This is the mark of greatness in the eyes of God. Christianity is a radical faith! It is exactly the opposite of the natural instincts of the heart. Our natural inclinations will get us deeper and deeper into trouble. Though we may achieve a form of greatness in the eyes of people, it will turn into cobwebs and ashes in our hands.

Teach me the meaning of these words in the depths of my heart. Help me to strive for that greatness that will shine throughout eternity.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #16 Mark 9:30-50

Open It

1. Beyond Jesus, Whom do you consider to be a great person? Why?
2. What happens to a team of workers when members become jealous and use power plays against each other?

Who Is the Greatest? - Mark 9:33-37

Introduction

Jesus and his disciples are now traveling south through Galilee, heading ultimately toward Jerusalem. On the way he again predicts his betrayal, death, and resurrection. His disciples tune out this message and begin to argue with one another.

Read It

Mark 9:33 - 37

Explore It

1. How did Jesus get His disciples' attention? (9:33-34)
2. What does the disciples' argument tell you about their understanding of who Jesus was and why He had come? (9:33-34)
3. What events prior to this argument might have prompted the Twelve to quarrel over which of them was "the greatest"?

Get It

1. How does Jesus define greatness?
2. How does his attitude toward children illustrate his point about greatness?

3. How are Jesus' attitudes about greatness and personal worth radically different from attitudes we often adopt from society?
4. Who are the "children" in today's society? In what ways is our church receiving these individuals? In what ways do you receive them?
5. How can you become a "servant of all" in your everyday actions and attitudes?
6. In what specific situation can you consciously choose to be a servant for Christ's sake sometime this next week?

Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us - Mark 9:38-41

Read It

Mark 9:38 - 41

Explore It

1. What issue concerned the disciples? (9:38)
2. What attitudes did the disciples have in this situation? (9:38)
3. Why do you think the Twelve tried to prevent someone who wasn't part of their group from casting out demons in Jesus' name? Why did Jesus feel the opposite – why was He ok with it? (9:40)

Get It

1. STUMPER: Could pride have caused the disciples to speak out against this man? What might he have done that made them feel inferior?

2. Over what issues do we tend to be divided as believers?
3. How does Christ want us to respond to others who minister in His name, even if they do not come from the same group or background as we do?

What group of people do you have difficulty responding in this way to?

4. What stumbling blocks do older Christians sometimes put in the way of new believers?
5. How can we become more unified as a body of believers?
6. What can you do to support someone who does good and is "not against you"?

Causing to Sin - Mark 9:42-50

Read It

Mark 9:42 - 50

Explore It

1. What was Jesus' attitude toward sin? (9:43-47)
2. How did Jesus use figurative language to get His message across? (9:43-48)
3. Why is "saltiness" necessary in a Christian's life? (9:50)

Get It

1. How can a person's hand, foot, or eye cause him or her to sin?
2. Where did Jesus previously say sin comes from (Mark 7:20-23)? Why would literally cutting off a hand or foot not be a radical enough way to deal with sin?
3. In what ways is causing another person to sin worse than sinning yourself?
4. What do you need to do to add some "salt" to your witness?
5. What concrete action can you take this week to avoid a sin that you have struggled with in the recent past?
6. STUMPER: Where are verses 44 & 46? Some translations leave them out. Why?
7. According to verse 48, how long will hell last?
8. How does Jesus' final command in verse 50 tie back to the issues raised in verses 33-34 and 38?

Would you rather endure the fires of hell as a lost sinner or the purifying fires of God as a sacrifice for His glory? Remember, Satan promises you glory now, but the pain comes later. Jesus calls us to suffering now, and then we will enjoy the glory. – *Warren Wiersbe*

Man At Work

Week #17

For Small Group Discussion 3/4 – 3/10

Mark 10:1-12

The Purpose Of Marriage

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one (Mark 10:7-8).

There are a great many implications in this statement. First, you recognize that it does away with all such notions as “homosexual marriages”. There are no such things. These pathetic misrepresentations are but a poignant commentary upon the twisted, distorted ideas that prevail in society today. It takes a man and a woman to be married. Marriage is one man and one woman, and it always has been, from the beginning.

But what our Lord makes clear is that this relationship is the highest relationship possible in life. It takes priority over all others. Closer even than the tie of blood is that of marriage, in the mind and heart of God. It is a closer relationship than with any children who follow. People are to become husbands and wives before they become fathers and mothers. This indicates a priority of relationship. A man is closer to his wife, and a wife to her husband, than they will ever be to their children. Though we may not feel that way, nevertheless, it is the truth.

What, then, is the purpose in marriage? It is to become one. This is what marriages are for. Two people who are disparate, distinct, and different individuals, with different personalities, different gifts, blending their lives together so that through the process of the years they become one flesh--that is what marriage is. It is not something that happens instantaneously when you get married. The wedding service does not make you one. The first act of sex after marriage does not make you one. It begins the process, but it does not finish it. It takes the whole marriage to accomplish this. Marriage is the process of two people becoming one.

Therefore man and woman are not to live together as roommates. Marriage is not going your separate ways and having your separate careers and merely sharing a house and a bed together. Nor are they to split up over every problem or difficulty that arises between them; they are to work them out. They are not to separate; they are to choose to be together, to spend the rest of their lives together, in order that they might merge their lives together. Therefore they stop being rivals and start to become partners. A successful marriage, therefore, is not one without problems; it is one where the problems are being worked out, where the husband and wife do not split but stick together, face up to their problems, discover the hardness of heart that is there, and learn how God can soften it. In other words, it is a process, not a single production. It is a pilgrimage, not a six weeks' performance. It is intended to be a public portrayal, not a private predicament. It is a lifelong contract, not a renegotiable franchise, as many presume today.

Thank You for these plain and clear words that help me understand what is involved when we choose a wife or husband and what Your purpose is in it. Help me to walk in these ways.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #17 Mark 10:1-12

Open It

1. Who is a great example to you of a godly husband or wife?
2. What do you think makes a marriage strong and lasting?

The Two Shall Become One - Mark 10:1-12

Introduction

A most serious issue of Jesus' time was divorce. The scripture gives high honor to the sanctity of marriage. Yet the common Jewish practice in Jesus' time was calloused. A statement of release, written by a rabbi, could be easily attained at the man's request. Jewish law treated the wife as a possession without any personal legal rights, a person at the complete disposal of the husband. She could be cast aside for the most trivial of reasons.

The Pharisees do not seek wisdom, but wish to "test" Jesus and perhaps trick him into saying something that will make him lose credibility in the peoples' eyes. The Pharisees pit Jesus against Moses.

Read It

Mark 10:1-12

Explore It

1. Remembering Herod's marital status from Mark 6:17-18 and what happened to John the Baptist, how could the Pharisees' question put Jesus in a tough spot no matter how He answered? (10:2)
2. Why do you think Jesus brought Moses into this discussion? (10:3)
3. How did Jesus explain the relationship between the Law and the will of God? (10:5-9)
4. What was God's original plan for marriage before sin entered the picture? (10:6-9)
5. Why did this topic come up a second time that day? (10:10)
6. How did Jesus protect women with His instructions? (10:11-12)

Get It

1. When Jesus asked the Pharisees "What did Moses command you?" (10:3), they responded "Moses permitted" (10:4). What is the significance of this difference?
2. Why do you think Jesus referred back to the "beginning of creation" in this debate?
3. What do we learn about God's intentions for marriage in 10:6-7?
4. Jesus gave His stringent standard on marriage in the context of other stringent standards for discipleship. How would obeying what He says in 9:33-37 affect a person's conduct in a marriage and family?
5. STUMPER: Under what condition did Moses allow for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1? Make sure that your answer is in line with Deuteronomy 22:22 and Leviticus 20:10 (and John 8:1-11).
6. How did Jesus' mention of the wife in His directive on divorce elevate the status of women in that society?
7. How could a person separate "what God has joined together"?
8. Why do you think the disciples asked Jesus about their question privately?

Man At Work

Week #18

For Small Group Discussion 3/11 – 3/17

Mark 10:13-31

The Plight Of The Overprivileged

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:25).

This is a remarkable statement that Jesus makes. In it He highlights the terrible danger of affluence. This, He says, does horrible things to the soul. Most of us, if not openly then at least secretly, are envious of rich people. We wish we had money. And yet, if we really understood what Jesus is saying, we would not feel that way. We would feel sorry for them. We think them overprivileged; Jesus says they are underprivileged. They are deprived people. There is so much they are robbed of by the things they have. So Jesus goes on to point out the terrible danger of affluence. "It is impossible," He says, "for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Let us not minimize His language here. Some commentators attempt to soften this by explaining that the "eye of a needle" referred to a tiny gate, about four feet high, located in the wall of Jerusalem, and that by squirming and wriggling a camel could conceivably get through it. I do not see much evidence to support that view. I think Jesus meant a literal needle. Try to imagine a huge, humpy camel trying to squeeze through a needle's eye. Jesus is saying to them, "It's impossible."

Why is it impossible? It is clear from the context that riches tend to destroy the qualities you must have in order to enter the kingdom of God. They destroy the childlikeness of life. Affluence creates a concern for secondary values. Rich people are not worried about where their next meal is coming from; they worry about what it will taste like. They are not concerned about whether they worship God rightly but whether they are in a beautiful building. Riches transfer their concern from the necessary things to secondary.

Furthermore, affluence destroys teachability because it creates a false sense of power and authority. Those who have power because of their money begin to feel that they ought to be the teacher. They do not need to learn--they already know everything! This makes for arrogance, indifference, and for insensitivity to the needs of others, for isolation and a lack of concern.

Finally, affluence gradually enslaves those who are attached to it. It builds an increasing dependence upon comfort, upon the "good life", until people reach a point where they cannot give it up. They are owned by their possessions. Like to a habit-forming drug, they become addicted to things, addicted to comfort and ease. Therefore it destroys the responsive spirit that is ready and willing to follow truth whenever it is revealed.

That is why Jesus said it is impossible--with people. But not with God. This is the note of grace. God can break that enslavement to riches. Isn't it interesting that if a rich person does come to Christ, he or she must come in exactly the same way as the poorest bum on skid row! Rich people have to acknowledge their complete and utter need and come as guilty sinners, wretched and miserable, and receive the gift of life at the hands of Jesus from the cross. There is no other way to come.

Lord, let me be ready to give up my possessions and put them back into Your hands.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #18 Mark 10:13-31

Open It

1. What's the best thing about being a child?

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being wealthy?

Introduction

As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, His teaching took on an increasingly urgent note. Those who would follow Him, Jesus insisted, must not think that citizenship in God's Kingdom would confer upon them worldly greatness. To the contrary, they could look forward to persecution, for their way of life as followers of Jesus would run counter to the prevailing wisdom of the day. Yet such must be their lot if they wished to escape God's judgment.

The Little Children and Jesus - Mark 10:13-16

Read It

Mark 10:13-16

Explore It

1. What about Jesus surprised the disciples in this situation? (10:13-16)
2. What unique connection do children have to the kingdom of God? (10:14)
3. How did Jesus treat the children He met? (10:16)

Get It

1. List the childlike characteristics that enable a person to receive the kingdom of God.

Make another list of those characteristics that prevent a person from receiving God's kingdom.

2. What about the behavior of children does God want us to copy?
3. In what specific ways do you need to change your attitude toward God?

The Rich Young Man - Mark 10:17-31

Read It

Mark 10:17-31

Explore It

1. What attitude did Jesus have toward the rich man? (10:21)
2. Why could the man not obey Christ's instructions? (10:22)
3. With what promise did Jesus conclude His teaching in this passage? (10:29-31)

Get It

1. Why did Jesus ask the man, "Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone"?
2. Jesus loves this man. List the things he tells the man to do in 10:21.

Why do you think Jesus demanded such a tall order from this man?

3. How did the man respond to Jesus' suggestion? What commandment was he breaking after all?

4. Why would selling all of his earthly possessions and giving to the poor ensure the wealthy man of "treasure in heaven" (See also Matthew 6:19-21 and Luke 12:32-34)
5. What do these instructions tell us about what is necessary if one wants eternal life?
6. Many in Jesus' day and in our own day think wealth is a sign of God's pleasure. How can wealth actually be a hindrance to us in our call to follow Jesus?
7. Does sustaining your lifestyle get in the way of your following Jesus? If so, how?
8. What steps can we take to insure that we place value on eternal things and not material things?
9. What does Peter seem to be getting at by his comments in verse 28?

How do you interpret Jesus' response?

How does Jesus reassure him?

10. Stumper: Contrast the social status of a little child with the status and power of a wealthy ruler.

What point might Mark be trying to make in recording these two episodes back to back?

Man At Work

Week #19

For Small Group Discussion 3/18 – 3/24

Mark 10:32-52

Not So With You

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you." (Mark 10:42-43a)

Jesus sees the cross waiting for Him. James and John see thrones waiting for them. And what do the other ten see? They see James and John! They are angry and upset at them. Why? Because they got to Jesus first. Obviously they wanted the same things that James and John did and were angry only because James and John beat them to it. This is often the explanation for our anger, is it not? We are so often upset because somebody thought of it before we did.

But notice how Jesus sets aside all this business of politicking and maneuvering and asking for special privileges. That is the way the world works, but it is not to be part of the kingdom of God. In the kingdom—the church, if you like—there is not to be struggling and striving for position and honor. Paul brings this out so beautifully in his development of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12, where he says that because we have gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit and a ministry opened to us by the Lord Jesus and power granted to us by the heavenly Father, we do not need to be in competition with anybody.

This is what our Lord wants to set before His disciples, so He gathers them together and patiently says, "Now, fellows, sit down. I want to say something to you. You've looked at the Gentiles. Have you noticed that when they exercise authority, it is always over somebody else? They measure their power by how many are under them. That is the mark of their authority." It is still true today. That is the way people do things, the way they judge their success. And although it produces all kinds of rivalry, competition, skullduggery, politicking, conniving, maneuvering, manipulating, and trying to undercut everybody else, nevertheless, you cannot blame people for that, because that is all they know.

The key is in these words: "Not so with you." The church is not to be set up as a hierarchy of power. There is no chain of command in the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus had already said to these disciples, "You have only one Master and you are all brothers" (Matthew 23:8). Every apostle is careful to remind us of the danger of lording it over one another, the problems that arise when those in positions of authority think they have the right to tell others what to do or how to act or what to think or how to behave, believing they have the right to make decisions that others must follow. This is not true in the church. Paul is careful to say to the Corinthians, "Not that we lord it over your faith" (2 Corinthians 1:24). That is, "You can do what you want. You stand before God, responsible to Him, not to me." But he is also faithful to point out what it is they need to do and to warn them of the results that may follow if they do not want to do it. But no one is ever to be commanded to do something by another person in the church. Only the Lord commands.

Thank You, Lord, that You are my Master, and You've made me a significant part of Your church.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #19 Mark 10:32-52

Open It

1. Who do you know who is truly great? In what ways has that person been a "slave of all"?
2. When has persistence paid off for you?
3. Has God ever led you down a road which you felt uncomfortable or frightened about?

Introduction

As they head toward Jerusalem, Jesus for the third time predicts exactly what was going to happen. Yet James and John still seem to think that whatever suffering lies ahead will be temporary and that soon Jesus will set up a kingdom that runs by the same old rules of power. They can't imagine that the places of honor at his right and left will be taken by two thieves crucified with him (15:27). Jesus labels the desire to dominate others as pagan.

Jesus Again Predicts His Death / The Request of James and John - Mark 10:32-45

Read It

Mark 10:32-45

Explore It

1. What did James and John want from Jesus? (10:37)
2. How did Jesus answer James and John's request? (10:38-40)
3. Who will grant the seats to Christ's right and left in glory? (10:40)
4. What did Jesus mean when He said He "did not come to be served, but to serve"? (10:45)

Get It

1. In verses 32-34 Jesus predicts His death for a third time. Compare this prediction with the previous two (8:31; 9:31). What new details did He add here?

2. If Jesus knew what was going to happen in Jerusalem, why didn't he change his course?

3. What surprises you about James and John's request? Why do you think they asked their question at this time?

4. Jesus tries to help the sons of Zebedee understand what they're asking. He asks them if they can "drink the cup" he drinks. To fully understand Jesus' question, you need to read the Old Testament cross-references and understand what "the cup" was to the Jewish mind: Psalms 16:5-6; 23:5; 116:13; 75:6-8; Isaiah 51:17-22; Jeremiah 25:15-28; Ezekiel 23:31-34. What is "the cup" referring to?

Dr. A. B. Bruce, in connection with this, once wrote, "If crosses would leave us alone, we would leave them alone, too." But they do not. They are handed to us. They are cups given to us. And these disciples could not escape it. What it meant was that they, too would have to suffer like Jesus. They, too, would have to bear reproach and shame and anguish and suffering and death.

5. How did the other disciples react to James and John's request and why? What does this show about Jesus' friends and the kind of kingdom they were still preoccupied with?

6. Mark 10:45, summarizes all of Mark's Gospel. It's the only verse that states explicitly why Jesus died. What is that purpose? (If you memorize only one verse from Mark, I recommend this one.)

7. Jesus himself is our model (10:45). Why, then do you suppose we find it so hard to live by His words in 10:42-44?

8. How can your life better confirm to Jesus' view of greatness? (Consider what motivates your actions as well as what you do.)

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight - Mark 10:46-52

Read It

Mark 10:46-52

Explore It

1. How did the blind man respond to the criticism from the crowd? (10:48)
2. How did the crowds of people treat Bartimaeus after they found out Jesus had called for him? (10:49)
3. What did Bartimaeus do after Jesus had healed him? (10:52)

Get It

1. STUMPER: In his words, Bartimaeus did something exceptional that no one else in all of Mark does. What is it?
2. STUMPER #2: And Jesus does something new in return – what is it?
3. Contrast the response of this blind man to the rich man in verses 17-22. What was different in their response?
4. Jesus asks the blind man the exact same question he asked James and John in verse 36. How do their responses differ?
5. What has Bartimaeus seen that the disciples have not?
6. When have you persistently prayed for one particular request? What happened?

7. What is one request that you will commit yourself to pray for regularly this week?

Because Bartimaeus had the right kind of faith, he received an instant, no-fuss healing. Jesus said, “Go” (Mark 10:52 NKJV), but tellingly, Bartimaeus chose to come. He followed Jesus “on the road” (10:52 NKJV). This phrase, repeated in so many ways throughout the Markan hinge, also closes it. The “road” Jesus is on is the servant’s road of obedience “to the point of death” (Philippians 2:8 NKJV), but Bartimaeus gladly follows.

This is the last healing Jesus performs in Mark’s Gospel. It forms the other bookend of the inclusio that began with Jesus healing a blind man who required a second touch. This blind man is one of very few who see by faith that Jesus is the Messiah. He is an example of someone helpless who is nonetheless named “worthy one,” cementing everything Jesus said about who will be great in God’s kingdom.

Mark intends the physically blind men to comment on the spiritual blindness of the Twelve. This is evident when Jesus asks Bartimaeus the exact same question he asked James and John. Over the course of the Markan hinge, we have seen Jesus’ way is a path of death and suffering that will result in resurrection and glory. Those who would share in his glory must humble themselves, love Jesus enough to share his suffering, and imitate him as the one who came not “to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45 NKJV).

Mark wants us to know that asking what Jesus can do for you is not central to discipleship. A true disciple’s passion is to ask, “What can I do for Jesus?”

Evans, H. Walker (2007-03-20). The Smart Guide to the Bible Series: The Book of Mark (Kindle Locations 3318-3328). Thomas Nelson.

Man At Work

Week #20

For Small Group Discussion 3/25 – 3/31

Mark 11:1-25

The Hindrance Of Pride

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. (Mark 11:24-25)

What Jesus is saying is, “The great hindrance to having faith in God is pride, the pride that refuses to forgive. That is like a mountain that fills up your whole life. All you can see is that big mountain looming before you, and it is blocking the life of God in your life. You have the power to have that removed if, when you stand and pray, you will forgive those who have offended you.” Because the only thing that stops us from forgiving one another is pride. We feel justified in wanting others to forgive us but also in feeling that we have to exact a price for the hurt they have caused us. So, in many ways—subtle, or direct and open—we insist that we will not forgive, that our offenders have to pay for what they have done to us. Somehow, we are going to make them crawl, make them beg or plead for forgiveness. “And that,” Jesus says, “is a great mountain that needs to be removed, for it is blocking the flow of the life of God to your faith.” So when you stand and pray, life will flow from God when you are able to recognize that you, too, need forgiveness. God has forgiven you. God has offered it freely to you; give it just as freely to the one who has offended you.

After many years of ministry, I can recite evidence by the yard that this is true. The one thing above all else that seems to block the flow of the life of God to an individual, to a church, or to a nation, is this unwillingness to forgive, this holding of grudges, this desire to put somebody down in order to feel good yourself, this unwillingness to set these things aside and let God heal all the hurts of life.

That is why Jesus puts His finger on this one thing. Is this not amazing? The nation Israel lost its life because it would not forgive the Gentiles, the Romans, who had offended and grieved it. Instead, it gathered its robes of self-righteousness about it and looked with pride up to God and said, “I thank God I am not like these other people.” God says that is what ends the life of a nation. That is what ends the life of a church. And that is what ends the spiritual life of an individual, as it cuts him or her off.

Father, how many times I have refused the forgiving word, the restoring act, only to be tormented by fears and anxieties and worries. Thank You for the forgiveness that is mine in Jesus Christ. Teach me to extend it to those around me.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #20 Mark 11:1-25

Open It

1. Describe something you've done or a place you've visited that gave you a sense of excitement.
2. What is the favorite parade you've been to and why?

Introduction

Jesus has walked everywhere throughout his ministry, but now he commandeers a colt to ride. An animal never before ridden is suitable for a sacred purpose and worthy of a king coming in peace. The pilgrims streaming toward the city for Passover strew his path with their garments and palm branches and chant acclamations from Psalm 118:25-26 that mark him as the royal Son of David.

The Triumphal Entry - Mark 11:1-11

Read It

Psalm 118:25-26, Malachi 3:1-2 & Mark 11:1-11

Explore It

1. Until now, Jesus avoided calling attention to himself. He has told people to keep quiet about his miracles and his messianic identity. Why do you think he now shifts and makes such a dramatic entry into the city?
2. How is Jesus fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 3:1-2?
3. How did the disciples' experience match with what Jesus said? (11:4-7)

Get It

1. What did Jesus know would happen to him when he reached his goal – Jerusalem? Why did he steadily keep going in that direction?
2. Jesus was obliged to *borrow* a colt. What does this tell us about his way of life? What does the incident show about his authority, despite this way of life?

3. Jesus riding over the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, up to the temple mount would clearly have called to minds words of the prophet Zechariah for those watching. What do Zechariah 9:9-10 and 14:4 indicate Jesus is saying about himself?
4. How did people respond as Jesus rode into town? What authority did he seem to have over them, and how did he exercise his authority?
5. You don't spread cloaks on the road for friends or even for family – especially in the Middle East, dusty and stony as it was. But you do it for royalty. How does Jesus' kingship call us to put our property at his disposal?

Jesus Clears the Temple - Mark 11:12-25

Read It

Mark 11:12-25

Explore It

1. How different is the temple here from what it was supposed to be (15-17)?
2. Why did the fig tree have no fruit? (11:13)
3. *What did Jesus do to the fig tree? Why? (11:13-14)
4. How did this event differ from every other miracle Jesus performed? (11:13-14)

Get It

1. What did Jesus do about the barren tree on his way out of Bethany the next day? What authority does he have to expect fruit from his creation?
2. What kind of "fruit" does Jesus expect from those who claim to be redeemed people? What religious "leaves" might a person show, but be barren of real fruit? (Mark 7:6-8 gives one description.)

Man At Work

Week #21

For Small Group Discussion 4/1-4/7

Mark 11:27-12:27

By What Authority?

Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Mark 12:17)

I remember reading some time ago of a brilliant young lawyer who had been raised a pagan and had no use for Christianity. Someone had given him the New Testament, and he was reading it through. When he came to this account in Mark, he read this question with great interest, for he himself had recently been involved with just such a dilemma. When the full impact of Jesus' actions hit this man, he was utterly astonished. He dropped the Bible and said to himself, "That's the most amazing wisdom!" For our Lord did not try to answer the question directly. In that wonderful way He had, He called for a coin—He had to borrow one, for He had none of His own—and held it up. "Whose picture is on this coin?" He asked. They said, "Caesar's." He said, "All right, then, it must be Caesar's money. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. But God has His stamp upon you, so render to God the things that are God's."

He shows us that human authority is not only limited in duration; it is limited in its scope. It deals with only a part of people. The secular government is ordained by God. The apostle Paul tells us that plainly, and Peter says the same thing: "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right" (1 Peter 2:13-14). Peter acknowledges that God is behind secular government—even bad government. For the king that Peter referred to was none other than Nero, wretched moral degenerate that he was. Yet Peter says to honor the king as the "supreme authority".

But human government, Jesus says, has only limited control over people. It has certain powers over its citizens' bodies and minds. It can regulate our conduct to some degree and has the right to influence and regulate our attitudes and actions and what we say and how we say it. But there is one area in human life over which secular power has no control, and that is the human spirit. Secular power cannot legislate who we worship, who governs our conscience, and who constitutes the ultimate authority of life. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." Certain things do properly belong to Caesar; give them to him. But other things about you belong only to God, so give those to God.

The Russian author Solzhenytsin stands as an example of the wrong that is done by secular might when it tries to govern and control the worship of people. Almost single-handedly, he has defied one of the mightiest powers of earth and revealed the viciousness and the exploitation that always results when secular might seeks to invade that proscribed area of human existence, the human spirit. Jesus is saying that the ultimate issues of life belong to God, not to people, and human authority is therefore limited in its scope.

Father, thank You for this One who helps me to see things rightly, who puts things in proper perspective and makes me understand who I am, and what I am, and to whom I am responsible.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #21 Mark 11: 27-12:27

Open It

1. Look back in your memory to when you were a child. What authority were you most likely to accept? What kinds of problems did you have with authority, and how has that affected you?

2. What are popular ideas today of what happens after death?

The Authority of Jesus Challenged - Mark 11:27-33

The Jewish leaders are furious at Jesus for attacking the temple – the center of their religion and power (11:18). They challenge him, but he outwits them (11:27-33).

Read It

Mark 11:27-33

Explore It

1. What are “these things” to which the religious leaders of Jerusalem refer in 11:28?

- 2.

Get It

1. In 11:27 the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law come asking a seemingly straightforward question about Jesus’ authority. What does Jesus’ reply and the subsequent discussion reveal about their motives?

2. Why doesn’t Jesus answer them?

3. Are there times when we shouldn’t answer questions? Explain.

The Vineyard Owner Judges His Tenants - Mark 12:1-12

Jesus next tells a parable that recalls Isaiah's song about Israel as God's vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7). His parable is targeted not at all Jews, but specifically against these leaders.

This parable didn't need an explanation. No going back into the house to tell the disciples what it was all about; everybody could tell right away. This was partly because Jesus was adapting a well-known story in Isaiah 5 that compares Israel to a vineyard. There is not happy ending to this story. As it stands, it is pure tragedy. All that is left is judgment. It's a terrifying picture of what happens if the people of God persistently reject the purpose for which God has called them.

Read It

Mark 12:1-12, Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 118:22-23

Explore It

1. If the tenants are Israel and its religious leaders, who are the owner, the servants and the son?
2. How are these religious leaders about to fulfill the scripture Jesus cites in 12:10-11?

Get It

1. What is Jesus saying in 12:1-9?
2. What does it say about the Jewish leaders that they hear this and still go forward with killing Jesus?
3. In verses 10-11 Jesus goes on to quote from Psalm 118:22-23, the same psalm that excited worshipers were using when singing their hosannas a few days before (11:9). What is Jesus saying with this quotation? Why do you think this psalm became a key verse to early Christians?
4. He speaks of a stone and builders, but what are the builders building? Jesus has been talking about the temple, and he'll say more about it in Mark 13. If the parable of the tenants was originally told in Hebrew, Jesus used a wordplay to allude to His destiny on the cross as a result of His rejection in Jerusalem – note the similarity between murdered “son” (*ben*) of the parable and the rejected “stone” (*eben*) – though this idea is lost in both Greek and English translations. The murdered son becomes the cornerstone of a new building project.

What is the new temple, according to 1 Peter 2:2-5 and Ephesians 2:19-22?

How should this affect the way we live our lives?

Taxes for Caesar – Mark 12:13-17

A common enemy can often draw together people who are not otherwise on good terms. In these verses, we find Herodians (supporters of the puppet monarchy) and the Pharisees (ardent nationalists and opponents of Roman rule) joining forces.

Read It

Mark 12:13-17

Explore It

1. Caesar's money bears Caesar's image. Where is God's image to be found? (Gen 1:26-27)
2. Regarding the question asked, how could Jesus equally get in trouble (but with different groups) by saying, "Pay taxes," or by saying, "Don't pay taxes"? (12:13-15)
3. How does Jesus avoid being trapped? (12:15-17)

Get It

1. Jesus not only avoids their trap by his answer, he also succeeds in establishing an important principle. What sorts of things are rightfully Caesar's (the government's) and what are God's?
2. What does this say about what it means to give "to God what is God's" (12:17)?
3. Caesar and God are not two counterparts, each lord of his own sphere (secular versus sacred). God is Caesar's Lord, for there is only one Lord of the world, not two. God is Lord of all aspects of life we might call secular, including the workplace, the family, and the government. We may owe Caesar [our own government] money, but we do not owe Caesar the love that is directed only to God.

What are some ways in which our commitment to God might come into conflict with what our government's laws and leaders say?

The Afterlife - Mark 12:18-27

The Sadducees were a pro-priestly, aristocratic party within Judaism. They rejected the Pharisees' traditions as well as any beliefs they thought came from something other than the five books of Moses. That included the belief that the righteous would ultimately rise from the dead. They baited Jesus with a question based on the law in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 that said that if a man died with no heirs, his brother should marry his widow and provide an heir.

Read It

Mark 12:18-27, 1 Corinthians 15:35-54

Explore It

1. What is the trap this time? (12:18-23)
2. How does Jesus turn this trap around (12:24-27)

Get It

1. How is Jesus' response from scripture particularly appropriate for the Sadducees who accepted only the authority of the Pentateuch?
2. How can we get to know the scriptures and the power of God better?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-54. In your own words, what are Paul and Jesus saying about the resurrection? Does the hope of a new life motivate you in this life? Why or why not?

Wrap-Up

1. Think of a friend who asks you really tough questions about the faith. Can you see any deeper questions behind the questions he or she asks?
2. How can learning to look behind questions to motives and learning to pose effective questions help us all to be better evangelists and servants?

Man At Work

Week #22

For Small Group Discussion 4/8-4/14

Mark 12:28-44

The Attitude That Matters

I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on. (Mark 12:43b-44)

The religious performance among these scribes and Pharisees had reached such an absurd state of affairs that some of the Pharisees, before they made their contribution to the great collection box Jesus was watching here, actually summoned a trumpeter to go before them to get everybody's attention. Then the Pharisee would come up and proudly deposit a bag of gold in the treasury chest. He wanted everybody to see his ample gift.

I heard about a dear man standing up in a meeting where an offering was taken who said, "I want to give \$100—anonymously". But in this passage Jesus said the one who really moved His heart and contributed tremendously to the kingdom of God was a little unnamed, unknown widow who had no influence, who had no outward posture of being worth anything. She came and put in two tiny coins that added up to no more than a penny; but because she loved the Lord her God with all her heart, all her soul, all her strength, and all her mind, she gave it. And Jesus said, "She has done more for the kingdom of heaven than all the outward performances of all these others combined." What is that saying to us?

We are so intent upon the fact that God wants some kind of activity on our part. We think that the way to serve God is to do spectacular or showy things—to win a lot of people to Christ or to give our time or work in open ways. Yet the Scriptures tell us over and over that works are just the channel. God wants performance, but only if the attitude of our heart is right. If you cannot do anything outwardly, your attitude may still be right—your attitude toward your neighbor and friends and your children and your husband and your wife and your boss and those who irritate you. If your attitude is one of love, love received from the God who loves you, then you are advancing the kingdom of God far, far more than all that is done outwardly by the greatest saints of our day and time.

Is that not amazing! God says, "You can serve me in the quiet of your home and by the gentle, sweet spirit that you display in the midst of pressures and problems. You have done more to advance the kingdom of God than those who get out and proclaim the word on public address systems everywhere." That is the way God sees life.

That is both discouraging and encouraging. It is discouraging for those of us who have a public ministry. We are mentally jotting down in the back of our minds how impressed God ought to be with our performance. But God is looking at our heart. This is encouraging for us to remember in those private moments when our attitude changes. Nobody was watching, nobody saw what we were thinking, yet, instead of being short and caustic and sarcastic, we were sweet and patient and gentle. Jesus says the kingdom of God is advanced by that attitude.

Lord, You have called me to this way of life, and You must empower it. Help me to be a loving instrument expressing Your quality of life today.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #22 Mark 12:28-44

Open It

1. What do you see as the most powerful motivations in people's lives around you?
2. What do you remember about your very first next-door neighbor?

A Question of Priority - Mark 12:28-34

Introduction

The **heart** (12:30) is the center of our inner being, which controls our feelings, emotions, desires, and passions; the heart is where religious commitment takes root. The **soul** is our motivating power that brings strength of the will. Together with the heart, the soul determines conduct. The **mind** is the faculty of perception and reflection that directs our opinions and judgments. **Strength** refers to one's physical capacities, including possessions.

Read It

Mark 12:28-34

Explore It

1. Another teacher of the law comes to Jesus with a pointed question. What evidence is there that he is not out to trap Jesus? (28)
2. In what ways do you think Christians should treat their neighbors differently from the way non-Christians do?

Get It

1. How is the scribe's question and response different from the others? How is Jesus' answer different? What does this teach us about approaching God and others with questions?
2. Jesus tells us what is most important for us to do while we await His return. Give some examples of what it means to love God with...

all your desires.

all your inner motivation and power.

all your ability to see, think, and form opinions.

all your physical capacity.

all your possessions.

3. Define love for your neighbor. With twentieth-century technology, we come into contact with masses of people daily from around the world. Who is your neighbor today? Can we realistically love them all? Why or why not?
4. What is the relationship between our love for our neighbor and our love for God?

What is one aspect of loving your neighbor that is hard for you?

The expert in the law endorses Jesus' view that love for God and neighbor are more important than temple sacrifices (12:32-33). But in doing so, he assumes a superior position from which he passes judgment on Jesus' teaching. So Jesus says he is not far from God's kingdom – but not in the kingdom either. To be “in the kingdom” one must do more than simply approve of Jesus' teaching; one must submit entirely to His authority and person.

5. Many great people – including Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama – have approved of Jesus' teaching, and even practiced it, without submitting to His authority. Why isn't agreeing with His teaching enough?
6. Is it possible to submit to Jesus' authority without practicing His teaching about love? Explain.

A Question of Identity - Mark 12:35-40

Introduction

Now it was our Lord's turn to ask the questions, and He focuses on the most important question of all: Who is the Messiah? This is a far more important question than the ones His enemies had asked Him, for if we are wrong about Jesus Christ, we are wrong about salvation. This means we end up condemning our souls. (John 3:16-21; 1 John 2:18-23)

Read It

Mark 12:35-40, Psalm 110:1

Explore It

1. What did Jesus point out from one of David's psalms? (12:36-37, Psalm 110:1)
2. Why did Jesus condemn the teachers of the law? (12:38-39)

Get It

1. The question of messiahship has been swirling all around Mark's Gospel. It was commonly understood from the Old Testament that the Messiah would come from David's line. Now Jesus offers a riddle of his own. How does Jesus expand their ideas about the Messiah?
2. To a Jew in Jesus' day a descendant was always inferior to an ancestor. A son might call his father or grandfather "lord" but never vice versa. How can the Christ be both David's Lord and his descendant (35-37)?
3. What does it mean for us to call Jesus "Lord"?
4. What sin does Jesus denounce in 12:38-40?

What does this sort of thing look like when Christians do it?

The Widow's Offering - Mark 12:41-44

Introduction

The poor widow intends to give all she has to God, but in fact her money goes to the high priests who control the temple and live in luxury. These same priests will bribe Judas to betray Jesus to them. Likewise, today there are leaders and churches who convince vulnerable people to give money in God's name but who are not worthy. Jesus gives us clues for discerning leaders who deserve our support, and He also sets us an example of concern for the poor.

Read It

Mark 12:41-44

Explore It

1. What did the "poor widow" give to the treasury? (12:42)
2. How did Jesus compare the actions of the wealthy people to the actions of the poor woman? (12:43-44)
3. Why did the large amounts of money given by the rich people not impress Jesus? (12:44)

Get It

1. How does the widow's offering foreshadow Jesus' own coming sacrifice?
2. How did the widow's life exemplify the principle in verse 33? How does this principle work for us today? Think of practical examples.
3. Make a list of the qualities demonstrated by the poor widow. What do you think she values most in life? How can you become more like her?
4. What questions might Jesus' statement in verse 43 have provoked in the disciples' minds, and what answer does he provide? If you had been one of Jesus' followers, how would this scene have answered some of the questions that you might have had after Jesus' previous teaching?

Man At Work

Week #23

For Small Group Discussion 4/15-4/21

Mark 13:1-37

Watch

Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch! (Mark 13:35-37).

Jesus gathers up all the intervening time between His first and second comings and divides it into four watches—one long night of the world's sin—and He says, “You don't know (and, I think He implies, “I don't know”) whether the coming is to be early in that time or in the middle of it, or three-quarters of the way through, or clear at the end.” No one knows. I don't know; you don't know. But it is like a man going on a journey (here He likens it to His own going away) who gives his servants work to do, and he expects them to do it. And he sets a doorkeeper to watch.

What is he to watch for? Is he to watch for the master's return? That is the way this is usually interpreted. But that is not it, for he is to start watching as soon as the master leaves. He knows the master will not be back right away. What then is he to watch for? He is to watch so that no one can deceive him and gain entrance into the house and wreck and ruin and rob all the master has. So Jesus' word is, “Be alert; don't go to sleep; watch! There are temptations and pressures that will assault you to make you think that it is all a lie, to make you give up and stop living like a Christian, stop walking in faith, stop believing the truth of God. Watch out for that. And in the meantime, do your work. Don't let anything turn you aside. Don't let anything derail you from being what God wants you to be in this day and age.” This is the way you watch. We are not to be looking up into the sky all the time, waiting for His coming. That will happen when He is ready. We are to watch that we are not deceived.

I have been disturbed at how many Christians seem to have fallen away. I look back across many years of ministry, and I see men whom I would have sworn were solid, tremendously committed, faithful, Bible-teaching Christians but who are now denying their faith and have turned aside. And on every side, seemingly, this increases—people falling off into immorality and iniquity, turning away from their faith, saying, in effect, they no longer believe the Lord or the Bible. It is this our Lord is warning against.

Therefore, He says that we are to keep awake. Do not believe all the secular voices that tell us the world will go on forever as it is now. Don't believe the other voices that tell us there is no God, so we can live as we please, or that if God exists, He will never judge us. Don't believe the voices that whisper to us constantly and try to turn us away from our faith. With one sharp, arresting, ringing word of command, Jesus ends his message: “Watch!”

Lord, strengthen me and help me to stay alert, that I may endure to the end, that I may be faithful unto death, that I too may join in that great day with those who are given the crown of life.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #23 Mark 13:1-37

Open It

1. What examples can you think of in which something new and important happened after a period of significant struggle?

2. Why do you think so many of us have such a fascination with the future?

Jesus' opportunities for teaching his disciples are almost gone. In just a few days, he will be dead and buried. In this chapter, Jesus spends time alone with his disciples, giving them his last words of warning, of counsel and of encouragement. He tells them that the way they have chosen, Jesus' way, will not be an easy road to travel, but that the path has been thoroughly explored and the glorious end is sure.

This chapter, full of ominous signs and strong words of advice, may seem obscure to twentieth-century people. It is full of distinctly Jewish traditions and phrases of speech. In spite of these apparent obstacles, few chapters in this gospel are more relevant to contemporary Christians.

Be Alert - Mark 13:1-13

Introduction

Jesus now leaves the temple, never to return. His disciples are so impressed with it, and indeed it's a marvel of carved and gilded stone atop Mount Zion. But within forty years, at around the time Mark writes his gospel, the Jews will revolt against Rome; the Romans will besiege Jerusalem; there will be a terrible slaughter; and the Romans will, against all expectation, reduce the temple to rubble.

Read It

Mark 13:1-13

Explore It

1. List the events that Jesus predicts in 13:5-13

List what Jesus tells his disciples to do in these verses, in light of these predictions.
2. How will many be led astray? (13:6)
3. Who will speak when the disciples are put on trial? (13:11)
4. Which verse in 13:1-13 charges us to be on our guard?

Get It

1. In chapters 11 and 12, Jesus has symbolically enacted judgment on the temple (with the money changers in the temple itself and on the fig tree), claimed authority over the temple, judged the leaders of the temple and affirmed that the two great commandments are much more important than sacrifices in the temple.

How do the opening verses of chapter 13 indicate that the disciples still haven't understood what he's saying?

2. Herod's temple, though still incomplete in Jesus' day, had the reputation of being the most beautiful building in the whole world, and was certainly the largest and most imposing structure for hundreds of miles in any direction. The disciples are astonished at Jesus' prediction and naturally want to know when it will happen.

Many people have read Mark 13 as being mainly about "the end of the world," which it certainly isn't. Jesus is focused (as is the disciples' question) on the temple's destruction. (If it were the end of the world, what would be the point of running away to the mountains as verse 14 suggests?) Jesus draws on the cosmic language of the Old Testament, as the prophets themselves often did, to indicate the world-changing nature of events that would transpire for Israel. For most Jews at the time, it would indeed be the equivalent of the end of the world for the temple (the center of their national life and identity) to be destroyed.

How does Jesus say his followers should act as they live through events that will lead up to the destruction of the temple (vv. 5-13)?

3. Jesus' warnings to his followers are to be taken very seriously by all who are called to work for the kingdom today. Many Christians today face persecution every bit as severe as that which the early church suffered; and those Christians who don't face persecution often face the opposite temptation, to stagnate, to become cynical, to suppose that nothing much is happening, that the kingdom of God is just a pious dream.

In verse 13 Jesus says we need patience to hold onto our faith in the midst of difficulties. What specific situation in your life right now do you need patience for?

4. Jesus doesn't give his disciples what they want - a firm timetable with signs (13:4). He gives them what they need - enough information so that they won't be "disheartened by persecution, panicked by wars, fooled by appearances, or led to apostasy by false prophets." What he calls "the beginning of birth pains" (13:8) covers "the entirety of the period during which Jesus' disciples bear witness, suffer persecution, and stand in danger of deception, however long or short that period may turn out to be."

Which of these two interpretations of Jesus' words do you think is more accurate & why?

- An increase in wars, earthquakes, and famines are signs that the rapture and other end-times events are about to happen.
- Wars, earthquakes, and famines will happen, but don't be distracted or discouraged by them, because the important thing is to stay alert and keep proclaiming the gospel.

Abomination of Desolation - Mark 13:14-23

Introduction

While Jesus encourages patience during the preliminary events leading up to the temple's destruction, one particular sign will indicate that things have changed dramatically and that it is now time to run. The sign is "the desolating abomination" (v. 14), an appalling object or person (Jesus is not exactly clear which) whose presence signifies imminent destruction. The text behind this is Daniel 11:31 and 12:11, which speaks of pagan armies invading Jerusalem, stopping the regular sacrifices in the temple and setting up what sounds like a pagan idol. When something like that happens, patience is not the proper response. Rather it is escape.

Indeed that is exactly what happened in A.D. 70, within a generation, as Jesus predicted (see v. 30). The Romans conducted a siege of Jerusalem with terrible consequences for the population. Ultimately they set up their own symbols of power and authority in the temple before destroying it. The first-century historian Josephus tells us of many would-be messiahs, many prophets, during the Roman-Jewish war of A.D. 66-70. They were offering rescue, trying to gain a following, promising signs and wonders. They all came to nothing.

[If he were talking about the end time, fleeing Judea (13:14) would be irrelevant to most believers around the world, and why would anyone care about his possessions (13:15) or the winter (13:18) at the end of the world? Rather, Jesus is concerned for people of his day who need to escape the savagery of the advancing Roman army.]

Read It

Mark 13:14-23

Explore It

1. Which verse in 13:14-23 charges us to be on our guard?
2. After the period of patience Jesus describes, what does he say will happen next (vv. 14-27)?

Get It

1. Clearly the fulfillment of such a prophecy would have supported Jesus' status as prophet. How does it also show the futility of trusting in the temple and all it stood for as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day did? AND what do we do we place trust today that is unwarranted and unproductive?
2. The temple, while a symbol of Jewish identity and nationhood, by virtue of that intense focus, prevented Jews from liberally making God's blessing available to those who weren't Jews. How can focusing on our own identity actually prevent us from freely offering God's blessing to those who aren't like us or in our group?

The Second Coming - Mark 13:24-37

Introduction

In 13:24-27 Jesus talks about his Second Coming. But he neither affirms nor denies that there will be a time gap between the temple's destruction and his return. He "wants to prevent his disciples from trying to nail down a specific chronology of end-time events— He expects his disciples to be ready for anything anytime."

Read It

Mark 13:24-37

Explore It

1. Which verses in 13:24-37 charge us to be on our guard?
2. What warnings and admonitions does Jesus issue to his followers?

Get It

1. Jesus says even the Son doesn't know the day or hour of these events (v. 32). A good deal of ancient and modern writing on prophecy tries to figure out precise timing of events, reducing the Bible to the level of a horoscope. What does this passage teach us about leaving such issues to God and trusting him when the future is not entirely clear?
2. How many times in chapter 13 does Jesus say to be on guard/watch?
3. The concluding command in this chapter is not, "Sit down and work out a prophetic timetable," but instead, "Keep awake and watch!" What does Jesus mean by this command, and how can we carry it out?

This Generation (13:30): The phrase "these things" also occurs in the immediately preceding verse (13:29), where it refers to events leading up to, but not including, the second coming of Christ. In this case Jesus is not saying that the "distress" He foretells will end within the lifetime of His disciples, but that "these things" – calamities leading up to but not including His second coming – must happen within that time. At the same time, Jesus is not ruling out further distress, nor is He saying that He will return within the lifetime of His disciples. He does say that even He doesn't know the time of His return – but only the Father knows.

Man At Work

Week #24

For Small Group Discussion 4/22-4/28

Mark 14:1-25

Love's Extravagance

*Leave her alone, said Jesus. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.
(Mark 14:6)*

Our Lord takes this beautiful incident and shows us the true value of it. He says five things about it that mark it as an extremely valuable act. First, He says, “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” The beauty of it lay in its very extravagance. This woman did not spare any of the costly ointment but broke the flask and poured the whole quantity out upon Him. Judas, with his practical computer mind, reckoned it up as worth three hundred denarii. A denarius was the day's wage for a laborer. Three hundred days' wages would be a tremendous sum. In the eyes of Judas, this woman wasted an enormous amount of money when she poured out the ointment upon Jesus. It was such a lavish act, and therein lay the beauty of it.

Second, He said that it was a timely thing she had done. “It was something that could only be done now. Any time you want to do good to the poor you can, because they are always around.” And it is right to help the poor. But there are opportunities that come in our life that must be seized at the moment. Mary had sensed this and seized the moment to offer this gift, for such a time would never occur again. It was out of the sensitivity of her heart that she realized that the timing was right, and Jesus recognized this.

Then, she did that which was feasible. That is, she did what she could. She could not fix Him a meal; there was no time for that. She could not make a garment for Him; there was no time for that. There was nothing else she could do to show her love but this. She did what she could. I am sure our Lord has called our attention to that because it is so practical for us. Someone said, **“I'm only a man, but I am a man. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do I ought to do. And what I ought to do, I'm available to do.”**

The fourth element of this act was that it was insightful. Our Lord says, “She has anointed my body beforehand for burying.” Many times Jesus said to these disciples that He was going to die. Not one of them believed him--except Mary of Bethany. She understood that He was heading for burial. And since she could not be sure she would ever have the opportunity later to find His body and anoint it for burial, she did it now, as a loving act of service. What a comfort this must have been to our Lord! Of all these friends who were around Him at this time, only this one had the sensitivity of heart to understand what was happening.

Finally, what she did was deserving of being remembered. It was memorable. Jesus said, “The story of this beautiful act will be told in memory of her wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world.” Here we are today, two thousand years later, fulfilling this very word, telling again of the act of Mary of Bethany when she anointed our Lord's head and feet.

Father, help me to understand that Mary is but depicting a far greater sacrifice. May that act of love grip my heart and strengthen me all the days of my life.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #24 Mark 14:1-25

Open It

What significant moments or events does your family mark with a significant meal? Why?

Perhaps the most significant meal in the Old Testament was Passover. Passover time was freedom time. Every year, and still to the present day, the Jewish people tell the story of the exodus from Egypt, leaving the slavery of Pharaoh and coming through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Passover, in the midst of Roman occupation, is the setting Jesus chose for the final showdown with the temple and its hierarchy. To familiarize yourself with this important Jewish feast, read Exodus 12-13.

Anointing - Mark 14:1-11

Introduction

Jesus now leaves the temple, never to return. His disciples are so impressed with it, and indeed it's a marvel of carved and gilded stone atop Mount Zion. But within forty years, at around the time Mark writes his gospel, the Jews will revolt against Rome; the Romans will besiege Jerusalem; there will be a terrible slaughter; and the Romans will, against all expectation, reduce the temple to rubble.

Read It

Mark 14:1-11

In this study, we enter into the last few days of Jesus' earthly ministry. The mood is somber as more and more people begin to fail and desert him. Try to empathize with Jesus as you read.

Explore It

1. Why isn't Passover time a good time for the Jewish authorities to arrest Jesus? (14:2 & intro above)
2. While the chief priests and lawyers are plotting against Jesus, an unnamed woman is anointing him with valuable oil. How much is the oil worth? (14:5)
3. How do the people present react to the woman's worship of Jesus? (14:5)
4. What is Jesus response to this woman? (14:6)
5. STUMPER: Is this the same account mentioned in John 12:1-7? What are the similarities and differences between the two accounts?

Get It

1. What is Jesus saying about the poor in verse 7?

2. This story sometimes held up as an example of a woman getting it right while all around her men are getting it wrong. How do we sometimes react when people seem to worship Jesus without inhibition – pouring out their valuables, their stories, their dancing, their music – in ways we feel aren't appropriate?

3. STUMPER: *Messiah* means "anointed." Normally a priest or prophet anointed a king, pouring oil on his head. How does Jesus' anointing in Bethany ironically contrast with those expectations?

4. Name some "good services" done in the name of Jesus that some may label a waste. In what ways might the Church "count the cost" too carefully when trying to honor Christ? Does this incident shed any light on the competing claims for beauty in worship and concern for the poor?

5. Which group or individual do you identify with most in this scene and why?

6. The Lord Jesus Christ has taught and exemplified extravagant, timely, self-giving love. What will it look like when we allow Him to love others through us?

7. In the devotional for this lesson this quote is shared: "I'm only a man, but I am a man. I can't do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do I ought to do. And what I ought to do, I'm available to do." What does that imply for you today?

The Last Passover- Mark 14:12-25

Introduction

At Passover Jews not only told the story of how God liberated them but also ate a commemorative meal together. Celebrating Passover was and is a deeply religious act, and also, for the many centuries in which Jews have suffered oppression, a deeply political act. It says, loud and clear, "despite appearances, we are God's free people." It sustains loyalty; it encourages faith, hope and love.

Read It

Mark 14:12-25

Explore It

1. What do the disciples do to prepare for the Passover meal? (14:12-16)
2. What startling disclosure did Jesus make while they were eating? Could he have been making a final appeal to Judas?
3. Why does Jesus' announcement upset the disciples? (14:17-21)

Get It

1. How does Jesus add new meaning to two of the Passover elements?
2. What was symbolized by this new feast Jesus instituted? How is this feast a celebration?
3. How does this meal help us make sense of Jesus' death and his kingdom that will come?

This Passover-meal-with-a-difference is going to *explain*, more deeply than words could ever do, what his action, and passion, the next day really meant; and, more than explaining it, it will enable Jesus' followers, from that day to this, to make it their own, to draw life and strength from it. If we want to understand, and be nourished by, what happened on Calvary, this meal is the place to start.

This meal, with all its new-passover associations, was Jesus' primary means of enabling his followers not only to understand his death but to let it do its freedom-work in their lives and in the world. It drew to a head the kingdom-actions (not least the feasting) and kingdom-teaching of his whole public career.

4. Even though he had been so close to Jesus throughout his ministry, what had Judas missed seeing in Jesus? Judas's betrayal of Jesus was predicted in Scripture. How responsible was he for the choice he made?
5. What would have happened to the ancient Israelites had they not painted the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts (see Exodus 12:13, 22-23)? What will happen to us if the "doorposts" of our lives are not covered with the blood of the new Passover lamb, Jesus Christ?

PRAY: Thank God for the salvation that Jesus' death brought for you. Ask him to help you have a more worshipful heart like the woman who anointed Jesus with oil.

Some interesting notes on the Last Supper

(From the *LifeChange: Mark* study guide.)

First day of the Feast (14:12). The following phrase, "when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover Lamb," makes it clear that Mark is talking about Nisan 14, or the day of Passover itself, and not the day following. The Last Supper was therefore a Passover meal.

A man carrying a jar of water (14:13). Such a sight would be unusual, since women normally carried the water jars.

A large upper room, furnished and ready (14:15). As with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had made advance preparations for this event. This indicates that He had a circle of disciples in the Jerusalem area in addition to the Twelve.

Just as it is written (14:21). Jesus was probably referring to Isaiah 53, the famous "suffering servant" prophecy. This Old Testament passage was quoted frequently by the first Christians immediately following Jesus' ascension, and Isaiah's title "servant of the Lord" was one of the earliest messianic titles for Jesus (see Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30; 8:32-35).

Jesus took bread (14:22). Unleavened bread, or matzoth, was eaten at Passover together with the roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and wine. Following the meal, the head of the household would break the remaining matzoth and distribute it. Mark is probably referring to this distribution, which followed the main meal itself (compare Luke 22:19-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, where the words "in the same way, after supper" may indicate that both the bread and the cup of the New Covenant were distributed following the main Passover meal).

He took the cup (14:23). Four cups of wine, symbolic of God's four promises to Israel on the first Passover (Exodus 6:6-7), were shared at different stages of the meal. The cup of which Mark speaks was the third cup, "the cup of redemption," symbolic of the promise "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm."

Blood of the covenant (14:24). The Old Covenant was made possible by the blood of the Passover Lamb, which freed the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Forgiveness of sins under the Old Covenant also required blood sacrifice (see Leviticus 16 for a description of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement). As another New Testament writer put it, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22), and therefore no possibility of a covenant between God and humankind.

For Further Study: Read carefully Hebrews 8:1-10:18, and compare the Old Covenant God made with Israel with the New Covenant God made through the blood of Jesus.

The Last Communion Ever (From *The Smart Guide: Mark*)

Mark 14:22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." (NKJV)

One of the great traditions of the Passover meal is that the head of the family gives a haggadah—a running commentary on the symbolism of each food and ritual throughout the meal. These comments were reverently scripted, memorized, and passed down through the generations to keep the sacred meaning of Passover intact. According to tradition, at this point Jesus would have lifted up the [matzoh](#) and prayed, "Praise be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth." This may be what Mark alludes to when he says, "Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it" (14:22 NKJV).

Traditionally, three matzoh were set before the leader; some rabbis thought they represented Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many Christians think of them as representing the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, because the leader was to break the middle one (representing the Son). Ancient Semites believed when a group of people partook of one loaf of bread, it created unity.

As Jesus broke the middle matzoh, he said, in effect, "This is me." Jews were to conduct the Passover meal without diverting from tradition, so it must have startled the Twelve when Jesus did this, essentially reinterpreting one of the symbols. In saying, "Take, eat," and then "This is My body" (Mark 14:22 NKJV), Jesus was showing his disciples that somehow, mysteriously, they would all participate in his death. In ways they could not know yet, Jesus' followers would be identified with the breaking of Jesus' body.

What Others Say

Andy Bond

Recalling that the second matzoh is symbolic of Jesus, it is important to realize that it is this matzoh that was broken, just as Jesus was broken on the cross. Modern matzoh is striped and pierced; in Isaiah 53:5 the Messiah is talked about as being "pierced for our transgressions" and that "with His stripes we are healed."¹⁰⁴

The ritual Passover meal has four cups, associated with God's fourfold promise of redemption for the Jews: "I will bring you out ... I will rescue you from their bondage ... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm ... I will take you as My people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:6–7 NKJV). Almost the entire meal passed between the breaking of bread and the third cup, the cup of redemption, which Jesus holds up now. Traditionally, the leader pronounced a prayer of thanksgiving that ended with these words: "May the All-merciful One make us worthy of the days of the Messiah and of the life of the world to come. He brings the salvation of his king. He shows covenant-faithfulness to his Anointed, to David and to his seed forever. He makes peace in his heavenly places. May he secure peace for us and for all Israel. And say you, Amen."

The prayer said over the "Messiah cup" (another name for the cup of redemption) included an unusual list of prophecies: the Messiah would make peace in heavenly places, bring salvation, and fulfill the covenant God had made with David. (God had promised a descendant of David would reign **forever**.) After everyone had drunk from this cup, Jesus adds, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" (Mark 14:24 NKJV). In other words, "The blood of my coming death fulfills the requirements of the **new covenant**, for everybody." Jesus' death would fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah cup.

Jesus refuses to drink the fourth Passover cup, which was associated with God gathering and fellowshiping with his people. He is going to wait and drink it when all that it implies comes true—when God's kingdom age finally begins.

Jesus' refusal to administer the final cup shortened the Passover meal. Normally celebrants sat around the table fellowshiping and reflecting on the works of God until midnight. After they "had sung a hymn" (Mark 14:26 NKJV), this party went out. Traditionally, Passover participants sang the **Hallel** psalms. *Hallel* comes from the Hebrew word meaning "praise." The leader sang the psalms, and the celebrants answered with a hallelujah.

What was this meal like for the disciples? First they find out one of them is a traitor; then Jesus strangely reinterprets the meaning of the matzoh; and then he tells them the wine they just drank is human blood. (Is that why Jesus waited until after they had drunk to introduce this new symbol?) He mystifies them with references to his coming death. Obviously, the meal made a huge impact on the Twelve, but they wouldn't understand its meaning until later.

Man At Work

Week #25

For Small Group Discussion 4/29-5/5

Mark 14:26-52

Watch And Pray

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak (Mark 14:37-38).

The enemy has little struggle with Peter. It is not even necessary to threaten to throw him to the lions or burn him at the stake. His resolve collapses by the simple expedient of making him too sleepy to pray. That is all; and that tremendous determination of will, that firm resolve, dissolves, and Peter is as weak as putty when the moment comes. He is weak because he lacks the strengthening of prayer. The devil only had to make him sleepy, that is all. I am sure this was a satanic attack. The sword Jehovah was wielding, which hurt and distressed the Son of God, was now affecting the disciples, and Satan was allowed to appear as a stealthy sandman, dropping sleep into their eyes. So they fell asleep instead of praying.

Jesus analyzes the situation. He comes and finds them, and there is almost a touch of humor here. After He wakes them up, He says to these disciples, "Peter, couldn't you watch one hour? Couldn't your resolve and fierce determination last at least that long?" Then He tells us why Peter could not do it. "The spirit is willing, Peter. I know your heart. I know you love me. Your spirit is perfectly willing. But Peter, you relied upon your flesh. The flesh is weak."

We have all felt this, have we not? We have been asked to do something, and we say, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is ready for the weekend." The flesh is weak. Jesus says that is the nature of the flesh. That human sense of independence, the confidence we have in ourselves, is always weak in the hour of testing. It cannot stand the test. This is the analysis Jesus gives of Peter's problem. The key is prayer. If Peter, feeling sleepy and weak, had followed Jesus' example and cast himself upon the Father and told Him the problem, the father would have carried him through, and he would not have denied his Lord.

It is our weakness that is our security, not our strength. That is why I am not terribly impressed when young people tell me how much they are going to do for God and how certain they are that they can carry it through. I have learned, out of sad experience in my own life as well as by the testimony of Scripture, that in the hour of testing, this self-confidence will all wash away. But I have confidence in the man or woman who says, "I'm scared. I don't think I can do this, but I'm going to try because God tells me to. I'm looking to Him to strengthen me."

Father, open my eyes and heart to understand that apart from You I can do nothing. You are the shepherd upon whom I can rely, to whom I can go in the hour of anguish and find the strength to do what You are calling me to do.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #25 Mark 14:26-52

Open It

1. What is one part of your past you wish you could do over?
2. What is it like to have a friend let you down when you really need support?
3. Who has been a faithful friend to you during difficult times in your life?

Forsaken - Mark 14:26-52

Introduction

We can only imagine the effects on the disciples of the sudden change that came over Jesus in Gethsemane. Until that moment he had been in control: planning, directing, teaching, guiding. He had always been ready with a word or action. Now he is, as we say, falling apart. But he wasn't the only one.

Read It

Mark 14:32-52

Explore It

1. What does Jesus predict his disciples will do in the near future (27-30)
2. What was the reaction when Jesus said that Peter would disown Him? (14:31)
3. How does the response of the disciples to Jesus' prediction contrast with their response to his call to stay with him in prayer?
4. Why is prayer often so difficult for us, even with the best of intentions?
5. Three times Jesus prays for rescue. Three times he appears to receive the answer, No (34-41). What can we learn even if Jesus received such a response to one of his most heartfelt prayers?
6. How did Jesus give a word of hope to His followers even as He foretold their failure (27-28)?

Get It

1. GUESS: What symbolism might Jesus have been employing by using the rooster in this example to Peter?
2. What can we learn about Jesus from the way he prays in 14:32-36?

How is your way of praying similar of different?

3. From your own experience, what kind of wrestling do you imagine Jesus did to submit his will to the will of God? Though we will never face the anguish that Jesus faced, how can we submit our will to the will of God?
4. What admonition did Jesus give to Peter, James, and John, and why? Learning from Jesus' example and command, how can prayer feed us when we don't feel like feasting?
5. In verse 34 and again in verse 38 Jesus encourages the disciples to watch and pray so that they not fall into temptation. What particular temptations were they about to face?
6. How might prayer have changed the outcome?

Abba (14:36). An Aramaic intimate form for father ("Daddy"). The Jews did not use this word to address God, thinking it too familiar and therefore disrespectful. Jesus not only used it Himself, but encouraged His disciples to do so (Matthew 6:9 and Romans 8:15).

"Deeply distressed and troubled" (14:33) translates a Greek word that suggests "the greatest possible degree of horror and suffering." And in 14:36, Jesus does not enter his suffering stoically but biblically, with loud lament like the laments we read in the Psalms. In this moment of waiting for the worst, he pours out his horror and longing without restraint, exploring the limits of his Abba's will without trying to counter it.

7. How can the same exhortations make the difference in your own life between resisting or falling into temptation?

8. Many people question whether the only way to God is through Jesus and his death on the cross. It has been suggested that this is the question Jesus himself wrestled with in Gethsemane. How might this passage help those who struggle with the question of whether Jesus is the only way to God? (35-36)

9. Have you ever felt like the disciples must have felt in verse 40? Explain.

10. Who led the crowd in the arrest of Jesus, and what is significant about the ways he is identified? How did all of his followers fail him?

11. Why do you think the disciples fled? (See also Luke 24:21)

12. What does the entire scene in the garden – from Jesus' time in prayer to his apparent readiness to rise and meet his betrayer- indicate about Jesus' relationship with the Father?

Personal Reflection: Would you say your relationship with God is at all similar? Why or why not?

13. GUESS: Who might the young man be who is referred to in verse 51?

Man At Work

Week #26

For Small Group Discussion 5/6-5/12

Mark 14:53-72

Jesus And Peter

He began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, I don't know this man you're talking about (Mark 14:71).

Mark is careful to point out the contrast between Jesus' speaking under oath in the inner courtroom and Peter's oath in the courtyard. Jesus said He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and Peter denied that he knew Jesus at all. That was a solemn and serious oath, and just then, Mark says, "the rooster crowed the second time." Peter's conscience smote him. He knew what he had done, and according to the account here, he broke down and wept. The word for "broke down" is very strong in Greek. He literally went out and threw himself down on the ground in agony and tears of repentance, and remorse began to flow as he thought of what he had done.

I think we can see why Mark has so carefully weaved this story together for us. Nothing intrigues me more in this account in the gospels than to see the careful way the writers of Scripture choose incidents that belong together and put them side by side. Mark has done that here so that we might see the contrast. Here is a band of priests who hate Jesus. Their hearts are filled with venom and anger and jealousy and bitterness against Him. And all of it comes spilling out in the spitting and buffeting that follow the verdict. Contrasted to this is a man who loves Jesus with all his heart and is determined to defend Him to the end. And yet, in the moment of crisis, he fails Jesus. He denies that he even knows Him.

Why does Mark put these two situations side by side? He does it so that we might understand that both of them manifest the same thing; both show the undependability of human nature--the flesh, as the Bible calls it. These priests were men of the flesh, men who lived according to the ways of the world, men who were seeking for status and prestige and position. Jesus was a threat to their position and awakened their hatred and their anger, which they expressed in this terrible accusation and mockery and violence. That is the flesh at work. Everybody recognizes that hatred and anger and vehemence are wrong. But what Mark wants us to see is that the love of Peter was no better. It too was depending on the flesh, on human abilities and human resources, to carry him through. In the hour of crisis, it was no more effective than the hatred of the priests. Love and loyalty and faithfulness mean nothing when they rest on the shaky foundation of the determination of a human will.

The most hopeful note here is the tears of Peter. The priests didn't weep. But Peter, when he denied his Lord, threw himself down and wept. Failure is never the end of the story. Peter's tears speak of another day that is yet to come when the Lord will deliver him and restore him, having learned a sobering and salutary lesson.

Father, there will come times when I will be confronted with failure. I will find myself, like Peter, doing the very thing I didn't want to do, denying the Lord who bought me. Help me to understand that I must not count upon the power of the flesh to accomplish Your work.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #26 Mark 14: 53-72

Open It

1. When was the last time you were misunderstood or misinterpreted?
2. What is one fact about you that most people don't know?

Before the Sanhedrin - Mark 14:53-65

Introduction

The Sanhedrin was the high court of Judaism, composed of the chief priests and other prominent religious leaders of Jerusalem. If all the members were present, there would have been seventy of them. // This nighttime gathering of the Sanhedrin was highly unusual and perhaps illegal. At the same time, we must keep in mind that certain "loopholes" may have existed in Sanhedrin procedures which would permit this sort of speedy nocturnal trial under extreme circumstances. As Jesus Himself noted, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were famous for creating exceptions to established rules in order to justify their deeds (Mark 7:9-13). So most, if not all, of the procedures at the trial of Jesus may have been legal, if not unusual. // Be it as it may, Mark's account portrays the trial of Jesus as a sort of "kangaroo court," with a parade of prearranged false witnesses and no real opportunity for a defense on Jesus' part. Whether or not strictly legal, it was certainly not fair.

Read It

Mark 14:53-65

Explore It

1. What different charges are leveled against Jesus? (55-64)
2. Why did the Sanhedrin have such a hard time convicting Jesus of any crime? (14:55-59)
3. What was Jesus' response to all the accusations against Him? (14:61)
4. Why do you think Peter followed Jesus "at a distance"?

Get It

1. Why do you think Jesus did not answer the charges brought against him? (14:61)
2. Why do you think Jesus chose to answer the high priest's question (14:61-62) after refusing to respond to the false charges brought against Him?

3. What was Jesus claiming about himself in 14:62?
4. Why should the council have believed Jesus' shocking statements? What evidence has there been in Mark's gospel that this is truth and not blasphemy?
5. With what question did the high priest finally challenge him, and what did his reaction reveal about his personal response to truth?
6. What can we learn about dealing with false accusations from Jesus' example?

Peter Disowns Jesus - Mark 14:66-72

Introduction

The detailed description of Peter's failure highlights the solitariness of Jesus. Betrayed by one associate, forsaken by ten more, and now publicly and bitterly renounced by his closest friend; he stands alone, defenseless, before the Jewish court, before the world. This too is important for the story Mark is telling: what Jesus has to do now, he has to do all by himself. No one else can give their life as a ransom for many. No one else can bring Israel's story of failure and redemption to its climax. If he is the Messiah, there comes a moment when he has to act solo. That moment has now arrived.

Read It

Mark 14:66-72

Explore It

1. What do you learn about Peter from his presence in the courtyard outside where Jesus was being tried and from his subsequent behavior?
2. How did Peter's denial of Christ happen? (14:66-72)
3. Who in the courtyard was curious and insistent about finding out who Jesus' followers were? (14:66-70)

Get It

1. How does Peter's failure to stay awake and pray affect what happens in these verses?
2. How does Mark contrast Jesus and Peter? (vv. 53-54, 61-62, 66-71)
3. Jesus has renamed his disciple Simon as "Peter," a rock. Yet in the high priest's courtyard he shows himself more like the shallow rocky ground in the parable of the sower, the kind of person who receives the word of the kingdom with joy but who falls away when trouble comes. // If the success of God's kingdom work in the world depended on the moral fiber of Jesus' disciples, what would be its prospects, and why?
4. From what you've read in Mark 14, what does the success of God's work in the world depend on?
5. In what sorts of situations are you sometimes uncomfortable or fearful about identifying with Christ?

How can you affirm your faith in Christ in those situations?

6. Personal: Have you ever done something you thought God could not forgive? Consider Peter's three-fold denial of Jesus, and thank God that Christ forgives even the most terrible of sins.

***Before we judge Peter too severely, we need to examine our own lives.
How many times have we denied the Lord and lost opportunities to share the gospel with others?
Do we, like Peter, talk when we should listen, argue when we should obey, sleep when we should pray, and fight when we should submit?***

Man At Work

Week #27

For Small Group Discussion 5/13-5/19

Mark 15:1-20

Jesus Or Barabbas?

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them (Mark 15:15a)

All the gospel writers tell us of Barabbas. He was a bloodthirsty revolutionary, hardnosed and bloody-handed; he was a murderer. The interesting thing about him is his name, which means “son of the father.” And in a most dramatic historic coincidence, according to some old manuscripts, there is some evidence that his name probably was Jesus Barabbas: Jesus, the son of the father. I do not see how we could read and understand that without knowing that this is again God silently guiding events behind the scene, bringing things to light that otherwise would never be known. For this crowd is confronted with choosing between Jesus, the son of the father, who rules by force and makes his living by his wits; and Jesus, the Son of the Father, who rules by love and is ready to sacrifice Himself.

Why did they choose Barabbas? The answer seems to be that they were disappointed with Jesus. This was the crowd that, just a few days before, had welcomed Him into Jerusalem. The city was filled with people Jesus had healed. The eyes of the blind had been opened, the deaf made to hear, and the lame to walk. He had awakened within the people the hope, the flaming desire, that this was indeed the Messiah, come to deliver them from the yoke of Rome. All their ideas of messiahship centered around the thought that He would be the one who would set them free from the hated bondage of Rome. Now, when they saw Him standing helpless before the Roman governor, saw His apparent unwillingness or inability to make any defense or to do anything against the Romans, all their loyalty to Him collapsed. In anger and disappointment, they turned and chose Jesus, the son of the father, who lived by force—Barabbas the murderer.

We too face the same decision these Jews had to make between Barabbas and Jesus. Have you ever been disappointed in Jesus, disappointed in God? Have you ever expected Him to act in a certain way because of what you understood about Him and His life and His nature—but He did not do things the way you thought they should be done? I have been angry and disappointed in God. I have been all but convinced that He did not live up to His promise, for I was sure that I knew what He was going to do, and God disappointed me. My heart was filled with rage that God would act that way, despite the fact that God has told us all, again and again, *'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8-9)*. We cannot figure out God. He will be true to Himself, He will never lie, He will never deceive us; but He is more than we can handle. He is bigger than we are. And like this crowd, when we get angry with God and upset with Jesus and turn from Him, there is always another Jesus Barabbas waiting in the wings for us to follow.

Lord I realize that life is confronting me all the time with decisions to choose Barabbas or Christ. Grant that I may choose the Lord Jesus, before whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #27 Mark 15:1-20

Open It

1. What's your favorite movie? Who is the hero in that movie? What heroic deed does he do?
2. If Hollywood wrote the story of Jesus' final hours, how do you think the story would have differed?

Mark 15:1-20

Introduction

Barabbas was a worthless thief and cutthroat, right? Actually, that's pretty unlikely, given his name and the technical term Mark uses to describe him. *Bar Abba* means "son of the father," a name commonly taken by rabbis. He is in prison as a *lestai*, a term for religious guerrilla fighters in league with the Zealots. Many of the *lestas* were former Pharisees who had grown so radical that they turned to violence to help purify the land. They sometimes resorted to banditry to finance their revolution, making them a strange cross between a Pharisee militia and a Robin Hood style band of thieves. If Barabbas had killed somebody, it would have been "murder" to the Romans, but to the Jews it would have been a blow for freedom against tyrannical oppressors. In other words, Barabbas was probably about the same kind of murderer as Ethan Allen or George Washington.

Read It

Mark 15:1-20

Explore It

1. How did Jesus respond to the Sanhedrin and Pilate? (15:2)
2. What prompted Pilate to goad Jesus about defending Himself? (15:3-4)
3. What amazed Pilate? (15:3-5)
4. How did Jesus react to the accusations raised against Him by the chief priests? (15:5)
5. What did Pilate think of Jesus? (15:5)

Get It

1. Why would Jesus' role be of concern to Pilate? What was so amazing about the way Jesus responded to the questions and accusations?
2. Who do you think Pilate wanted to release – Jesus or Barabbas – and why? In what way was Pilate also on trial?
3. Pilate has sympathy for Jesus, but he has no intention of paying a price to help him. Why does Pilate execute a man he can see is innocent? How is this kind of moral cowardice a temptation today? How can we keep from succumbing to that temptations?
4. Why do you think Jesus' response to Pilate is not more direct? What point is Jesus making? Speculate on what might have happened had Jesus said "Yes' or "No."
5. Contrast this crowd's response to Jesus with the crowd who had met him only a few days earlier. What does this tell you about human inclination toward leaders? How have you seen this in local, national or international events in your lifetime?
6. When have you been falsely accused of something? How have you responded to your accusers? To what extent can we leave vindication in God's hands?

7. With what accusation, picked up from the trial, did the soldiers taunt Jesus? How and why do people mock Jesus and his claims today? When is worship a mockery?

8. Describe your emotional response to the soldiers' mistreatment of Jesus. In what ways is Jesus mocked and mistreated today? In what ways do we respond today to the mistreatment of Jesus?

9. When is it unimportant to defend ourselves or our actions? In what way can you entrust your reputation to God?

10. The mockers say that the One who saved others can't save himself (15:31). Their words are truer than they know. Why can't Jesus save both himself and others?

11. If you could ask Mark who killed Jesus, how do you think he would respond?

Caiaphas and his posse wanted Jesus killed because they felt his teaching would undermine the Temple. But by supporting Barabbas and the Zealots they contributed to a program of violence that forty years later provoked the Romans to destroy the Temple. When we cast aside God's rules because they seem to get in the way of what needs doing, we rarely foresee the consequences of what we're really choosing.

Man At Work

Week #28

For Small Group Discussion 5/20-5/26

Mark 15:21-47

A Heart Wide Open

Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38)

Perhaps one of the priests told Mark about the veil. But for sheer drama there is nothing like this in all of recorded history. This cry in the darkness of the cross, the dismissing of the spirit of Jesus, and the rending of the veil in the temple—Mark brings them all together in order that we might understand what these events mean. As Jesus' cry rang out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" there must have been many in the crowd who recognized that it was the opening words of Psalm 22. If you want to get the background and atmosphere of the cross, read that psalm through. There is no adequate explanation for the question that Jesus asked except that which Scripture itself gives, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Then there comes the loud cry of dismissal and the rending of the veil. Why did the veil split in two? It was God's dramatic way of saying for all time and for all people that the way into His heart is wide open. God is not planning revenge. All those who gathered around the cross in hatred and malice against Jesus—every one of them is welcome to come back. That is what the rent veil means. The penalty has been paid for the hateful, the cruel, the ignorant, the selfish, the empty-headed thrill seekers. The way is wide open, and God is waiting to restore the hopeless, the helpless, and the fearful.

When I was just a young Christian, in my early twenties, I read a message by D. L. Moody that I have never forgotten. It was the great evangelist's imaginative description of what happened after Jesus rose from the dead. Moody says He gathered His disciples in Jerusalem and said to them, "Men, I want you to go and find the priests who mocked me, who hurled in my teeth the taunt, 'He saved others, himself he could not save.' Explain to them that if I had saved myself; they would have been doomed men. But tell them there is a way wide open." The book of Acts says that as Peter and the other disciples preached in Jerusalem "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Moody said that Jesus said to the disciples, "Go find the soldiers who cast lots for my garments, for my seamless robe, and tell them that there is a far greater treasure awaiting them if they will come to me. They shall have not a seamless robe, but a spotless heart. All their guilt can be washed away; all their callous cruelty can be forgiven if they come. Find the centurion who thrust his spear into my side and tell him there is a closer way to my heart if he will come, just as a sinner needing forgiveness."

In this beautiful scene of the rending of the veil at the moment of the death of Jesus, God is saying that the way to Him is open to us, despite the wrong attitudes we so frequently have had toward Him.

Father, may I lay hold of that great word, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. I know of no greater wonder in all the universe than this.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #28 Mark 15:21-47

Open It

1. Who is the most courageous person you know?
2. Simon of Cyrene's encounter with Christ was most unusual. How did you first "encounter Christ"?

The Death of Jesus - Mark 15:21-47

Introduction

It was the darkest hour in the history of God's people. The religious leaders of Israel had condemned their Messiah to death, and the worldly rulers of Rome were carrying out the sentence. Even the skies above Jerusalem fell under darkness, though it was the middle of the day (15:33).

The fact that Jesus was crucified was final proof to many that He could not be the Messiah. Did not God's own Law say that anyone hung upon a tree was under God's curse (Deuteronomy 21:23)? How could the Messiah be the cursed one?

Yet even as Jesus died, God gave the high priests of the temple a clue as to what this Man's death had accomplished: the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two (Mark 15:38). Only later would the meaning of this event become clear.

Read It

Mark 15:21-47

Explore It

1. Why did Jesus not carry the cross Himself? (15:21)
2. How did the people insult Jesus when He was on the cross? (15:29-30)
3. What challenge did Jesus ignore? (15:31-32)
4. What did Jesus say "at the ninth hour"? (15:34)
5. What caused the centurion to believe in Jesus? (15:39)

Get It

Mark's readers know the gory details of flogging and crucifixion, so Mark doesn't recount them. Instead, he gives only those details about Jesus' torture and death that have theological meaning. And he wants us to hear the irony of what the onlookers say about Jesus.

1. Simon was picked out of the crowd, apparently at random. (Mark 15:21) Yet in the sovereignty of God, he and his sons later became followers of Christ. (Romans 16:13) What events of the crucifixion may have led to Simon's conversion?

Can you point to one or more apparently "random" events in your life which, upon further reflection, show God's sovereign will being worked out in your life?

Wine mixed with myrrh (15:23). Such a mixture was used as a narcotic, to help lessen the victim's pain. Since consideration of the victim seems out of character for Roman soldiers as Mark depicts them, perhaps local Jews prepared the mixture whenever Rome crucified one of their people.

2. Why do you think Jesus refused the drugged wine?
3. The mockers say that the One who saved others can't save himself (15:31). Their words are truer than they know. Why can't Jesus save both himself and others?

The many ways Jesus' death fulfills Old Testament predictions shows that his end is not a tragic failure but the glorious fulfillment of the destiny God assigned him as the Messiah. In particular, Jesus calls attention to Psalm 22 by crying out its first verse (15:34).

4. Compare Mark 15:24-34 to Psalm 22:1-18. What echoes of the psalm do you find in Mark's account?

What is the significance of the fact that David wrote Psalm 22 hundreds of years before the Jews knew anything about crucifixion (a Roman form of execution)?

Read Psalm 22:23-31. What does the end of this psalm tell you about the destiny Jesus expects even as he quotes the beginning of the psalm in anguish?

5. When faced with the worst suffering, Jesus prays a psalm that expresses anguish and complaint, but also trust in God. What can we learn for our own lives from the way Jesus faced death?

6. What peculiar thing occurred at the time of Jesus' death, and why were his final words so important to humankind?

7. How would your life be different if Jesus had taken up the religious leaders' challenge and come down off the cross (15:32)?

As the heavens were torn open at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Mark 1:10), so the temple curtain is torn open at the end (15:38). This curtain separated the temple's court and Holy Place (which one Jewish writer compared to the land and sea, accessible to humanity) from the Holy of Holies (which represented heaven, the dwelling place of God).

8. What implications does the tearing of the temple curtain have for us?

The centurion is the opposite of the people who want to see dramatic proof before believing (15:36). Faith is not a matter of seeing in order to believe, but of trusting to the point of death. One must be able to see that precisely here in the obscurity, lowliness, humiliation and powerlessness of the cross, not in any miraculous display, God demonstrates power over the demonic and humankind.

9. Like the soldiers who mocked Jesus (15:16-20), the centurion who watches Jesus die (15:39) has been taught to call Caesar alone the Son of God. Caesar proves his divinity by wielding naked power. What do you think it is about Jesus' death that convinces this hardened military man to shift his thinking and call Jesus the Son of God?

10. The centurion was a Roman soldier. He recognized the great truth that the religious leaders could not see. What is the significance of this for Mark's readers, and for you?

11. In what ways is the centurion's confession a climax to the whole of Mark's Gospel? (Compare 15:38-39 with 1:1; 1:10-11; 8:28-30.)

12. Who else witnessed the crucifixion, and what contribution had they made to Jesus' ministry? Why is this consequential?

13. Who was Joseph of Arimathea, and how did he show special courage in making his request? What proof do you find that Joseph believed Jesus is the King?

14. What barriers exist in your relationship with God? What effect do these barriers have in your spiritual life? Your life with others? What has God done to remove these barriers? What can you do to further remove these barriers?

15. What is there about how Jesus died that we might apply to how we should *live*?

Commentary Notes from *LifeChange: Mark*

And they crucified him (15:24). Mark shows remark-able restraint in recounting what Cicero called "the cruelest and most hideous punishment possible."⁴ Jesus, already half-dead from a flogging, was now stripped of His blood-clotted clothing and laid upon the ground, His arms spread atop the crosspiece. A soldier then drove a large iron nail through each of Jesus' wrists into the crosspiece. The crosspiece was then hoisted into place atop a vertical beam already placed in the ground. Finally, Jesus' legs were either nailed or tied to the vertical beam (John 20:25 mentions nail holes in Jesus' hands only). A slow, agonizing death now awaited Him.

The third hour (15:25). Around nine o'clock in the morning by both Jewish and Roman reckoning. Neither Matthew nor Luke, who otherwise follows Mark's chronology, includes this statement. John 19:14 places the crucifixion sometime after "the sixth hour." Many solutions have been proposed for this difference.

Perhaps B. F. Westcott's explanation, that John was using a system of reckoning time familiar to his readers in Asia Minor (Ephesus?), is still as plausible as any. In that case, John 19:14 would have Jesus still with Pilate at about six a.m. (the "sixth hour" by John's reckoning), rather than at noon.⁵ This not only makes John's narrative consistent with Mark's, but also avoids the problem of how Jesus could have gone from Pilate's presence on a long procession through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha, been crucified, died, and been prepared for burial, all between noon and sunset (which would still be relatively early at Passover time).

The written notice (15:26). All criminals sentenced to death by crucifixion were paraded through the streets of the city with a written notice proclaiming their crime in large letters. Once outside the city at the site of the execution, the soldiers attached the notice to the victim's cross. The notice served as a warning to any who would repeat the crime.

Two robbers (15:27). The Greek word literally means "insurrectionists." So far as Rome was concerned, Jesus was attempting to make Himself a king and thereby displace the authority of Caesar. Thus they crucified Him between two men (probably Zealots) who sought to overthrow Roman rule in Judea.

The curtain of the temple (15:38). The Old Testament tabernacle, which symbolized God's dwelling place with Israel, had two principal areas: the "Holy Place" and the "Most Holy Place." There were thus curtains, one separating the "Holy Place" from the "Most Holy Place," and the other separating both from the outer area (Exodus 26:30-37; see also Hebrews 9:24).

The priests entered the Holy Place daily to offer incense and bread, but the Most Holy Place was reserved for one yearly sacrifice only: that of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of the animal sacrificed for the sins of all Israel. He sprinkled this blood on the Ark of the Covenant as an atonement for the sins of all the people. Only the high priest could do this, and only once a year (see Leviticus 16:17 and Hebrews 9:7).

When Israel built the Temple to replace the tabernacle, the same pattern was followed. Thus in Jesus' day there were two curtains in the temple. Mark is almost certainly referring to the inner curtain, which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. This curtain was made of very heavy material, tightly woven and virtually impossible to tear. The fact that it was torn from top to bottom suggests the imagery of an invisible sword cutting it in two. Mark is clearly talking about a supernatural event.

Joseph of Arimathea (15:43). Mark called Joseph a "prominent member of the Council," i.e., the Sanhedrin. The word translated "prominent" may also be rendered "of good repute," referring not to Joseph's rank in the Sanhedrin, but rather to his reputation as a just man. Luke has evidently interpreted it in this way, adding that Joseph did not consent to the Sanhedrin's condemnation of Jesus (Luke 23:50-51). Joseph was "awaiting the Kingdom of God" of which Jesus spoke, though John 19:38 tells us he kept his allegiance to Jesus secret for fear of the Jewish authorities. Matthew notes that Joseph was wealthy, perhaps because Matthew was emphasizing the fulfillment of prophecy (see Isaiah 53:9).

Arimathea was probably the same village where the prophet Samuel was born (Ramathaim; see 1 Samuel 1:1), located about twenty miles north of Jerusalem.

Man At Work

Week #29

For Small Group Discussion 5/27-6/2

Mark 16:1-20

The Rumor Of Hope

“Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’” (Mark 16:6-7).

The words of the angel to these women contain the answer to all the skepticism of over twenty centuries. For the angel said some things to them that answer most of the claims that have ever been raised in questioning the actuality of the resurrection. The first thing the angel said was, “This Jesus of Nazareth, this One who was crucified, this same One whom you seek, has indeed risen from the dead.” Many of the attempts to explain this away say that the women went to the wrong tomb or that they found the wrong person. That whole question is answered here by the angel. He says to the women, “This very same Jesus, the One you knew from Nazareth, the Jesus who was crucified, whom you saw on the cross with the nails in His hands and the blood running down His side, that same One is risen from the dead.”

Then he said to them, “He is not here.” That is, “He is not only risen; He is not here.” And in those words he makes clear that, though Jesus is risen, there is nevertheless a real tie with our humanity. He is not just a spirit. This is not a spiritual resurrection but a bodily resurrection. It was the body of Jesus that rose from the dead. There are cults today who claim that what happened was that the spirit of Jesus rose, and He now lives spiritually only. But the Bible consistently defends the proposition that it was the dead body that was put into the grave, which also rose from the dead. “He is not here.” He is a person yet, a human person with a human body—changed, yes—but still human. And in that human body He rose from the dead.

The third thing the angel says is put in these extraordinary words that only Mark records: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee.’” That is a wonderful touch. What a gentle, tender word that is! The last time we saw Peter in this gospel account, he was standing in the courtyard of the high priest during the trial of Jesus. And a little maiden kept following him around, saying, “I know you. You were with Him, weren't you? Peter kept denying it.” He went out into the darkness of the night, weeping bitterly. What a tender thing it is for the angel to say to these women, “Go and tell the disciples and Peter that He goes before you to Galilee.” It puts him right back into the apostolic band.

That says that Jesus is available to individuals—not just to the crowd at large, not just to the world in general, or the church, but to you. Put your own name in there. This accessibility to individuals has been the hallmark of Christianity ever since. Each one of us can know Him personally, intimately—not just as a figure of history nor as a coming king nor in a general sense, as we know about the president of the United States, but in that close, personal, real, conscious sense of knowing that we share in the most intimate human communion.

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are, indeed, what you promised to be—a living Lord—and that You can enter my life and begin to bring me out of despair into hope, out of death into resurrection.

~ Ray Stedman

Study #29 Mark 16:1-8

Open It

1. What is the most extraordinary event you have ever witnessed?
2. What does the saying mean, "Truth is stranger than fiction"?

The Resurrection - Mark 16:1-8

Introduction

We must make sure that we spend plenty of time at the empty tomb's entrance. The resurrection is the core of what we believe. It is at the core of Jesus' divinity. If the resurrection is excluded, why should Christians continue to revere Jesus, who is then only one of many figures from antiquity worthy of attention and honor? If Jesus is only the 'historical Jesus,' then Christianity is a delusion and a waste of time. But if Jesus Christ is raised as Lord, everything changes radically.

Read It

Mark 16:1-8

Explore It

1. What did the women see when they got to the tomb? (16:4)
2. How do we know from verse 5 & 6 that this was not an ordinary man? (Then substantiate that thought with Matthew 28:2-4 and Luke 24:4.)
3. What did the women do after talking with the Angel? What feeling did they experience?

Get It

1. What had happened to the women's problem when they arrived? Relate a time when God has astonishingly solved a problem you anticipated.
2. Why do you think the Angel made a point of specifying Peter rather than just referring to the 11 disciples generally? "But go, tell his disciples **and Peter**, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee.'"

5. Why do you think Jesus chooses Mary Magdalene to be his first witness? What does this communicate to the Church today about Jesus' priorities?

6. Initially, the women fail to obey the command to go and tell (16:7), because they're scared (16:8). What do you think they're afraid of?

Why are we sometimes afraid to go and tell that Jesus has risen?

7. It would be a mistake to think Jesus' death is more important for us than His resurrection. What did His resurrection accomplish for us? (See Romans 4:25, 5:10, 6:1-14, 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-22.)

8. What does Jesus promise directly in John 11:25-26?

Mark 16:9-20 Explained

(Smart Guide: Mark)

So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark's book ends with surprising abruptness. The women who were already terrified flee in complete, **overwhelming** dread in verse 8. **The End.**

Huh? Was that really where Mark stopped writing? By now you have a feel for Mark's style. This ending fits him in several ways:

1. The abrupt ending matches the abrupt beginning. While the other Gospel writers have long preambles to introduce Jesus, Mark jumps right in with both feet. Mark 1:1 starts with, "The beginning of the gospel" (NKJV), and within eight verses, he's covered all he wants to say about John the Baptizer, Jesus is already an adult, and he's been baptized. The short, sharp ending matches the beginning.
2. Mark leaves many important things unresolved. Who won the **battle**- between Jesus and Satan? Mark doesn't say; he expects you to figure it out. When Jesus calmed the storm, and the disciples asked one another. "Who can this be ... !" (4:41 NKJV), did Mark answer the question? No; he expects you to figure it out. Why did Jesus **silence people**- who called him Messiah? Mark doesn't say; he expects you to figure it out. This unsettling, unresolved ending matches Mark's style.
3. Mark uses deep fear as the reaction to God's **overwhelming** presence. When the divinity of Jesus shines forth most powerfully, Mark shows people reacting in fear. Remember when Jesus shone with glory on the mountain? Peter was **afraid**-. How did the Twelve respond when Jesus acted like Yahweh by controlling the ocean? They were **terrified**-. People were afraid when Jesus cast out a **legion of demons**, when he walked on **water**-, and so on. The women's fear shows that God did something mighty.
4. It was common in the literature of the era merely to allude to well-known events. We read that someone announced Jesus was alive, and we might well ask. "Really? Then what happened?" Mark was writing in Rome, during the lifetimes of these female witnesses, when virtually **everyone knew**- how the story went. Mark can feel free to stop right here. The only other note needed might be, "And the rest is history."

I believe this really is the end of Mark's Gospel. Some scholars believe the real ending was lost. If so, we are remarkably "lucky" to have a book that ends with a complete sentence and with even essential element of the Gospel intact. Though we might wish for Mark to depict the risen Savior, we have all we need here to complete the Gospel.

I like his haunting ending, because it drives you back into the book for another look. Of course, we know- from the other Gospel writers the women eventually overcame their fear and obeyed the command to tell the apostles.

Early Manuscripts... explained:

If you open your Bible to Mark 16:9, you'll probably find a note from the publisher that says, "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." This note states part of why most scholars do not consider these verses to be God's Word. I agree with these scholars, so I won't go into the same depth with this passage as I have with the rest of Mark (although I will summarize the passage a little later).

You might be thinking, "Wait a second. If most scholars don't think this passage is God's Word, why is it in the Bible?" Good question. The reason it's there is because the translators of the King James Version, using sixteenth-century knowledge and tradition, accepted it as part of Mark. As our understanding of manuscript transmission and ancient Greek has increased, evangelical scholars no longer accept this passage of Mark as being authored by Mark.

Today, publishers include this passage to be sensitive to tradition and to show respect for the work of scholars of previous generations who were well meaning, hard-working, and sharp thinking. It would be arrogant to take a passage counted as Scripture for hundreds of years and simply trash it. But because of the well-founded doubts about the origins of this passage, publishers include the note mentioned above to inform you of a fact that may affect your reading of it.

There are many reasons scholars don't believe Mark wrote this passage. Here are some of them:

- As mentioned in the publisher's note, Mark 16:9-20 is not in the earliest, most reliable copies of Mark we've found. In fact, they don't show up until over two hundred years after Mark lived.
- None of the early church fathers indicate awareness of these verses for the first few centuries of Christianity. They don't quote from them, comment on them, or live by phrases like "if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them" (verse 18 NKJV).
- Textually, the vocabulary and style of Greek are not like Mark's.
- Structurally, these verses seem tacked on. The subject changes suddenly (from the women, to Jesus), with no segue whatsoever. Even-where else, Mark always had a segue, even if it was something very brief like "and then" or "next." Mary Magdalene's already been mentioned three previous times, but she is introduced here like a new character, which doesn't fit Mark's style.
- This passage recommends practices mentioned nowhere else in Scripture that were never part of the life of the early church. None of the believers purposely drank poison or intentionally picked up snakes. The evidence suggests someone from a later period inserted these verses to justify- their own beliefs.

Whatever you conclude about whether this passage was written by Mark, we can safely delete it without losing anything significant. Verses 9 through 15 summarize material handled with more depth and detail in the other Gospels. Verses 16 through 18 bring in beliefs that the church did not practice. Verses 19 and 20 are covered elsewhere, especially in the book of Acts.

Who would add this passage to Mark, and why? We don't know. Our best guess is, the book seemed unfinished to someone who tried to "help" Mark by making it more complete. As for who did it, the evidence suggests it was someone alive around AD 200. That's all we know.