

The Gospel of Mark

A Study Guide
Teacher Edition

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Introduction

The Book of Mark is a biography. It tells about the life of a man named Jesus, also known as Jesus Christ (“Christ” is a title that given to Jesus meaning “the anointed one.”) Jesus was a Jew who lived around 2000 years ago. It is believed that he was born around 3 or 4 BC. In fact, “BC” means “Before Christ.” The life of Jesus Christ was so significant that the world measures time relative to his birth.

Mark’s book is called a “Gospel.” A “Gospel” is a book of “Good News” (that’s what the word “gospel” means, “good news.”) The life of Jesus was good news to the world because he came to teach us about God and to restore our relationship with God.

Mark’s Gospel is one of sixty-six books in the Bible. The Bible is a history of God’s relationship with man. It is divided into two major parts, called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament tells us that God created us in order to have relationship with us. His desire was that we would love him. He wanted that love to come out of free choice, however. He gave us the option to love him or to reject him. In order to truly love him, it is necessary to submit to his leadership. Man chose to rebel and refused to submit to God. This rebellion is called sin. It disrupted man’s relationship with God. Furthermore it brought a penalty upon man. God had warned that sin brings death. God’s original intent was for man to live forever. Because of sin, man was destined to die.

The New Testament tells how God restored the relationship with man. He sent his son, Jesus, to live among us and to show us how to live in perfect love and submission to God. Jesus was the only man who ever lived a life without sin and thus was the only one free from the penalty of death. In spite of that, he allowed himself to be executed, taking upon himself the penalty that we all deserved. He died for us so that we might live forever.

The New Testament contains four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all tell the story of the life of Jesus, each telling the same story from a different narrator’s point of view. It is the most important story in all of history. Let us read and understand what it has to say.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is sin?

Sin is rebellion against the authority of God. He is the creator. We are the creation. Creation was meant to be subject to the creator. When we fail to submit and fail to follow the standards that he set for us, we sin. Pure love for God would cause us to purely follow his leadership. Jealousy and a desire to be our own masters motivate us to rebellion.

2. How did sin disrupt our relationship with God?

God's plan was to live in harmony with his creation, freely interacting with his people. In the beginning he perfectly provided for their needs and walked among them in the Garden of Eden. Man was meant to live eternally. Man was the pinnacle of creation and was given authority over the earth and all that is in it. This was not enough for man. Man rebelled, attempting to usurp the authority of God and attempting to become his own master. This disrupted God's plan.

God is holy. He will not defile himself with the presence of sin. Because man put himself in the domain of sin, man could no longer live in the presence of God. Man was driven from God's presence. Man also brought physical death upon himself, because the penalty for sin is death.

The fall of man broke God's heart. God is a God of relationships. Sin prevented us from having the sort of relationship with God that he intended and desired.

God had a dilemma. His creation no longer served any useful purpose to him. He could obliterate it or he could find a way to restore it. God put in motion a plan to restore the relationship and to defeat the problem of sin. Jesus was the champion who brought that plan to fulfillment.

Chapter 1

Discussion

Read Chapter 1 of Mark.

Mark covers a great deal of material in this first chapter. We see:

- the ministry of John the Baptist.
- the baptism of Jesus.
- Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness before he begins his active ministry.
- the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John.
- some of Jesus' early teaching and healing ministry.

Mark begins by talking about John the Baptist. John and Jesus were relatives, perhaps second cousins. It is unlikely that they knew each other very well, but the Gospel of Luke tells us that their mothers were related. God had called John into a very special ministry. The prophets of the Old Testament had promised that God would send a messenger to prepare people for the coming of the Savior. John was that messenger. His job was to remind people of their sin and to plant in them a desire to be free from the sin. He cultivated in them a longing to see the Savior come. John baptized people, which involved immersing them in water. It was symbolic of cleansing them from sin. The physical washing represented the spiritual washing that they desired.

John began his ministry before Jesus did. He prepared a body of people who were prepared to meet the Messiah (the Savior). When the time was right according to God's plan, Jesus went to John. Jesus asked John to baptize him. When he did, the Holy Spirit of God descended upon Jesus and remained upon him. An audible voice spoke from heaven and said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." God empowered Jesus for ministry and then testified to who he was.

After the baptism, Mark says that Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted. Matthew Chapter 4 and Luke Chapter 4 give more information about these forty days. It was a solitary time, when Jesus was cut off from the rest of the people in the world. He was alone with his Father in Heaven, contemplating the mission that was before him. He knew that it was going to be a difficult time, ending with his own death. In the wilderness he faced the temptation to compromise and to take shortcuts towards gathering a following. After all, Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He could do miracles. Wouldn't it be easy to gather a large following by performing miracles for people, i.e. putting on a "Messiah Side Show?" Yes, indeed, Jesus could have gathered a crowd that way. The problem is that Jesus did not come to gather a crowd of miracle-seekers. He came to bring truth. He wanted people to follow him, but he wanted them to

follow because they believed in his teachings, not because they were impressed by his “stunts.” During these forty days, Jesus had to firmly resolve to submit to the Father’s plan.

Failure to submit to the authority of the Heavenly Father has been our problem all along. That is what sin is all about. Jesus lived a life of submission. He came to show us how. There was no other way than the Father’s way for Jesus to save the world.

After the time in the wilderness, Jesus began his ministry of teaching and preaching. His words and deeds were empowered by the Holy Spirit and he gathered a following. Out of the large group of people that followed Jesus he would eventually select twelve men to become an inner circle, known as disciples. A disciple is basically an apprentice. Jesus ministered to the masses of people who came to hear him teach, but the majority of his time was spent with these twelve men. He knew that he would die as a result of his ministry. These twelve were given intensive training so that they could carry on the work after Jesus was gone.

When Jesus taught and ministered to people’s spiritual needs, he would normally minister to people’s physical needs as well. Thus he would heal or drive out demons as the Holy Spirit instructed him to do so. The miracles of Jesus validated who he was. He told the people about the Kingdom of God and then demonstrated its power. It is interesting that he often instructed people not to tell everyone who had healed them. He knew that people would be drawn to him looking for that “Messiah Side Show.” He was not interested in that kind of following.

Jesus wanted (and still wants) people drawn to the truth he came to bring.

Leader Notes

Does it seem strange that Jesus submitted to baptism? Since John’s baptism was symbolic of cleansing from sin and since Jesus lived a life without sin, why did he need to be baptized? Jesus’ baptism was sort of like his coronation as King. John was preparing people for the Kingdom of God. In his baptism, Jesus identified with these people and became their leader.

The baptism also was the backdrop for an important sign. John 1:33 tells us that John the Baptist did not know who the Messiah was prior to the baptism of Jesus. God had told him that he would baptize someone and when he did he would see the Spirit of God come down and remain on that individual. Thus John was looking for this sign. When he baptized Jesus, he saw the fulfillment of this sign. Only then did John know for sure that his cousin Jesus was the Messiah. (We do know from Luke that the unborn John leapt in the womb of Elizabeth when the pregnant Mary approached. The Holy Spirit testified to the presence of Jesus at that point and it served as a sign to Elizabeth and to Mary, but it is unlikely that the adult John would remember that prenatal experience. We also know

from verses such as Matthew 3:14 that John considered Jesus to be a very righteous man. Still, it was the sign at his baptism that confirmed to John that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.)

There was one other important thing that happened at the baptism. The Holy Spirit fell upon Jesus and remained upon him. The Holy Spirit had been a presence in the life of Jesus prior to this, but it was at this time that Jesus received the anointing for ministry that he needed to carry out his mission. Jesus was the Son of God, but he took on all the limitations of human flesh when he came to earth. In order to do the things that he did (speak the powerful truths of God, work miracles, heal, etc.) he was empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is the same Spirit that empowers the church today to do the same things that Jesus did!

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it important to us that Jesus experienced temptation?

When Jesus came to earth, he emptied himself of his divinity (see Philippians 2:6-8). Thus he operated under all of the same restrictions that we do. He experienced the same emotions that we do. He even experienced temptation, just as we do. Still he rose above it all and lived a life perfectly submitted to the Father. In doing so, he showed us that we can do the same thing. We can rise above our limitations, emotions, and temptations and experience victory. We can even minister in power, signs, and wonders, just like Jesus did because we as believers are empowered by the same Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus.

The key to it all is learning to listen to the Father's voice. Jesus experienced complete victory because he knew how to listen to the Father and he did exactly what the Father told him to do. Learning to live a victorious Christian life is a process of learning to listen to and obey the voice of the Father.

2. What is the Holy Spirit?

The nature of God is more complex than the nature of man. We have one God who is manifest in three distinct personalities. The three persons of God are distinct in personality and purpose but are one in nature. This concept is called the Trinity – one God in three persons.

The three persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is at the head of the Trinity. He is in charge. Normally when we simply refer to “God,” we are referring to the Father. The Father is holy. Although he once walked with man in the Garden of Eden, he is now separated from his creation by sin.

The Son is Jesus. Jesus has existed from the beginning (he is eternal just like the Father) but took on flesh and bones and dwelt on earth as a man, demonstrating the nature of God to us in the life that he led. Functioning in this capacity, he gave his life as a perfect sacrifice for our sin. After his death and resurrection he went back to be with the Father. He will return to earth in bodily form at the end of time when he establishes his reign on earth.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Like the other two persons, he is eternal and has been around since the beginning. When man rebelled in the Garden, he lost the ability to interact with God face-to-face. The Holy Spirit serves as a bridge, restoring that fellowship to a degree until that time when we are fully reconciled to God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, given to interact with our spirits. When a person becomes a believer, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in his life. He begins to speak to that person and gives him guidance. He teaches him about the things of God. He empowers that person for ministry, just as he empowered Jesus for ministry.

In this age, when we are waiting for the return of Jesus and the full restoration of our fellowship with the Father, the Holy Spirit is our lifeline to God. The voice and the power of God flow from the Throne Room of heaven into our lives through the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 2

Discussion

Read Mark Chapter 2.

In this chapter we see the following events:

- Jesus performs a miraculous healing and pronounces forgiveness for the sins of the man being healed. He is criticized for assuming the authority to forgive sins.
- Jesus calls Levi as a follower.
- Jesus is criticized for associating with undesirable people.
- Jesus is criticized for working on the Sabbath.

It is easy to see from this short list that the ministry of Jesus received much criticism. He made people mad. Sometimes we think that religious leaders should be the types that make people happy and feel good about themselves, but in fact Jesus came to “rock the boat.” He came to turn the Jewish religious system upside down.

The Jews had a true revelation of God and at the foundation their religious beliefs were strong and correct. They had the Old Testament and all of that is a true and proper revelation of God. Unfortunately, over time they had laid a number of false or improper traditions on top of that solid foundation and they had muddied the understanding of God. Jesus came to sweep away the mud and to restore the true understanding of God to the people. Whenever you start messing with people’s traditions you make them mad. It was primarily the Jewish leaders – the guardians of these traditions – who got mad at Jesus. The average Jew recognized that he was a great and powerful teacher.

At the beginning of Chapter 2, great crowds were following Jesus. Whenever he taught, they pressed in to hear what he had to say. The people were obviously hungry for the kind of truth that he brought. He was teaching in the city of Capernaum and masses of people were there, trying to hear what he had to say.

In the crowd was a man who was paralyzed. Some of his friends brought him to Jesus because they knew that Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal. Unfortunately the crowds were so thick that they could not get the man near Jesus. They found a way. They went up to the top of the house, removed some of the roofing material, and lowered the man through the roof to Jesus.

When Jesus saw the man, he knew why the friends had brought him. The man needed physical healing. They wanted their friend to be able to walk. Therefore it is interesting

that Jesus looked at the man and said “Your sins are forgiven.” He did not say, “Rise and walk.” He forgave the man’s sins.

In fact, this is entirely consistent with Jesus’ mission. True, he operated in signs and wonders. He performed miracles. He healed people and cast out demons. But the reason that he came was to bring truth and restoration with the Father. No matter what was wrong with this man physically, he was dead spiritually because sin had disrupted his relationship with God. Jesus knew that the spiritual sickness was more threatening than the physical problem because it had eternal consequences. Thus he dealt with that first. Empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so, he told the man that his sins were forgiven.

Some of the Jewish leaders were there when Jesus said this. They were shocked that Jesus forgave the man’s sins. They began thinking to themselves, “Who does he think he is? God is the only one who can forgive sins! In saying this, this man is presuming to have authority that belongs to God alone! He cannot do this!” They thought that Jesus was blasphemous, which means that he was presuming equality with God. They did not understand that Jesus said this out of obedience to God.

They did not voice their thoughts of blasphemy, but Jesus knew what they were thinking. Thus he said in Mark 2:8-11:

“Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”

There was no tangible way to verify whether or not Jesus really had the power to pronounce forgiveness for sin. Thus in order to demonstrate in a tangible way that he was operating in the power of God, he healed the man. He told him to get up, to pick up his mat and to walk. The man did so. The people were amazed.

Jesus came to proclaim the truth of the Kingdom of God. Forgiveness for sin is one of the absolute, fundamental truths of the Kingdom of God. In order to validate the truth that he taught, Jesus performed miracles. The miracles testified to the authority of Jesus. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and then demonstrated its power. It is a formula that still works today. The followers of Jesus should proclaim the truth of the Kingdom of God and then demonstrate its power. The demonstration validates the truth.

And just as was true with the ministry of Jesus, we should expect opposition and criticism when we proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom of God because Satan, the enemy of God, does not want that Kingdom to advance.

Next in the story, Jesus calls Levi to be one of his followers. Levi is another name for Matthew – the same Matthew that wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector, and the Jewish people hated tax collectors. Matthew was an outcast, but Jesus

accepted him and offered him restoration. He gave Matthew a chance to be reconciled with God. He offered him acceptance – something Matthew had not known from his own people. Matthew accepted Jesus' offer. He left his position as tax collector (which was a very lucrative profession) and followed Jesus. He gave up the wealth of the world, which had not brought him fulfillment, and traded it for the riches of the Kingdom of God.

At the time that Matthew became a follower of Jesus, his friends were all outcasts of society, just as he had been. Jesus went to dinner at the home of Matthew and the other people there were the “undesirables.” Jesus associated freely with them. He came to transform these very people into citizens of the Kingdom of God. Some of the Jewish leaders saw him socializing with these “unclean” people and criticized him for it. After all, if he was such a good and righteous man, why would he hang out with people like this? Not only was he associating with these people, but he was participating in a feast with them. If he were really religious, shouldn't he be fasting or something?

Jesus addressed the criticism of the people. First of all, he said that it is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. What he was saying was that those who are in spiritual trouble are the ones who need spiritual help. Jesus did not hang out with “holier than thou” types. He hung out with people who were battered, scarred, and in desperate need of truth. That really has never changed. People who are self-sufficient are not apt to view themselves in need of a Savior. It is those who are honest about their hurting that will be drawn to him. Those are the ones that he would seek out. If Jesus were here today, living in bodily form, he probably would not spend much time in churches. He would be out in the world, mingling with real people who have real hurts and problems.

Jesus also said that it was appropriate for him to celebrate and to feast with people. His time among us should be a time of celebration. He knew that the day would come when he would be killed. That would be a solemn time. For the present, he wanted to enjoy the people. After all, he loved them – enough to die for them.

Jesus got in trouble one more time in Chapter 2. On a Sabbath day, his disciples were hungry. They were walking through a grain field and plucked some grain to eat.

This was not stealing. Jewish law mandated that a portion of any crop be left for the needy. This was God's welfare system. It was not lawful to go to somebody else's field and harvest crops for sale. It was lawful to go there and eat.

There was a problem with what they did, however, because they did it on the Sabbath. One of the Ten Commandments says to “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” The Pharisees (a group of the Jewish leaders) had developed hundreds of laws which defined what it meant to keep the Sabbath holy. These laws prevented anything resembling work, and harvesting grain was considered work. Thus when the disciples picked grain to eat, they were violating the Pharisee's concept of keeping the Sabbath holy.

Jesus responded to their criticism once again. He told them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Jesus came to dismantle Pharisaical tradition, which clouded the truth of the word of God, and to restore a clear understanding of God to the people. When God said to remember the Sabbath and to keep it holy, he wanted people to cease from their normal labors once a week and to devote some time to him. The Pharisees had so complicated this simple fact with their laws and regulations that nobody remembered what the Sabbath was all about. Jesus rather boldly said to his critics, “The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

The pattern in this chapter is clear. Jesus continuously challenged people’s concepts of what was right. He caused people to question their traditions. If they did so honestly, then they discovered the firm foundation of the truth of God and worked their way past the traditions of man. In doing so, the cloud that separated man from God lifted. People began to experience the love and truth of God again and found freedom from the conditions that man had put on them.

Leader Notes

- Capernaum was the base for Jesus’ ministry. It is a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew, and perhaps some other disciples were from this city. After returning from the wilderness experience following his baptism, Jesus seems to have made Capernaum his home base for the rest of his life. Peter’s home seems to have the setting for much of the ministry activity there. When the men lowered their paralytic friend through the hole in the roof, it was probably Peter’s roof that they were damaging in the process.
- When Jesus spoke forgiveness for the man’s sins, he was doing this on behalf of the Father. John 5:19 tells us that Jesus did only what the Father told him to do. Thus when Jesus spoke forgiveness for the man’s sins, it was in obedience to the Father.
- A tax collector was a servant of Rome and was considered a traitor among his own people. To become a tax collector, one had to bribe the proper people. Once in the position, Rome would tell the tax collector how much money they needed from him every year. His job was to produce the money. Rome did not care how much they actually collected as long as they paid what was due. Thus in order to make money being a tax collector, one would collect as much as possible beyond what Rome was demanding. The tax collector was a professional extortionist, and had the authority (and army) of Rome to enforce the extortion. This is why the tax collectors were hated by the other Jews.
- The parable of the new patch being sewn on old clothes and the new wine in old wineskins was given as an explanation of why Jesus and his disciples did not fast. The old clothes and the old wineskins represented the traditions of the old covenant. The new patch and the new wine represent the truth that Jesus brought. Jesus did not

come to put a new patch on an old tradition. If you try to force-fit the teachings of Jesus onto the Pharisaical traditions then both would tear and both would be useless. Jesus brought new, fresh, living truth. There was no reason to try to frame it and make sense of it in the context of old traditions. He would supplant the traditions of the Pharisees and he was not interested in criticism that he did not follow their ways.

- There were several parties prominent among the Jews. The primary parties of Jews were the Sadducees, with an emphasis on a very legalistic study of the law, and the Pharisees, with an emphasis on the priesthood. Two other factions existed as well. The Essenes were a separatist group, seeing the Sadducees and Pharisees as being somewhat apostate. They tended to live in communities off to themselves. The community at Qumran, which preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls, was one such community. John the Baptist is thought to have been heavily influenced by the Essenes. The other faction is the Zealots, which was more of a political movement, seeking political freedom for the nation. The Jewish leaders were typically either Sadducee or Pharisee. The average Jew may not have identified with any of these groups.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to us that one does not put new wine into old wineskins?

Jesus did not come to lay a cosmetic coating on your life. He came to supplant your ways with his ways and your traditions with his truth. There is a cost to discipleship. Do not expect to grab on to Jesus with one hand and cling to your old life with the other. Expect him to change you over time, but be confident that the change is for the better.

2. If Jesus walked the earth today, what would his relationship be with old, established churches?

Jesus loves the church, so much that he died to give her life. The church, however, is not a collection of buildings, hymns, programs, etc. The church is the people who have trusted him for salvation and who are seeking a restored relationship with God. Much of what we think of as the church has become very Pharisaical. They have developed traditions that define the way that we are to relate to God. Jesus would challenge those traditions and would bring people back to the simple truths that he brought. He would cause them to question and to challenge and to come out from the cloud that obscures their vision of God. Jesus also would not spend much time hanging out in the church buildings. He would be out in the world, ministering to the sick rather than the “healthy” who do not perceive that they need a doctor.

Chapter 3

Discussion

Read Mark Chapter 3.

In this chapter we see the following:

- Jesus is criticized for healing on a Sabbath.
- Jesus appoints the twelve disciples.
- Jesus is accused of being demon-possessed or out of his mind.

It never got easy for him! Everywhere he went and everything he did brought criticism from someone. That is the way it is, however. Satan did not want Jesus to succeed. He stirred up whatever opposition he could against him. Satan does not want the followers of Jesus to succeed. He will stir up whatever opposition he can against them.

In the first episode in Chapter 3, Jesus encountered a man with a shriveled hand. It happened on the Sabbath. Jesus had already confronted the Pharisee's Sabbath traditions before and it was time to do so once more. He asked the man to rise so that all could see him. Then he turned to the Pharisees and asked, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" He put them in a very awkward position.

The only logical answer to the question was that it is proper to do good, to save life. If they acknowledged that, however, then they would have been giving Jesus permission to heal. The problem was that healing on the Sabbath was against Pharisaical law. They had no good way to answer his question, so they were silent.

Jesus was angered by their stubborn and cold-hearted silence. They were concerned only with saving face and had no compassion on the man with the shriveled hand. Thus Jesus healed the man. Rather than being awed and overwhelmed by the miracle, they were filled with intense hatred for Jesus and began to plot his death. Amazing!

Following this, many people pursued Jesus seeking healings. He ministered to many. Ultimately he sought to withdraw from the crowds, however. Jesus needed time alone. He needed one-on-one time with his Father. Jesus was a man of prayer and he continually sought guidance from God. This time, his prayer was specifically about the future. It was time to narrow his band of followers to an inner circle of disciples. Jesus had many followers by this time. He selected the twelve to be apprentices to his ministry. They would live with him and work with him, supporting his ministry with their lives and efforts. In return, he would teach them to be ministers in the Kingdom of God. He chose Simon Peter, James and his brother John; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew,

Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who would ultimately betray him.

The crowds who followed Jesus continued to grow. Wherever he went there were masses of people. This generated some interesting reactions. His own family thought he was out of his mind. Here he was, seemingly the eldest son of Joseph the carpenter. Joseph was most likely dead at this point because there is nothing mentioned about him. According to human traditions, Jesus had a responsibility to take over the family trade and to support his mother and any young brothers or sisters. Instead, he was roaming about the countryside preaching. Surely something was wrong with him. Others believed that Jesus was demon-possessed. How else could he do the things that he was doing? Surely he must be empowered by Satan if he is able to drive out demons.

By this time Jesus had a great deal of practice in dealing with criticism. That does not mean that it got easy. It is bound to have hurt his feelings. Still, he reminded people that if he was casting out demons by the power of Satan then that would mean that Satan was working against himself. That did not make sense. Satan was not the source of his empowerment; the Holy Spirit was. When his family came to try to take charge of him, his response was that his mother and brothers were those who followed him and did the will of his Father. He did not reject his natural relationships, but his spiritual relationships became more important. They last for eternity.

Leader Notes

Each of the four Gospels includes a list of disciples. Note that each list begins with Peter, who was considered the "head" apostle, and ends with Judas, the traitor. This is probably an indication that each author listed the disciples in an order equal to the "pecking order" that he perceived to exist in the group.

Each list includes Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. Matthew and Mark list the twelfth disciple as Thaddaeus, whereas Luke names him as Judas the son of James. More than likely these were two names for the same individual (just as Matthew was also known as Levi or Simon was also known as Peter).

John never mentions James, John, Bartholomew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, or Matthew by name. The book of John often referred to "the disciple that Jesus loved," and this is assumed to be a modest way that John referred to himself. John does mention a disciple named Nathanael. Again, we assume this to be a second name for one of the twelve, although we do not know which one.

Interestingly enough, the Bible has very little to say about the majority of these men. They were instrumental in changing the course of history. Unfortunately we have very little

information about who they were, what they were like, why they were chosen by Jesus for the role, etc.

Peter was a businessman – a fisherman by trade. Andrew was his brother. James and John seem to have been fishermen as well, perhaps working with Peter and Andrew. Matthew was a wealthy but corrupt tax collector – a servant of Rome. Simon the Zealot was a member of a party dedicated to overthrowing Roman rule. Judas was a traitor.

When Jesus chose his disciples, he chose ordinary men. Some, such as Peter, were leaders. Others, such as Matthew, were hated by men. Some, like Matthew, were wealthy. Others probably had very little. They came from all strata of society. They came from different occupations, different education levels, different family situations. But they all had to make the choice to leave an old life behind and to follow Jesus without reserve. They had to decide to submit everything they had and everything they were to his Lordship. Jesus still chooses ordinary men. They come from every level of society, from every economic situation, from different life circumstances. They still have to make the choice to leave an old life behind and to follow Jesus without reserve. They still have to decide to submit everything that they have or that they are to his Lordship.

Questions for Discussion

1. When we consider the way that Jesus trained his disciples, what implications should it have for us today?

Once people become believers, they need to be rooted in the faith. They need to learn and mature. The disciples of Jesus had the same need – to learn and mature. To train his disciples, Jesus selected a small group and then devoted a great deal of personal, one-one-one time to this small group of men. This is still the best model for discipleship that we have. The church today needs to be concerned about making disciples and not just converts. We are to bring people into the Kingdom of God, i.e. make converts, but once people are saved they need to be discipled. They need to be taught and matured in the faith. The best way for that to happen is mentoring in a small group. Mature leaders take newer believers into their care, teaching them and modeling ministry to them.

2. Jesus encountered a great deal of opposition, even from close friends and family. Does that set expectations for the church today?

Absolutely. The world is the domain of Satan and thus the world hates the church. Satan will use every device within his means to disrupt and discourage those who are working to advance the Kingdom of God. Opposition will quite often come from those closest to us, just as was true with Jesus. It is important to remember that our friends and loved ones (and even some of the people for whom we do not really care too much) are not the enemy. Often they, too, love the Lord and have no idea that

they are playing into the hands of the enemy, being instruments in bringing us discouragement or holding us back from serving. In fact, we might unknowingly do the same things to them. We must operate in a spirit of forgiveness to one another, acknowledging the true source of all trouble and maintaining our determination to march forward in spite of all of Satan's stupid little devices. The good news is that he does lose when it is all said and done.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Read Mark Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, we see several of the parables of Jesus. A parable is a teaching tool. Jesus used word pictures from everyday life to illustrate the truths of the Kingdom of God. He related these concepts to things the people knew, like planting seed and harvesting crops. In chapter 4, we have:

- The Parable of the Sower and the Seed
- The Parable of the Growth of the Kingdom
- The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The chapter concludes with Jesus miraculously calming the sea.

The chapter begins with the parable of the sower and the seed. Jesus told of a farmer who cast out seed. Normally when we think of a farmer planting, we consider that he would first take time to prepare the field, i.e. clear the land, plow the soil, etc. In the first century, however, it was not uncommon for a farmer to simply go out and broadcast the seed as described in the parable. If it happened to fall on proper soil, it would grow.

In the parable, the seed fell in four different types of places:

- On the path. This would have been a well-worn road. The soil would have been pressed down hard from foot traffic. The seed was unable to penetrate this soil. Birds came and ate this seed. It never took root. Jesus explained that this represented one who heard the message of Jesus but did not understand it. The birds represent Satan, who comes and snatches the message away. It never had any impact on the hearer. The seed never penetrated.
- Rocky places, without much soil. This seed did initially take root, but those roots quickly hit rock. The plant was unable to sustain growth. It withered and died in the sun. Jesus indicated that this is someone who hears his message and has a superficial initial reaction to it. It is understood, but never really takes root in the life of the hearer. Any sort of trouble in the life of the individual can cause it to be lost. The seed was lost because of internal issues in the life of the hearer (specifically a shallowness of faith).
- Among thorns. Here, roots were formed. The plant grew. Unfortunately, at the point when the plant should have blossomed and produced fruit, instead it was choked out

by the thorny brush around it. Jesus explained that this represents an individual who hears and understands the message. It takes root initially. Eventually, however, he lets the cares of life rob him of the benefit of the seed. It has no benefit in his life. The seed was lost because of external issues in the life of the hearer.

- Good soil. Here the plants took root, grew and produced a crop. Jesus indicated that this is the one who hears the message, receives it, and lets it bring benefit in his life.

The Gospel – the good news brought by Jesus – would be scattered out among all men. Unfortunately only those who were “good soil” would ultimately benefit from it. It would only bring fruit in the lives of those who clung to it and cherished it dearly enough that no distraction – internal or external – could choke it out or cause it to wither.

The fact is that all of mankind is drowning in sin and judgment. A lifesaver has been tossed to each of us. Many people do not understand what a lifesaver is, so they push it away. They drown. Others know what it is, but figure they can tread water so they do not grab hold of it. They drown. Others know what it is and grab hold of it, but then think that it might cause a skin abrasion if they hold on too tight. They let go. They drown. Others strap it on and hold on for dear life. When the rescue boat finally comes, they are the ones that will be saved.

After explaining the meaning of the parable to his disciples, Jesus told them (Mark 4:21), “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand?” The truth of the Kingdom of God is like a lamp, intended to bring light to the world. Satan has tried to do all that he can to conceal this light. Those who know the truth must bring it out from being hidden and place it where all can see. Once we know the truth of God, we need to be instruments of spreading that truth. He said in Mark 4:24-25, “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you – and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.” The amount of truth that you are given depends on how you use the truth you already have. If you hide it away and fail to submit to it, it will fade from you. If you make it part of your life and share it with others, it will empower you and you will be given further truth. God wants his word to be taken seriously.

Next Jesus gave a parable that explained the manner in which the Kingdom of God grows. Kingdoms of the world are built by men. They are controlled by men. Through the military exploits of men, the kingdoms of men expand or shrink, rise or fall. This is not true with the Kingdom of God.

Just as men lack the ability to make seed sprout into grain, men cannot cause the Kingdom of God to grow, nor can they prevent its growth. It is nurtured by God and God alone. Men can scatter seed, through evangelism, but men lack the ability to make that evangelism bear fruit. When the Word of God is preached, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and conversion in the hearer. It has nothing to do with the

eloquence of the speaker. The Holy Spirit causes the seed to sprout and the Holy Spirit gathers the harvest when the time is right.

The Kingdom of God is a gracious provision of God. We get to belong. We do not get to control. We take no credit for its success.

God grows his Kingdom as he will.

The parable of the mustard seed teaches these same concepts. Kingdoms of men are given birth by armies and machines of war. There is great pomp and fanfare as their kings are ushered in. The Kingdom of God was ushered in by a birth in a stable. The coronation ceremony of its King consisted of a journey on the back of a donkey.

A mustard seed is a tiny seed which grows into a sizable plant. It grows large and provides shelter and refuge. In like manner, the Kingdom of God started with humble beginnings. It has sprouted and filled the earth and provides shelter to all who will rest in it.

From a small beginning, the Kingdom of God would become a tremendous place of refuge for all who will turn to it for shelter.

In the last episode in the chapter, Jesus and his disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was asleep. A storm arose and began to toss the boat about. The disciples were afraid for their lives. Jesus slept calmly through the storm. Finally they awoke him and expressed their fear to him. Without getting alarmed, he spoke to the waves and told them to be still. They obeyed! The storm stopped!

His disciples were amazed. Even after all that they had seen him do and heard him say, this was truly amazing. Here was a man who could command to forces of nature to do his will. Jesus on the other hand told his disciples that if they had enough faith they could have done the same thing.

Faith by itself does not empower us. The Holy Spirit empowers us. Faith allows us to have the mind of God to the point where we understand what we are empowered to do. The Holy Spirit has equipped us to do some marvelous things. If we do not understand that – if we do not have enough faith to see our world as God sees it – then we will never act upon those things that have been given to us to do.

Leader Notes

It is important to understand the role of faith in empowerment. Faith does not empower. Faith unleashes the empowerment that you already have. It is also important to understand the nature of empowerment. You are not empowered to do anything you want whenever you want. God has a day-by-day game plan for each of our lives. What he

wants for me today is not necessarily the same thing that he wants for me tomorrow. What he wants for me this morning is not necessarily what he wants for me this afternoon. The things that I am empowered to do are dynamic and changing – just as they were in the life of Jesus. Remember that John 5:19 says that Jesus did only what he saw the Father doing. That is why his ministry was so successful. By faith he saw the world through the eyes of the Father and he understood his empowerment. Luke 5:17 notes that there were times when the Spirit was present to empower Jesus to heal, which implies that there were times when the Spirit did not empower Jesus to heal. The key to empowered ministry is the same for us as it was for Jesus. Learn to hear the voice of the Father. Learn to see the world through his eyes. Learn to understand his will. When you act in accordance with that, you will be empowered. Faith is the key to unlocking that.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you become the “good soil” mentioned in the parable of the sower and the seed?

The good soil is the person who hears the teachings of Jesus and makes them a part of his life. The teachings “take root” and penetrate the hearer. They change him. Like a healthy tree they bring forth fruit, which means that there is evidence of the teaching in the behavior and lifestyle of the hearer.

The value of the soil is to sustain the life of the vegetation. In and of itself, it is merely dirt. Our true value comes when we begin to bear fruit from the seed (the word of God) planted in our lives. We must submit to it – giving God back his rightful place as the authority in our lives. Rebellion against that authority is what caused the fall of man. Submission to that authority restores us to a fruitful position in the Kingdom.

2. Is it true that we can do whatever we want to do if we have sufficient faith?

No. With sufficient faith, we can change our wills and our minds to be the will and mind of God. We will understand what we are empowered to do. With sufficient faith, we can do anything that he wants us to do.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Read Chapter 5 of Mark.

In this chapter we see three healing miracles:

- The Gerasene demoniac.
- The woman who had a bleeding sore for twelve years.
- The raising from the dead of the daughter of Jairus.

The chapter opens with the story of the Gerasene demoniac. This is a man who had been oppressed by demons for years. The Bible does not give a count, but it indicates that there were many demons harassing this man. They caused him to be a terror to the people in the town. We know this because the text says that they had attempted to chain the man in order to restrain him. His demonic strength allowed him to rip apart the chains, however. He lived by himself outside of the town, sleeping in tombs. It is not a pretty picture.

We do not know how this man came under the strong influence of these demons. We only know of the damage that they caused to his life. Demons still harass people in varying degrees. They still cause havoc to lives.

Jesus knew, however, that the authority of these demons was completely subject to the authority of the Kingdom of God. He was not afraid to deal with them because he understood the authority that he carried.

Jesus told the spirits to leave the man. The spirits had to go somewhere. According to Mark 5:7, when told to leave they said, “Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” In Matthew’s version of this same story (Matthew 8:29) they said, “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” A day of torment does await the demons in the end. When the final judgment comes they will all be cast into the lake of fire along with Satan (Revelation 20). These demons knew this and they were concerned that Jesus might send them to their time of torment “before the appointed time.” They pleaded with Jesus to let them go into a herd of pigs instead. Jesus allowed them to do so. When they did, the pigs rushed off a bank into a lake and died.

The men who tended the pigs ran into the town and told the people there what had happened. They came out and asked Jesus to go away. Their concern was for the economic loss of the pigs. They had no regard for the fact that the demoniac had been healed. Jesus prepared to get into a boat and leave, respecting their wishes.

The man who had been healed wanted to go with Jesus. If anyone ever understood the life-changing power of Jesus, it was this man. Before he met Jesus, he spent his life uncontrollably hurting himself and others and howling on the outskirts of town. It was not a way that he wanted to be. Thanks to Jesus, he was now sane, calm, and safe. His response to Jesus was one of total gratitude and devotion. He wanted to spend the rest of his life by the side of Jesus. Jesus told him to remain behind, however. He wanted the man to stay behind and tell others what the Lord had done for him.

Following this, a man named Jairus came to Jesus for help. His daughter was dying and he perceived that Jesus could help. It is interesting that this man was a leader of the synagogue. This is an indication that some of the Jewish leadership supported the ministry of Jesus. Jesus set out to the home of the man.

As Jesus walked, a large crowd pressed in around him. He was a popular leader and he had a large following. People wanted to be near him. They recognized that there was something very special about this man.

In the crowd was a woman who had been ill for twelve years. We are not sure of the nature of her illness, but she had some sort of bleeding sore. She had sought medical attention but nobody had been able to help her. She had hope and faith that Jesus could heal her. She believed that if she could just touch him she would be healed. A large crowd surrounded Jesus, but she worked her way through the crowd and reached out to touch the hem of his garment. When she did, she was immediately healed. At the same time, Jesus felt “that power had gone out from him.” Jesus had a physical sensation that healing power had been imparted through him by the Holy Spirit. He turned around and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

Most people did not understand his question. With such a large crowd pressing in around him, many people must have touched his clothes. The woman knew what he was asking, however. She was afraid but confessed to him that she was the one. Jesus responded to her in love and compassion. He told her that her faith – her willingness to submit her fate to Jesus – had brought about her healing.

Jesus continued to the home of Jairus. By the time he arrived, the daughter of Jairus was already dead. Jesus took Peter, James, and John and went to the home. He tried to encourage the people by telling them that he could wake her, indicating that he could bring her back from the dead. They laughed at him. After all, how could such a thing be possible? They did not understand the power of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus went into the room where the dead girl was. He spoke to her and called her to come back from the dead. She did! He gave the girl back to her parents and told them to care for her physical needs (feed her). He also instructed people not to tell what had happened. Again, he did not want to attract a crowd of miracle side-show seekers.

Leader Notes

- Demon oppression is a phenomenon that is still very real. It occurs in varying degrees, causing everything from minor physical problems to compulsive behaviors to depression to total outright and out-of-control insanity, as evidenced in the life of the Gerasene demoniac. Ministry to the demon-oppressed individual involves breaking its authority to be in the life of the oppressed and then invoking the authority of Jesus to command the demon to leave.

There is some event in the life of the individual that allowed the demon to have a foothold in the first place. Normally this is some sin that the individual committed – drug abuse, pornographic involvement, unforgiveness, occult involvement, or whatever. At times the influence can be there as a result of something done to an individual – e.g. rape or other forms of abuse. Demons can even gain foothold through sins of ancestors. When ministering to an individual, one must allow the Holy Spirit to guide the minister and the oppressed individual to identify the event (or events) that allowed the demon or demons an entry point in the life. The oppressed person must confess the foothold and ask for forgiveness. Once the footholds are gone, the minister can invoke the authority of Jesus and force the demon to leave.

This is an oversimplification of the process. Ministering to the demonically oppressed is best learned by apprenticeship (that is how Jesus taught his disciples to minister). Team up with someone who does it and participate in deliverance ministry. Deliverance can take time. Often it is not accomplished in a single ministry encounter. The encounters can be ugly and tiring. The result is freedom for someone who is captive.

- It is interesting that Jesus would not allow the former demoniac to join him and travel as one of his followers. More often than not, when Jesus heals us and frees us from captivity, he does not want us to respond by dropping everything and running into full-time vocational ministry. More often than not, he tells us, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” The call on most people’s lives is to become witnesses for Christ where we live rather than to pick up and travel the earth in the service of the Lord.
- Mark 5:30 says that Jesus felt power flow out from him when the woman touched his garment. This is not unusual. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is normally accompanied by some form of physiological phenomenon. Often when people are receiving ministry and the power of the Holy Spirit comes upon them, they may shake, their eyes may flutter, their temperature may elevate, they may pass out, or any number of other things may happen. Equally, phenomenon may occur to the one giving the ministry. The person ministering may shake or have any of the other symptoms. One symptom that may occur is a feeling that is almost electrical in nature running up the spine or through the arms – particularly if the one praying is laying hands on the one being prayed for. It is a physical affirmation to the one praying that the Holy Spirit is

imparting gifts of healing or deliverance to the object of the prayer. It may well be this sort of feeling that Jesus felt when the woman touched his garment.

Questions for Discussion

1. Normally, what should our response be when Jesus saves us, heals us, or sets us free from the things that oppress us?

We are not normally called into full-time vocational ministry. The normal response that Jesus wants from us is to become witnesses among our families, friends, coworkers, and other associates. The normal response to the healing (spiritual or physical) that Jesus provides is to continue the normal activities of life with a new attitude and a new hope. The changes in us should be apparent to those around us. We should be willing to tell people who brought about the change in our lives. The most powerful ministers in the world are those in homes, market places, etc, and not those behind the pulpit.

2. Jesus told the woman who had the bleeding sore, “Daughter, your faith has healed you.” Does this mean that if we believe something hard enough God will give it to us? If we have enough faith, can we be healed from anything we desire?

No. Often verses like this have been taken to mean that we can manipulate the will of God by believing hard enough. That concept does not hold true in the rest of Scripture, however. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 tells us that Paul had an affliction that God chose not to take away from him. In the case of the woman in this story, one must assume that the Holy Spirit prompted her to do what she did. If she would be obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, she would be healed. Since she was obedient, she received her healing. It was faith that led to obedience that resulted in the healing. The same is true in our lives. If we have faith enough to be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit, then we will successfully see his will fulfilled in our lives.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Read Chapter 6 of Mark.

This chapter contains a great deal of material. In the narrative:

- Parenthetically the death of John the Baptist is described.
- Jesus attempted to minister in his hometown of Nazareth.
- Jesus sent the twelve disciples out on a ministry trip.
- Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes.
- Jesus walked on water.

Verses 16-29 describe the death of John the Baptist. It is presented as a “flashback,” something that had already happened. John was a popular leader, but got into trouble when he began to challenge the personal life of Herod. The “Herod” in this passage is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. He was the governor of Galilee at the time, having inherited a portion of his father’s kingdom. He had a brother named Herod Philip I. Herod Philip I had married his niece, Herodias (who was a granddaughter of Herod the Great).

Herodias was a manipulative, power-hungry woman. She recognized that Herod Antipas was a more powerful ruler than her husband, Herod Philip, so she left her husband and married Herod Antipas. John the Baptist publicly denounced them both for this. In God’s eyes, this was flagrant adultery. John did not mince words about saying so.

Thus to silence John, Herod had him arrested. Herod was both annoyed and intrigued by John. He did not want John running around in public accusing him of adultery, but at the same time Herod recognized that John was a true prophet. He respected him. Herod would have liked to benefit from John’s wisdom but he had no intention of repenting from his sin with Herodias. Thus Herod held John in prison, but from what we can gather he periodically went to talk with John and to seek his advice. Herod had no intentions of killing John; he just wanted to keep him in confinement.

Herodias hated John the Baptist. She had no use for him. She wanted him dead.

Herodias had a daughter. She was young and beautiful, probably in her late teens. She seems to have been a daughter from Herodias’ marriage with Herod Philip, and thus would have been Herod Antipas’ niece. Herod seems to have been attracted to and fascinated by her.

One year at Herod's birthday, Herodias threw him a party. At the party, she arranged for her daughter to dance for Herod. Herod was quite enticed by her dancing and told her that as a reward he would give her whatever she wanted. This was the opportunity that Herodias needed. Herod had publicly committed in front of his friends to grant any wish to the daughter of Herodias. Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. So she did.

Herod was disheartened by this. He really did not want to kill John. Still he had little choice. He had publicly promised to do whatever she wanted. Thus he had John beheaded.

We are not really sure when this happened. John was there at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, but we do not see too much of him after that. His purpose had been fulfilled. He came to prepare the hearts of people for the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah was here now and John had stepped aside. He never came to gather his own following. He came to point people to Jesus.

When chapter 6 opens, Jesus is back in his hometown of Nazareth. This is where he had spent his childhood. These people knew him when he was a little boy, running around with the other children in the neighborhood. They knew Mary and Joseph and the brothers and sisters of Jesus. That was a bit of a problem for them.

Because of the fact that they watched Jesus grow up, they now had difficulty submitting to his leadership. Prior to his baptism, we know that Jesus was a righteous man and we assume that he was well-respected by those who knew him. The power of his ministry had not been unleashed in his life at that time, however. Now the Holy Spirit had empowered him and his time of ministry was in full gear. These people who had known him so well in the past were not prepared to accept this new dimension in his life. Because of the fact that they would not accept his ministry, his ability to minister was greatly hindered.

After leaving Nazareth, Jesus organized his disciples into teams of two and sent them out to minister. Teaching his disciples how to minister was one of the most important things that Jesus did. He knew that his time on earth was limited. He was determined to leave behind a group of followers who could carry on his ministry after he was gone.

He sent them out in teams. They ministered in his name. They called people repentance, to turn their hearts towards God and away from sin. They healed and cast out demons, demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God. This is still the charge of Jesus to his followers. Proclaim the message of the Kingdom and then demonstrate its power. This is how people are brought into the safety of the Kingdom of God.

The disciples ministered in power. News of their ministry spread. When news reached Herod, he feared that John the Baptist had come back to life. People everywhere wondered who Jesus was. How could his followers – ordinary men – minister so powerfully in his name?

The disciples returned from their ministry trip. Jesus was trying to get them together and away from the crowds so that they could discuss their experiences. He led his disciples out to the countryside, trying to be alone with them. The crowds followed, however. People followed Jesus wherever he went. His heart was touched and so he ministered to the people.

The day grew late and it was time for dinner. They were out in the countryside and there was no place to get food. The crowd was surveyed and it was discovered that one person had five small loaves of bread and two small fishes.

Jesus assembled the people and prepared them to be served. Then he took the few loaves and fishes, broke them into pieces, and told his disciples to begin serving them to the crowd. As they did, the food miraculously began to multiply. A great miracle was performed in the midst of this crowd. These were not large loaves of bread; each loaf was probably a few bites. The fish were probably more the size of sardines than some large game fish. The food with which they began was enough for a reasonable lunch for one person. Somehow it fed five thousand men plus an uncounted number of women and children. Furthermore there were twelve baskets full of food left over when they were finished. The people were amazed and impressed at the miracle.

Following this, Jesus sent his disciples out in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. He dismissed the crowd and then went off by himself to pray. In the middle of the night he was ready to rejoin the disciples. They were in the middle of the Sea. He did not have a boat. This was not a problem for him.

He stepped out onto (not into!) the water and walked to his disciples. There they were in the middle of the night, rowing their boat. They look out across the waves and see a man walking towards them. They were terrified! Who wouldn't be? Jesus spoke to them and told them not to be afraid. He walked to and stepped into the boat. When you read the story, it sounds as if he were very nonchalant, acting as if nothing out the ordinary had happened. To Jesus, operating in the power of the Holy Spirit had become normal. It was ordinary to expect extraordinary things to happen.

This event was another witness to the disciples of who Jesus was. He was the Lord of nature. Because he lived a life in total submission to the Father, nature was in submission to him.

The next day they arrived at the other side of the Sea of Galilee. People immediately recognized him and a crowd gathered for ministry.

Leader Notes

- It is an unfortunate fact of human nature that we often do not want to allow people the freedom to change. There is an old saying that familiarity breeds contempt. That is sort of what happened to Jesus in Nazareth. These people knew this hometown boy, the son of the carpenter. Growing up, he was a good kid, but not a miracle worker. Why should they accept him as a miracle worker now?

This sort of an attitude is probably bred out of jealousy as much as anything else. Suppose that I grew up with Jesus. Jesus the kid was my peer. We played ball together. Jesus the teenager was my peer. We sat next to each other in Bar Mitzvah classes. Why would God pick Jesus the adult rather than “Me the adult” to be Lord? Why all of the sudden is he better than me? Why should I submit to him?

We can imagine that thoughts like this went through the heads of the people in Nazareth. What a contrast to John the Baptist, who lived to submit to Jesus.

- It is hard to imagine what went through the minds of the disciples when Jesus decided to feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Surely they were intrigued. At this point, they had ample evidence that he could do it. There was a new twist to the miracle this time, however.

Jesus peeled off a bit of bread and a little bit of fish, handed it to a disciple, and said, “There, go feed that crowd of people over there.” Put yourself in their shoes. If it had been me, I would have looked down at the fragments of food in my hand, looked at the crowd that I had been told to feed, and thought, “Boy, I’m in trouble now!” As much as anything, this was an exercise in faith for the disciples. If they had said, “No way, Jesus, I can’t do this!” then most likely there would have been no miracle. Instead, they acted in obedience and faith. As a result, the miracle happened. They submitted to God’s perfect will and as a result he was able to unleash his ministry in their lives.

It is really no different for us. There will be times when the Holy Spirit prompts us to do things that do not make sense. There will be things that we know are not within our power to accomplish. We will have a feeling that we are stepping out on a limb and that we will look foolish if we fall. We can take the “safe” course of action and draw back. On the other hand, we can take the risk and step out in faith. Only the latter course of action will allow God’s ministry to be unleashed in our lives. Only when we give up the world’s definition of safety and seek refuge in the shadow of God will we truly see his power in our lives.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the lessons that we can learn from the example of John the Baptist about being faithful servants of Jesus?

Serving Jesus does not involve gathering one's own following. It involves pointing others to Jesus. It involves total submission, even to the point of death if that is required. In John 3:30, we find the words of John the Baptist, "He must become greater; I must become less." There is no greater statement anywhere in Scripture of what serving Jesus is all about. Our purpose is to make him increase and to let ourselves decrease. The amazing thing that we find is that when we bow down, he lifts us up to heights that we could never achieve with our own striving.

2. Can we block God's ability to minister in our lives through a lack of faith?

We do not really block God's ability to minister. God is God and he can do anything he desires. We block God's willingness to minister in our lives, however, if we are unwilling to receive that ministry. When God created us, he made us creatures with a free will. He does not force things on us that we are unwilling to receive – even good things. The more that we submit to God, the more that his perfect will is fulfilled in our lives.

In Nazareth, Jesus would only minister to those who would freely receive it. Because of their hardness not many would receive it. He was not able to accomplish very much there.

Chapter 7

Discussion

Read Chapter 7 of Mark.

In this chapter:

- Jesus has a confrontation with the Pharisees over the rules about ceremonial cleanliness.
- Jesus casts a demon from a young girl.
- Jesus heals a deaf man.

The confrontation with the Pharisees began when they saw some of the disciples of Jesus eating with hands that had not undergone a ceremonial washing. This does not mean that the disciples were eating with dirty hands. Hygiene was not the issue.

The Old Testament prescribed certain rules governing ceremonial cleanliness. One who was not ceremonially clean could not participate in religious ceremonies. One could be made unclean by doing such things as touching dead bodies. The Old Testament also prescribed rules for removing the uncleanness so that the person could again participate in religious life.

The Pharisees had taken the rules of the Old Testament and had expanded them quite a bit. They put layers of extra rules on top of the simple prescriptions of Scripture. They put their traditions alongside the requirements of Scripture and expected everyone to follow them. One of their traditions involved a ceremonial hand-washing before eating. The disciples of Jesus did not necessarily follow these traditions of men. Thus Jesus was criticized for allowing his disciples to violate the rules of the Pharisees.

When they criticized Jesus, he was very blunt in his reply:

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.”

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.

Jesus quoted the words of Isaiah, one of the great Old Testament prophets. He spoke of people who pretend by their words and actions to be close to God, but who have no place for God in their hearts. God does not want people who put on a show. He wants people who honor him in their hearts. Furthermore, no amount of ceremony will fool God.

The Pharisees were very big on religious show. They very publicly participated in rituals and ceremonies, but they were doing it to impress other men. In their hearts, they disobeyed the true commandments of God whenever it suited them. They were not submitted to God. They used the ordinances of God to suit their own purposes.

Then Jesus got to the heart of the matter. It is not what goes into a man's mouth that makes him clean or unclean before God, it is what comes out. It is attitudes, words, and deeds that make him clean or unclean. He directly and boldly took the Pharisees to task by saying this. They were trying to achieve righteousness through ceremony. It cannot be done. Righteousness can only be achieved through repentance and submission to God.

Following this, Jesus was in Tyre, which is north of Israel in the modern nation of Lebanon. While there, a Greek woman asked Jesus to free her daughter from a demon. The interchange that occurs in verses 27-29 are somewhat puzzling:

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

One of the things that makes this conversation sound so strange is the modern connotation of “dog.” It carries a certain negative meaning, e.g. “he's in the dog house” or “it's a dog's life.” We often use “dog” to mean “at the bottom of the barrel” or “the lowest of the low.” We forget that dogs are (and were in the first century) beloved pets.

It is accurate, however, to infer from this conversation that Jesus was assigning an inferior status to this woman. The problem was that she was not Jewish.

At this point in his ministry, Jesus was focused on the Jewish people. After his death, the Kingdom would be opened up and ministry would be available to all. Right now, however, the Jews were the target. The Jews were and are God's chosen people. Out of all nations and races on the earth, God chose them to be his messengers of salvation to the rest of the world. The prophets came from the Jews. Jesus himself came from the Jews. Jesus' ministry was spent preparing Jews to carry on his ministry. After his death (beginning in Acts 10) the Gentiles (the non-Jewish people) were brought in the Kingdom, no longer as second-class citizens but as full members of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus said to the woman, “it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs,” he was testing her to see if she understood this. Her response indicated that she understood. In humility, she still asked for Jesus’ help. Because she responded in this manner, he granted her request and healed her daughter.

Following this, some people brought a deaf man to Jesus. The man also was hardly able to speak. Jesus touched his ears and tongue and commanded them to “be opened.” At once he could hear and speak. People marveled at the miracle.

Leader Notes

In verse 11, Jesus talked about “Corban.” This was a legalistic device invented by the Pharisees to get them around true observance of the commandments of God. God’s expectation is that people would provide for the needs of their elderly parents. Selfish men did not want to share their belongings with their needy parents. Thus they would declare all of their belongings to be “Corban.” If something is Corban, it means that I can freely use it, but when I die it all goes to the church. Thus since it is consecrated to God, I cannot (i.e. have an excuse not to) share it with my parents. Corban was not God’s idea. It was an invention of selfish and self-righteous men. They could receive the admiration of men for being so generous to “dedicate everything they own to God,” when in fact they were selfishly preventing others from “getting their hands on it.” They put their own rules above God’s command to honor father and mother.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do the Jews still have a special standing before God?

Yes. God’s plans for the Jews runs through the last pages of Scripture. They continue to have a special function to play in history. They are still his chosen people. They do not have a different path to salvation, however. They come into the Kingdom of God through Jesus just like Gentiles do. The status of the Gentiles has been elevated through Jesus. They are full members of the Kingdom and joint heirs of the promises of God. Jesus fully gave them that privilege (just as he gave it to the Jews.)

2. What do we learn about praying when we look at the prayer model of Jesus in the New Testament.

For one thing, Jesus prayed constantly. He was always “in touch” with the Father and tuned into his will.

One of the special things that we get from chapter 7 (as well as other places) is that Jesus did not pray long-winded righteous-sounding prayers. “Be opened” is more typical. Jesus was to-the-point in his praying. He spoke to God just as he would

speak to you or to me. “Proper” praying does not involve finding the right “word formulas” to manipulate God into doing what you want. It involves tuning into his will, praying for the things that are consistent with his will, and being open and honest with God. He is not impressed with verbiage.

Chapter 8

Discussion

Read Chapter 8 of Mark.

This chapter contains:

- Another miraculous feeding by Jesus.
- Condemnation of the “yeast of the Pharisees.”
- Healing of a blind man.
- Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ.
- Jesus’ discussion of the cost of discipleship.

The miraculous feeding is similar in nature to the one that happened in Mark 6. Using a few small loaves and fishes, Jesus fed four thousand men plus an uncounted number of women and children. When the meal was over, there was enough left to fill seven baskets.

What is the significance of these miracles of multiplication? The phenomenon is similar in nature to the miracle of manna when the Jews were wandering in the wilderness during the exodus. Every morning (excluding the Sabbath) for forty years, manna miraculously appeared. In spite of the fact that the people were living in a barren wilderness, they never ran short of food. The message then could not have been more clear. God is the supplier of all of our needs. We look to him one day at a time for provision. He gives us today what we need today. Tomorrow he will give us what we need tomorrow. The reason that he provided like this is that he wanted his people to look to him every day and to remember the provider rather than just the provision.

The Jews in the time of Jesus did not live in a wilderness. They lived on land that could provide food. Still, they never should have lost sight of the fact that God is their provider, giving them what they need one day at a time. The provisions of today are from God. The provisions of tomorrow are from God. It is still true. Even if I have a great deal of money sitting in the bank and have no worries about my physical needs, it is still true that the provisions of today are from God as are the provisions of tomorrow. It is also true that wealth is a fleeting thing. Events that are quite beyond my control could wipe out my wealth in a moment. If I look to my bank account as my provider, then I will be devastated if it should be lost. I do not have to do that, however. God is my provider. Regardless of the ways that the wealth of the world may come and go, my provision is sure because my provider is sure.

The miracles of the multiplying of food remind us of this. God can provide manna from heaven if he so desires. He can take a few small loaves and fishes and feed thousands of people. He can provide for the physical needs of my family today and tomorrow.

The normal human response to the situation in Mark 8 is to say, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” (verse 4). We tend to look for our provisions in places and things. Jesus looked for provision in God. We tend to despair when we find ourselves in “remote places,” perceiving that we are cut off from the resources necessary to sustain life. Jesus never felt cut off because he knew that our resources come from God.

After the feeding, Jesus had another confrontation with the Pharisees. They asked him for some sign from heaven that he was the Messiah. He would not give them one. Jesus wanted followers who came to hear his truth, not those who came to see him work miracles.

After this encounter, Jesus said to his disciples, “Be careful. Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” They were confused and did not know what he meant. All they could figure was that Jesus was scolding them because they forgot to bring along bread. When Jesus heard what they were saying to each other he reminded them that twice God had provided a miraculous feeding. He was not worried about bread. When Jesus spoke of the “yeast of the Pharisees” he was talking about their sin.

The Pharisees had an attitude of disbelief. Just like yeast permeates a lump of dough, this sort of attitude can infect anything that it touches. It is easy to get caught up in the negative and disbelieving attitudes of others. The disciples needed to take caution to avoid this.

It is still true today. It is very easy to get caught up in negative attitudes of others. Sin is more comfortable when it is in the company of sin. People who sin like to pull others around them into the sin because they do not feel so bad about themselves. It takes constant vigilance to avoid getting caught up in this.

In verses 22-26, Jesus healed a blind man. Jesus came to restore physical sight as well as to restore spiritual vision to a world that had gone blind.

In verses 27-33, Jesus was alone with his disciples. He asked the disciples what people were saying about him. They told him that some people thought that Jesus was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, come back to life. That was a logical conclusion. Of all of the characters of the Old Testament, Elijah and his protege Elisha had ministries that compared to that of Jesus as far as signs and miracles were concerned. They multiplied food, similar to the way that Jesus did. They healed the sick. They raised people from the dead. It was natural to compare the ministry of Jesus to that of Elijah. But Elijah was not the Messiah.

Some people said that Jesus was John the Baptist. In this they probably believed that the anointing of John had passed to Jesus when John died. John was a contemporary prophet and well-respected by the people. Comparing Jesus to John was a favorable thing. But John was not the Messiah.

Jesus turned the question to the disciples themselves. Who did they say that he was? Peter responded in verse 29, “You are the Christ.” This is significant. It is the first time that we have one of the disciples declaring that Jesus is more than just a great teacher. Peter did not say, “You are a wise teacher,” or “You are a great prophet.” He acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent from God to save his people.

Peter still did not understand what sort of Messiah Jesus was, however. Jesus began to explain to them that since he was the Christ, he had to go to Jerusalem and face execution, as the world’s sacrifice for sin. The disciples did not understand that. Peter in particular took him aside and began to rebuke him for talking like this. The disciples were looking for a political takeover. They envisioned Jesus as a popular ruler who would set up an earthly kingdom. Jesus knew the price that needed to be paid for sin, however.

Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” It is amazing that Peter went so quickly from being the one to proclaim Jesus as Christ to the one being rebuked. Satan can so quickly take us from a high spiritual mountain to a low valley.

In verses 34-38, Jesus then addressed a larger crowd of followers and told them about the cost of true discipleship. He said:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.

The invitation to follow Jesus is freely given to everyone. All are encouraged to follow. Following does have a price, however. When we become a disciple, we begin a life of denying our own desires and submitting to the will of God. Basically we give up our own lives (meaning our control of our lives) in exchange for the one that he will give us. We give up a life of pursuing material gratification and begin pursuing righteousness. We live for Jesus and without shame identify with him, even in a world that hates him. We acknowledge him before men so that he will acknowledge us before his Father.

It is a very expensive price to pay. There is no better exchange to be found in the universe, however.

Leader Notes

- Why wouldn't Jesus give a sign to the Pharisees? Maybe one good miracle would have shut them up and turned them into followers. Wouldn't that be a good thing?

The fact is that Jesus' ministry was permeated by miracles. If that is what they wanted, they had ample evidence. There is no reason to believe that one more miracle would have swayed them.

Following his baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness. During that time, Satan appeared to Jesus and tempted him three times. Twice he tempted Jesus to use his empowerment in ways contrary to the way God would have had him use it (Matthew 4:3, Matthew 4:6). Twice he tempted Jesus to gather a following in ways contrary to the way God would have had him do it (Matthew 4:6, Matthew 4:9). Satan was doing the same thing now, except that this time he was coming to Jesus through the Pharisees. The offer was the same, however. They said, "Use your powers in a way contrary to the way the Father would have you use them and you will gain new followers." Jesus knew that it was a lie.

- I am somewhat intrigued of the description of Jesus healing the blind man in Mark 8. Why did he spit on the man's eyes? Why did he have to pray twice? The first time the man received only a partial healing. The second time his vision was fully restored. We can only conjecture on these issues.

Jesus would have spit because the Holy Spirit instructed him to do so. Often in healing ministry, the Holy Spirit will instruct the one who is praying to lay hands, to anoint with oil, or to do some other physical act, symbolic of the impartation of the healing gift. The significance of the spit is lost on me. That fact really is of no importance. If it was the instruction of the Holy Spirit then it was the right thing to do. In a ministry setting, however, you should be very sure it is the leading of the Holy Spirit before you spit on anyone.

As for having to pray twice, again we are not sure why this was necessary. It may well have been for our benefit. The fact is that we often have to pray more than once. The reason for that is a rather large treatise in its own right. For now, however, we can find some reassurance in the fact that Jesus had to pray more than once in at least one occasion. If you do not see results the first time you pray, it does not make you a second class minister. Follow the model of Jesus and pray again.

- In Jesus' exchange with Peter in verses 31-33, we again see Satan tempting Jesus, this time through the voice of Peter. Peter envisioned Jesus as a political Messiah, setting up an earthly kingdom. Out of love for Jesus, he could not imagine his Lord submitting to an execution. He was suggesting to Jesus that he take a shortcut to Messiahship, taking his kingdom and gathering his following in a manner contrary to the way the Father would have him do it. Jesus had heard this before. He recognized

the voice to be that of Satan, even though it was speaking through Peter. He responded to Satan and not Peter.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why wouldn't Jesus give the Pharisees a sign and what can we learn from this?

The Pharisees already had all of the signs that they needed to convince them of who Jesus was. One more would not make any difference. Furthermore he was looking for people who were interested in the truth of his teachings, not in the entertainment value of his miracles.

The real reason that he would not give them a miracle is that the Father did not instruct him to do so. Jesus only did the things that the Father instructed him to do. (John 5:19).

The Father did send Jesus to gather a following. The Father had a plan and a method that he was supposed to use to gather that following, however. It would have been wrong for Jesus to circumvent the Father's ways in order to gather the following.

What do we learn from this? You don't do God's things your way. You do God's things God's way. There are no shortcuts. There is only obedience. Our job is faithfulness. The outcome belongs to God.

2. Since God is our provider, does this mean that we have no responsibility towards obtaining our physical needs?

No, that is not what it means. Our responsibility is to live lives submitted to God. We are to be obedient. If we are, he will show us our provision. For most of us, obedience involves work of some nature. (2 Thessalonians 3:10 says, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'") God's provision often comes in the form of a job rather than in the form of unearned wages.

Others, for whatever reason, may not be able to work. Still, they have a responsibility to live lives submitted and obedient to God. If they live lives submitted, God will show them their provision. That may come through the care of the church while they get back on their feet. It may come through some other means. Still God is the source of the provision.

We must also be careful to distinguish between our wants and our needs. God does not necessarily provide all of our wants. Many of them are not good for us. He will provide our needs.

Chapter 9

Discussion

Read Chapter 9 of Mark.

The highlights of this chapter include:

- The event known as “The Transfiguration.”
- A demonic expulsion.
- Miscellaneous teachings that Jesus gave his disciples.

Jesus went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John. If there was an “inner circle” of disciples, this was it. Jesus had selected the twelve from among the crowds of his followers to be his disciples. Among the twelve, however, Peter, James, and John seemed to be the closest to Jesus.

While on the mountain, Elijah and Moses, two of the greatest figures from the Old Testament appeared with Jesus. How did they appear? Was it in the form of a spirit or perhaps in a vision? We do not know for sure. From the text, however, it sounds like they appeared in a bodily form. Furthermore it says that Jesus was “transfigured” before them. What does “transfigured” mean?

The term is not well-defined. We are not exactly sure what happened. Somehow the physical nature of Jesus was changed. His physical presence became startlingly white; he glowed before them. The radiance of heaven poured out from him. My guess is that he assumed the state of a glorified body – the sort of body that we will all have after we are finally resurrected.

Jesus, in his transfigured state, entered into conversation with Elijah and Moses. What was significant about Elijah and Moses? Why did they come? Why not Abraham or David or one of the other great figures from the Old Testament?

Abraham was the father of the race, but Moses was revered as the father of the faith of the Jews. Through Moses the Jews received the law. He was the author of the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy – the foundation of everything that the Jews held dear. He led them out of their bondage in Egypt and formed them into a nation under God.

Elijah was an extraordinary prophet. In a time when the nation of Israel was engulfed in the worship of pagan idols – the Baals – he rallied the people of God to defeat the prophets of Baal and he brought the nation back to a true worship of God. More than any

other figure in the Old Testament – including Moses – Elijah, and his young prophet apprentice Elisha, had a ministry punctuated by signs and wonders, having a striking parallel to those performed by Jesus himself.

In a spiritual sense, there were no greater figures in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the goal of their ministries was to point people to God and ultimately to Jesus. It was fitting that they should appear with him. It was confirmation that Jesus was the fulfillment of the truth of the Old Testament. Furthermore in the midst of all of this, a voice from heaven declared, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

This was a stunning affirmation of Jesus to Peter, James, and John. They did not know quite how to react. Peter said, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He wanted to build walls around the experience that would contain this wonder for those present but shut out the rest of the world. That was not to be. As suddenly as it all appeared, it then vanished. Moses and Elijah were gone and Jesus’ physical appearance was back to normal.

Jesus told the three to keep this experience to themselves until after he had risen from the dead. Verse 10 says that they refrained from telling anyone, but did not understand what he meant about rising from the dead. It is interesting that even these three – the inner circle of the inner circle – never really understood what was happening, how Jesus would die and rise again. He told them repeatedly but they never really understood. Only after the resurrection did they put all of the pieces together. In spite of their lack of understanding, they knew that Jesus held the key to life for them, that he was worthy of their obedience and following, indeed their very lives.

As they were coming down the mountain, the three disciples said that they had been taught that Elijah had to return before the coming of the Messiah. Since Jesus, the Messiah, was here, they wanted to know what this teaching meant. They were referring to the closing words of the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6, which say:

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Jesus indicated that this prophecy had indeed been fulfilled. We know from other places in the New Testament (e.g. Matthew 11:14) that he was referring to John the Baptist when he said this. John the Baptist had been the fulfillment of this promise. He had come in the spirit of Elijah, having a ministry similar to Elijah in that he turned the hearts of people away from sin and back to God. He was the one sent to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus.

When they had returned from the mountain, they found the other disciples in a bit of disarray. Jesus asked what was wrong. A man had brought his son to them. The son was

heavily oppressed by demons. The description of the manifestation sounds like severe epilepsy, but in addition it had often caused the boy to try to take his own life.

Jesus rebuked the demon and told it to leave the boy. It was gone. His disciples asked him why they had not been able to make it go away. His reply in verse 29 was, “This kind can come out only by prayer.” This is a puzzling statement. Does this mean that other demons were driven out without prayer? Does this mean that the disciples were trying to drive this demon out without praying?

When you study Scripture, sooner or later you discover that there are some passages the meaning of which is uncertain. This is one of them. Perhaps two thousand years ago when the words were written they were perfectly clear to the readers and have lost something through time and translation. On the other hand, it is possible that the disciples who heard the words spoken by Jesus were not entirely sure what he meant.

Experience in dealing with demonized people may shed some light on the response. As Christians, saved by the blood of Jesus and anointed by the Holy Spirit, we walk in the authority of Jesus. We are empowered to minister in his name. At times, we can claim the authority of Jesus and command demons to leave and they will. Demons seem to come in various strengths, however. Some demons will not obey the authority given to us. Some might be driven out by praying and asking the Father to command them to leave. Some will require still other things to break the influence that they have over the life of a person. The point is that different demonizations require different ministry techniques. That may well have been the point of Jesus’ response to his disciples.

Following this, there are several instances where Jesus taught his disciples or other followers. The section includes the following:

- Jesus again explained to his disciples what was going to take place, that he would be betrayed, executed and that he would rise from the dead. They still did not understand.
- Ironically, soon after he told him about his betrayal and execution, he found his disciples arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest. How disheartening that must have been. Here he was, sharing his pain with them and they were busy jockeying for position in the Kingdom. He reminded them that greatness comes through servitude. The one who would be the greatest in the Kingdom was the one who became the lowest servant.
- The disciples were trying to stop people who were not a member of their “inner circle” from ministering in the name of Jesus. Jesus told them not to forbid such ministry. Anyone who ministers in the name of Jesus will be rewarded for it. Anyone who prevents others from coming into the Kingdom will be punished for it. We are to be conduits for bringing people to Christ. We should never be instruments of leading them into sin.

Leader Notes

- The similarities between the ministry of Elijah (and his successor, Elisha) and that of both Moses and Jesus is striking.

Like Moses,

- God led Elijah to Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai) for a divine appointment.
- At Mount Sinai, God revealed his presence to Elijah.
- Both Elijah and Elisha saw God part the Jordan River so they could walk across on dry land.

Like Jesus,

- Both Elijah and Elisha raised the dead.
 - Elisha fed a mass of people with a few loaves of bread.
 - In a miracle similar to the multiplying of the loaves and fishes, both Elijah and Elisha were able to multiply oil or flour and oil.
 - Elisha healed a leper.
 - Elijah spent forty days in the wilderness. 1 Kings 19 tells us that Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb took forty days. The text implies that he may have fasted during that time like Jesus did during his forty days in the wilderness.
 - Elisha called upon the miraculous power of God to help with what we might consider to be ordinary problems of life. In Matthew 17:24-27, Jesus told his disciples to find money to pay the temple tax in the mouth of a fish. In 2 Kings 6, Elisha asks God to make an ax head float to the surface of the water so that they will not lose it.
- There are several places in Scripture where Jesus compares his followers to the “salt of the earth.” This is an interesting analogy. Salt has two main functions. First of all, it is a flavoring agent. When salt is put on food, it should change the flavor of the food. The food should not change the flavor of the salt. In like manner, we should flavor the world around us and it should not flavor us. The character of Christ that is resident in us should season the world around us. We should not be seasoned by the world.

Second, salt is a preservative. Prior to the days of refrigeration (and to a lesser extent today) salt was used to preserve food. Properly coated with salt, food would not spoil. The followers of Christ should act as a preservative to the world around. The world is indeed spared from a certain amount of destruction simply because of the fact that we serve as a moral compass. The judgment of God is delayed for a time because of the presence of his church.

If we cease to serve the functions of flavoring and preserving our world, then we have lost our saltiness. Salt that has lost its saltiness is useless and will be cast aside. That message is a warning to the church. Jesus gave this message to a group of men who were bickering about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom and who should or should not be allowed to minister in the name of Jesus. We need to focus on being salt and let God run the show.

Questions for Discussion

1. At the Transfiguration, the three disciples wanted to erect shelters so that they could contain this wonderful event. Are our experiences with God given to us so that we can contain them and quietly contemplate them or are they things that we should share with the rest of the world.

They are both. There are times when the voice of the Holy Spirit speaks quietly to us and gives us words primarily intended to edify or comfort us. There are times when we should contain them and quietly contemplate them. More often than not, however, we should be beacons, displaying the radiance of heaven to a dark world. The walls of the church may be a physical phenomenon, but they should never be a physical barrier keeping the things of God in and the world out. Likewise the lives of individual Christians should not have walls keeping God in and others out. We should be “walking invitations,” beckoning “whosoever will” to come to Jesus and to become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

2. According to Mark 9:39-41, do YOU have the authority to minister in the name of Jesus?

Absolutely. If you are his then you are empowered to minister in his name. Furthermore any form of service that you provide to the world around in the name of Jesus will be rewarded.

Chapter 10

Discussion

Read Chapter 10 of Mark.

In this chapter we see:

- Jesus taught on divorce.
- Jesus taught on children in the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus taught on rich people and the Kingdom of God.
- Again Jesus warned his disciples about his death and resurrection.
- Again the disciples bickered about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus healed a blind man.

Divorce is a difficult and an emotional subject. Intimate relationships bring fulfillment to life that will never be found anywhere else. At the same time they are difficult. A successful and fulfilling relationship is hard work and requires an investment of energy and sacrifice. Those who do not understand this or are unwilling to pay the price often find disillusionment and disappointment in place of the intimacy and security that they desired. Others put out the energy and sacrifice only to find themselves abandoned by a wayward or confused spouse.

In the first century, marriage was a very different institution than it is today. Women had no status and were treated as little more than possessions. If a man wanted to divorce his wife, all he had to do was present her with a certificate of divorce and send her on her way. He did not have to offer an explanation. She had no recourse in the matter. It was a shameful way to treat women. The teachings of Christianity, particularly those of Jesus and of Paul, were radical. They taught that marriage should rest on a foundation of love. They reminded people that God intended marriage to be for life. A man who dismisses his wife and marries another is effectively committing adultery.

Where should the church stand on divorce? Sin is that which deviates from God's standard. Divorce is not God's standard. Divorce is sin. The church should stand against divorce. The church should not stand against divorced people. Historically the church has a bad track record of embracing divorced people. We must remember that lying, cheating, hating, lust, swearing, filing false tax returns, and taking home office supplies from work are also sin. The church should stand against these as well. We seldom treat people as second-class citizens in the church because they stole paper clips from the office.

People who are going through divorce are hurting. They need the love of Christ, expressed through his church. If possible, the church should turn them back from divorce.

God can heal relationships if they are submitted to him. Realistically it will not always happen. The church should act as a safety net for those who fall.

Jesus stood against divorce because divorce is sin. Jesus never stood against divorced people or anyone else who was hurting or in need.

In Mark 10:13-16, some people brought children to Jesus so that he could bless them. The disciples saw this as an intrusion on the time of a very busy man. Surely he had more important things to do than to dote on these children. Jesus used the opportunity to demonstrate something to the disciples that he had been trying to teach them all along. The only way that we can approach God is with the innocence of a child. A young child trusts his parents completely for his nurturing and sustenance. He does not question their provision or their motives. He trusts them completely. That is the attitude that we must have towards God if we are to receive his Kingdom. We must trust him completely.

Jesus allowed the little children to come to him. He received them with joy, just as the Father receives us when we come to him like little children.

Following this a rich man asked Jesus how he might obtain eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the commandments. He indicated that he already did obey them. Jesus then said in Mark 10:21, "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

The man was quite wealthy, so this was a hard thing for him. Jesus then taught about how hard it is for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God.

There is nothing wrong with wealth. God does not forbid it. Money is not inherently evil. The love of money, however, is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). That is why it is so hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom.

This man was quite attached to his wealth. Jesus knew that. His real question to the man was, "Do you love anything more than me? Is there anything that you put ahead of me?" Unfortunately, the man's answer was "yes."

There is no Scriptural mandate to sell everything we have and give the proceeds to the poor. There is no Biblical prohibition of wealth. What Scripture does require might be even harder. The requirement is to give up ANYTHING that we put ahead of Jesus. That could mean wealth, car, job, house, addiction, hobby, friendship, or even church. Jesus did not make this specific requirement of anyone else, but he was able to look into the life of this specific individual and see that his wealth was a barrier to discipleship.

When the disciples heard what Jesus told the man they were surprised, because the requirements were so hard. Peter remarked that they had given up everything to follow Jesus. Jesus assured him that anyone who had given things up to follow Jesus would be rewarded many times over for the sacrifice. Ironically, if the rich man had given up all that

Jesus required, he may have experienced a temporary setback, but eternally speaking he would have been much better off than when he started.

Beginning in Mark 10:32, they were headed to Jerusalem for what would be their final trip there together. Jesus knew what would happen to him once they arrived. Once more he tried to explain to the disciples how he would be executed but then rise again. Once again they did not understand.

Almost before he finished speaking, James and John privately asked him if they could be his right-hand and left-hand men in his Kingdom. Once again, they ignored the seriousness of what he had just told them and they were jockeying for positions of greatness. They still expected Jesus to establish a political kingdom. Somehow they believed that he was going to throw out the Romans and set up a throne in Jerusalem. Jesus informed them that they did not understand what they were requesting. His kingdom would be obtained at the terrible price of a crucifixion. Did they really want to go through that? He also informed him that it would not be his decision to decide who gets what position in the Kingdom. That decision would be made by the Father.

The other disciples heard what James and John were asking and they got mad. Again they were bickering about who would be the greatest. Jesus once again reminded them that greatness is achieved through servanthood. He said in Mark 10:43-45, "Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This Kingdom of God is a strange one. To become great we must become least. To be first we must be last. The Father will raise high those who bow themselves low.

As they continued to Jerusalem, they passed through the town of Jericho. There a blind man named Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by. He called to Jesus and begged him to heal him. Jesus had compassion for the man and healed him. Then he set his face for Jerusalem and went there for the last time, knowing full well that he was facing the bloody and painful death of a criminal. It was through this lowly act of service that he achieved the greatest Kingship in the history of the universe.

Leader Notes

The restrictions that are placed at times on divorced people serving in the church often come from an interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:12, and Titus 1:6, which say that a deacon, elder, or overseer should be the husband of one wife. This is an understandable, although not certain interpretation of these verses (more literally it is a prohibition against polygamy among church leaders). Even if this is a correct interpretation, the most it does is exclude divorced people from positions of deacons, elders, or overseers. It does not mean that the church should treat them as anything less than redeemed citizens of the Kingdom.

Questions for Discussion

1. The discussion says that we must give up anything that we would put before Jesus – even church. How could church be something that we put before Jesus?

It is possible to get so wrapped up in the business of church that we forget to make time to have a relationship with Jesus. The church should be a place where we come together to worship God. It should be a place where we are instructed and challenged to grow in faith and maturity. It should be a place where we are edified by relationships with other believers. It should be an outlet where we can serve other believers and the world around us in the name of Jesus.

It is important to understand that we all have places where we can and should serve in the church. Some are called to teach. Some are called to work with children or to volunteer time cleaning the church building or to participate in various ministry outreach programs. None of us are called to be at the church every time the doors are opened. None of us are called to do so much in church that it disrupts our family lives and leaves us exhausted. None of us are called to do so much that we do not have time to worship or time to have a relationship with Jesus.

The church does not come between you and Jesus, but your busyness in church can be something that you put between you and Jesus. Often this is an attempt to earn acceptance or to work yourself to a place where you are “good enough” for Jesus. You do not have to do that. You cannot do that. He accepts you as you are and his priority is his relationship with you, not what you can do for him. When you begin to put your doing ahead of your relating then it is a problem.

2. Does Mark 10:29-30 promise that if I give \$1 to the church I will receive \$100 in return?

Be careful here. The verses say, “I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.” Does this mean that if I leave my 1 mother for the sake of the gospel I will receive 100 mothers in return?

Unfortunately some people look to this verse to try to get people to contribute to their “ministries” (and I put that in quotes because some – not necessarily all, but some – of them can hardly be classified as ministries.) What Jesus is saying is that any sacrifice that we are forced to make for the sake of the Gospel will be repaid to us abundantly – in this life and the next. The return may not be monetary. God supplies all of our

needs and we need to come to him with child-like innocence, questioning neither the provision nor the provider.

Chapter 11

Discussion

Read Chapter 11 of Mark.

This chapter begins the focus on events that occurred during the last week of Jesus' life. We see:

- The Triumphal Entry of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
- The Cursing of the Fig Tree.
- Clearing the Money Changers and Vendors from the Temple.
- A Confrontation with the Jewish Authorities.

Around a thousand years before Palm Sunday, King David wrote the words of Psalm 118. Psalm 118:24-27 says:

This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we
bless you.

The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join
in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

Note that "Save us" in the second line is literally "Hosanna" in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament. David had foreseen this event, which was fulfilled on Palm Sunday. The prophet Zechariah had seen it as well. In Zechariah 9:9 he wrote,

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king
comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt,
the foal of a donkey.

The eternal king came riding into Jerusalem not on a white stallion but on a donkey. He came in humility because his Kingdom was a kingdom of truth, built of lowly servants. It was not a political kingdom preparing for a military encounter.

As Jesus entered the city, he was popularly received. As David had foreseen in Psalm 118, the people lined the road and cheered his entry. They laid their garments and boughs that they had cut from trees in the road before him, a gesture honoring him and symbolically shielding him from the dirt of the road. This was the last time in his earthly life that Jesus would receive such adoration. By the end of the week the crowds would be shouting, "Crucify him!"

We know from the other Gospel accounts that during this final week, Jesus spent his days in Jerusalem, but at night went to Bethany and stayed with his friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Bethany is only a couple of miles from Jerusalem, so it is not a great distance to walk. On Monday morning, Jesus and the disciples were leaving Bethany to go to Jerusalem. Jesus was hungry. He passed a fig tree and wanted to eat from it. He discovered that it had no fruit. He cursed the tree. Later that day they passed by the same tree again and it had withered away.

This happened for a reason. The nature of God has more than one dimension. God is a God of mercy and grace. He patiently waits for people to come to repentance and to “bear fruit” in their lives. Bearing fruit in your life means that your behavior shows evidence that you are truly submitted to the will of God. God is also a God of judgment and wrath. There will come a day when he says, “Enough is enough!” and judgment will follow. Those who have consistently failed to bear fruit – to submit to God – will wither under his judgment. It will happen as surely and as quickly as the fruitless tree withered under the judgment of Jesus.

When they arrived at Jerusalem they went to the temple. Jesus found people buying and selling in the temple courts. The vendors were actually providing a useful service. This was the week of Passover. People came to Jerusalem from other areas and other nations to celebrate Passover. While there, they would make a sacrifice at the temple. It was easier for them to buy a sacrificial animal after they arrived than to bring one with them on their journey. The selling of sacrifices was not wrong.

The problem was that they were doing their selling right there in the temple complex. This was supposed to be a place of prayer, but they had turned it into a noisy flea market. Jesus was incensed that the temple – the most holy place on earth – had been turned into a place that was so busy and so noisy that people could not pray. He took control of the situation. He turned over their tables and physically drove them out of the complex.

The Jewish leaders did not know how to deal with this. They were probably embarrassed, because they knew full well that they should not have let this activity go on in the temple. They were also personally challenged, because most likely they benefited financially from the activity (it is likely that the vendors paid them money to allow them to be there). Jesus had challenged their authority and he had hurt their pocketbooks. They wanted to take him to task for it.

Thus they asked him in verse 28, “Who gave you authority to do this?” Notice that they never questioned whether or not what he did was right. Their question was more along the lines of “Who do you think you are?”

Jesus did not want to play their game, so he turned the situation around on them. He said, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism – was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!” Jesus was

really wise in the way he dealt with challenges like this. This was a no-win situation for the Jewish leaders. If they said that John's ministry was from heaven, the Jesus would ask why they did not submit to it. If they said that it was not from heaven, popular support would be against them because John had been a very popular prophet. Thus after discussing it among themselves they replied, "We do not know. We cannot answer your question." Jesus said, "Then I will not answer your question, either."

Realize that this did not make him very popular with these leaders. They already hated him. Their hatred intensified each time something like this occurred.

Leader Notes

There is no reason to believe that the people who shouted "Crucify him" at the end of the week were the same that greeted him with honor on Palm Sunday. Many people loved and honored Jesus. Many hated him and wanted to kill him. The majority of the people probably had no real leaning one way or the other. They may or may not have heard of Jesus but did not know enough to have an opinion.

Those who loved Jesus were those who showed up on Palm Sunday. On Good Friday when Jesus was sentenced, it was most likely a completely different crowd calling for his execution. Those who hated him "worked the crowds" and stirred up opposition. It is likely that a great number of the people who called for his crucifixion did not really even know who he was. They were just joining in a cause that seemed popular at the time.

Questions for Discussion

1. Based on what we saw in this chapter, is it wrong to have any form of buying or selling going on in a church?

It is not necessarily wrong. If commerce is going on in a church such that it disrupts the atmosphere of worship or somehow becomes barrier to the mission of the church, it is wrong. Many churches sell books or music, however, intended to edify their people. There is nothing wrong with this as long as the church retains its focus on ministry and does not turn into a business.

2. Why is it important to realize that is a God of judgment and wrath as well as a God of mercy and grace?

Any day could be the day when God says "Enough is enough" and pronounces final judgment on those who bear no fruit. We know that now God is waiting patiently, but that day will come when his patience will come to an end. The door will close and there will be no more opportunity for people to repent and escape the terrible judgment.

The implication of this? Receive Jesus today. Let him save you this hour. Tomorrow may be too late. Tonight may be too late.

Chapter 12

Discussion

Read Chapter 12 of Mark.

Remember that Chapter 11 ended with Jesus having a confrontation with the Jewish leadership. That exchange continued in chapter 12. By this time he was very bold about confronting their erroneous ways. In chapter 12 we see:

- The parable of the vineyard and tenants.
- A question about paying taxes to Rome.
- A question about the resurrection.
- A question about the greatest commandment.
- Condemnation by Jesus of the Jewish leaders.
- A teaching about sacrifice.

The parable of the vineyard and the tenants was a rather bold indictment of the unfaithfulness of the Jewish hierarchy. The audience is still the chief priests and elders. The message is obvious and would have angered the listeners.

The vineyard is God's Kingdom on earth. He entrusted it originally to the Jews. They have been unfaithful tenants. He sent prophets, who brought messages intended to bring reconciliation. They had no tolerance for the prophets and did not respond to their message. Thus God sent his Son. Predicting his own death, Jesus said that the tenants killed the Son.

Jesus indicated that the Lord of the vineyard would surely tear it away from the hands of the unfaithful tenants and give it over to those who would administer it faithfully. God sent his Son to beckon the Jews to become citizens of the Kingdom. The leaders of the Jews killed the Son, and thus as a whole the nation rejected the Son. Many individual Jews embraced Jesus, but as a whole the nation chose not to become the Kingdom of God. Thus the invitation has been extended to the Gentiles to become Kingdom citizens. Those who responded have joined the faithful Jews to become the manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth.

The priests and elders knew that Jesus was condemning them by his words. They were angry and would have apprehended him except that they feared the reaction of the crowds. They began looking for a way to quietly arrest him. They also sought to get him in trouble, one way or the other.

They thought they might trick him by asking him whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to Rome. They figured that he would get in trouble one way or the other, no matter how he answered. If he said that people should pay taxes, it would be an unpopular response, since most Jews hated the Roman authority. If, however, he told people that they did not have to pay taxes, he would get in trouble with the Roman authorities.

Jesus had wisdom that far exceeded theirs, because his came straight to him from the throne room of heaven. He asked them to show him a coin. When they did, he asked them whose picture was on the coin. They responded, "Caesar's." He then replied, "Give to Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's." It was a wonderful response.

Jesus never advocated unnecessary disobedience to government. He wanted his followers to be good citizens of the kingdoms of men. Christians should be respected in their communities because it advances the cause of our Lord. At the same time we are citizens of a higher Kingdom. Most of the time, it is possible to be law-abiding citizens of both kingdoms.

Those who had sought to get Jesus in trouble were even more perplexed, because his answer won him even more favor with most people. Their desire to kill him grew more and more intense.

Next the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus. The Sadducees were a faction among the Jews who did not believe in a resurrection – life after death. They posed a question to Jesus concerning what might happen to a woman who had been married to multiple men. The background of the question is a verse in the Old Testament. It says that if a man dies leaving a widow but no heirs, his brother should marry the widow and give her a child. They told Jesus to suppose that a woman married, was widowed, married the first man's brother, was widowed again, etc., until she had married each of seven brothers. Their question was, "When she ultimately died, whose wife would she be?"

Jesus looked beyond their question and saw their motive. They did not believe in the resurrection and thus their question was not sincere. They thought they had given Jesus a question that he could not answer and that his inability to answer would embarrass Jesus. Jesus answered that in the resurrection marriage would not be an issue. He also addressed their ignorance concerning life after death. He said that if they knew their Scriptures they would know that God is the God of the living and not the dead. He pointed out that when God first appeared to Moses, he introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, implying that those three were still very much alive.

The Sadducees had been unable to trick Jesus. He answered their questions with wisdom from heaven. Some people that were there recognized this. One of them was impressed and came to Jesus with another question. This time, the man's question was not an attempt to get Jesus in trouble. He was genuinely seeking wisdom from the Master. He asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. Jesus replied in Mark 12:29-31: "The

most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

There are two themes running throughout all of Scripture: (1) God cares how we relate to him, and (2) God cares how we relate to one another. If all of Scripture could be summarized into two verses, the two mentioned above would be those. We are to be devoted to God and subject to his authority. There should be evidence of that in the way we treat our fellow man.

The Jewish leaders had posed several questions to Jesus that they thought he could not answer. He decided to turn the tables on them. In Mark 12:35-37, he asked them a question that they could not or would not answer:

How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

"The Lord said to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.'"

David himself calls him "Lord." How then can he be his son?

Jesus is quoting Psalm 110:1. The quandary is this. Scripture teaches that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. At the same time, David refers to this Messiah as his Lord. According to tradition, a man might refer to his ancestors as "lord," but never his descendants. How, then, could this descendant of David be David's Lord?

The only way to answer this question would be to acknowledge that this son of David was also the Son of God. David was Israel's greatest king. The only way that a descendant of David would be greater than David was for him to be the Son of God. The Jewish leaders would not acknowledge, however, that a son of man might also be the Son of God. Specifically, they would not acknowledge that Jesus, a descendant of David, might be the Son of God. Thus they were silenced and would not answer his question.

The Jewish leaders were incensed. The crowds, however, were delighted. They could see the hardness of the leaders towards Jesus. Jesus openly challenged them in front of the crowds. In Mark 12:38-40 he said,

Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.

Jesus denounced “religion for show.” Many of these men liked to put on shows of spirituality, hoping to gain the adoration of men. Underneath they were cold towards God. God had no use for this. Jesus then pointed towards a true example of devotion to God. He saw a widow put two small copper coins in the offering at the temple. She quietly and humbly put it in the offering container. She was quite a contrast to some of the more wealthy men, who made a very big show of how much they were giving. Jesus told the disciples that even though the other men gave more money, the widow gave a much bigger gift because she gave all that she had.

God is not interested in people who use the church to attain power or recognition of men. He is interested in people who are devoted to him and who are willing to surrender everything to his cause. He is interested in quiet humility and not flashy show.

Leader Notes

- Between the close of Malachi's prophesy and the beginning of the first century, several developments occurred in Judaism. First of all, the canon of Hebrew Scripture was closed and organized into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The synagogue became a permanent fixture in Jewish life, focusing on a teaching-based, nonsacrificial form of worship. Rabbinism came into being, with the rabbis, or teachers emerging as an important part of the culture. The Jews themselves began organizing into factions. The primary parties of Jews were the Sadducees, with an emphasis on a very legalistic study of the law, and the Pharisees, with an emphasis on the priesthood. One of the major doctrines that divided the Sadducees and the Pharisees was the question of the resurrection. Pharisees believed in an afterlife. Sadducees were nihilists; they believed that when you died that was the end of it. Two other factions besides the Pharisees and the Sadducees existed as well. The Essenes were a separatist group, seeing the Sadducees and Pharisees as being somewhat apostate. They tended to live in communities off to themselves. The community at Qumran, which preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls, was one such community. John the Baptist is thought to have been heavily influenced by the Essenes. The other faction is the Zealots, which was more of a political movement, seeking political freedom for the nation. During this time, racial hatred grew between the Jews and the Samaritans.
- The Old Testament verse in the background of the Sadducees' question is Deuteronomy 25:5-6: "If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel."
- The answer that Jesus gave the Sadducees touches upon but does not actually settle a question that is very curious for believers. In the resurrection, will we maintain the

relationships that we have now? Specifically, if we are married in this life, will we maintain that marital relationship in the next? There is no straight answer to this anywhere in Scripture. This verse suggests, however, that we will not carry that relationship into the afterlife. Those of us that treasure our marriages may find that distressing, but if so, we are trying to look at that life through the lens of this life. Whatever is there will be better. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that many of our spiritual endowments, such as prophecy or knowledge will one day pass away, but that love will endure. I infer from this that the love that we have shared in this life will carry over to the next. I believe that we will know each other there as we have known each other here. Scripture seems to infer, however, that we will not have marital relationships in the same context that we have them here.

Questions for Discussion

1. If a government is spending money on things with which we do not agree (e.g. abortions, etc.) is it right for us to resist paying taxes?

There is no Scriptural precedent for this. Jesus teaches us to be law-abiding citizens. If we have concerns about the way that the government is spending tax money, then we should work through legal channels to try to change government policy. The fact is that governments are institutions run by men and thus they will always have a certain amount of corruption. In spite of that, the New Testament teaches us to be subject to them. As long as we are not being forced to disrupt our relationship with God, then we must labor lawfully under the institution of government. There are times when one has to make a choice (i.e., if a government would outlaw the practice of Christianity), but those situations are the extreme exception (although they do occur).

2. What sort of sacrifice is acceptable to God?

First of all, realize that God does not need our money. It is all his anyway. What God wants is our lives, our devotion, our obedience. Giving benefits us, because it is an act of submission and worship. It is a visible and tangible act of trust. We believe that God is the source that supplies our needs. Giving some of our income back to him is a sign that we trust his supply.

What sort of sacrifice is acceptable to God? He demands our whole beings. His Spirit will guide us to give of our financial resources, but that is only a portion of what we are to yield to him. Our lives, our time, our financial means, our relationships, our homes, our driving habits – all aspects of our lives are to be yielded to him. If we give him anything less, then we have not really made him Lord.

Chapter 13

Discussion

Read Chapter 13 of Mark.

This chapter is entirely devoted to the topic of what happens in the end of time. Jesus taught his disciples about the end of the world as we know it.

The topic of end-time events has intrigued Bible Scholars for centuries. There are a number of different interpretations that have arisen, taking different viewpoints on exactly what will happen and when. To get a fuller understanding, one needs to consider what other parts of Scripture say about this topic, including the entire book of Revelation plus parts of the Book of Daniel, Zechariah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, and bits and pieces of other books as well. It is a nebulous topic and not easy to understand. The fact is that God has not laid out a clear, step-by-step description of what will happen in the end. He has given us bits and pieces, enough so that we know in general the condition of the world at that time. The book of Revelation contains a great deal of information, but much of it is communicated in symbolism that requires interpretation. That is why there are so many different viewpoints on what will happen in the end.

What can we get from Mark 13?

The chapter begins with Jesus telling his disciples that the temple will be torn down. The temple was a massive structure, an incredible architectural feat for the time. It was much bigger than most modern buildings and it was a wonder of the world in its time. It was built of huge stones such that it could have stood almost forever. It was a stunning prediction that Jesus made, saying that the temple would be destroyed so that no stone would be left on top of another. In fact, in AD 70, the Jews revolted against Roman authority. In response to the rebellion, Roman armies rode into the city of Jerusalem. They leveled the city. As part of that, they completely destroyed the temple. No stone of the temple itself was left on top of another. They did leave standing one wall of the temple complex (not of the temple itself.) That wall still stands today in Jerusalem. It is known as the Western Wall, or the Wailing Wall. Jews today revere it as one of the holiest places on earth, because it is all they have left of the great temple.

Jesus' words regarding the temple were fulfilled within forty years of his death. The remainder of the chapter looks into the future, to events that are still to be fulfilled. The disciples wanted to know what would be the signs that the end of the world was approaching. Jesus enumerated some of them:

- There would be many false prophets, claiming to be a savior of the people. (How many of these have we seen in recent history? Jim Jones of Jonestown or Marshall Applewhite of the Heaven's Gate Cult are a few of the more extreme examples, gaining the trust of people and then leading them into death. They, however, are only the tip of the iceberg. The world is full of would-be Messiahs, deceiving people and leading them into spiritual death.)
- There will be wars and rumors of wars. There will be great civil unrest in the world (as is rampant today.)
- There will be earthquakes. (The number of earthquakes that the earth is experiencing is increasing at an alarming rate. We have more in a typical year now than used to be experienced in a century.)
- There will be famine. (Again, our earth has been experiencing famine in unprecedented proportions in recent years.)

Jesus says that when we see these things, they are indications of the coming of the end, in the same way that labor pains signal the coming of a birth. Is the world ripe today for the coming of the end? It would seem so.

This chapter shows us a number of things that will happen during the last days:

- There will be great persecution in the world. People will be arrested for professing Christianity. That persecution will actually cause the Gospel message to spread throughout the world, however. This seems to have two causes. First of all, many people will flee to escape persecution. They take their faith when they go and tell others about Jesus. Second, people will be put on trial. When they testify, they will have an opportunity to talk about Jesus and testify for him.
- It will be a time of betrayal for many. Because of the persecution, people will turn against their own family members to save themselves. Many will die for the faith.
- God will preserve those who are faithful. This does not necessarily mean that they will escape death. God can protect us through death rather than from death.
- False religion will be rampant. There will arise a great leader in a false religious system who will win the devotion of many. He will lead opposition to the true church. People need to be very careful about whom they follow during this time. They need to stay true to Jesus and not get caught up in the false religious movements.
- The turmoil on earth is going to be accompanied by many natural disasters. The sun and the moon will turn dark and stars will fall from the sky. Destruction will fall upon the earth through these natural disasters.

These things are a glimpse of what is to come. Revelation has a great deal more information about these events. It is going to be a time of great difficulty, a final judgment on mankind. The good news is that God will protect his faithful through it all. That does not mean that it is going to be easy. Many will die. Even through death, however, God will be with them. There will be a reward waiting for them once they escape the time of judgment.

Leader Notes

It is difficult to get into all of this without a full-blown discussion of the end-time events in other books, but this study is focused only on Mark. Mark does not get into a number of things that will happen in the end-time. Many in the church hope for a pretribulation rapture, which will take us out of here before most of these terrible things begin happening, but there is nothing in Mark to even hint at the concept of a rapture. Furthermore, the timing of the rapture is debated and we may in fact be here for these events.

The fact is that eschatology (the study of last things) is a difficult and even controversial topic. It is not a subject for an entry-level Bible study. The leader of this study is encouraged not to lead the study too deep into end-time philosophies because they can be very confusing to someone who is not already well-grounded in Scripture. The point that needs to be made is that time as we know it will come to an end. There will be a great time of difficulty as God's judgment is poured out on man's final rebellion. Jesus will triumph. In the midst of the travail, he will come again and set up his Kingdom. We do not know when this is going to happen. Our role is to be prepared and to stay strong in the face of persecution.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you suppose that God did not give us a clear, detailed timeline explaining the events leading up to the end?

All people in all times have needed to live in expectancy that life as they know it could end in an instant. We need to live every day knowing that it could be our last, that Jesus could come for us the next moment. If the Bible said, "The second coming will be on June 1, 2015," then most people would wait until May 31, 2015 to get their hearts prepared for the coming of Jesus. By then it would really be too late because they would be too hardened to do anything about it.

It is also important to remember that most of us will be privately summoned to our Creator rather than go in the rapture. Any of us could die at any moment. Regardless of when the rapture or the second coming is, any of us could have our lives cut short this day.

We need to be devoted to God now and not worried about tomorrow. We need to hold onto the promise that God protects his faithful so that we can face the uncertainties and difficulties of today. We need to be encouraged in the knowledge that God will preserve us, even through death. We need to let that energize us to lead a life of hope and purpose. If we get caught up in worrying about how it all will end, then we lose sight of what God wants us to do today.

2. There seem to be so many violent and terrible things happening in the end. Why does it have to be this way?

We must never lose sight of the fact that God is a God of judgment and wrath just as he is a God of patience and mercy. Today his grace and mercy holds back the wrath and he is patient, waiting so that people will have every chance to accept reconciliation to him through Jesus Christ. The day will come, however, when he says, "Enough is enough," and unleashes judgment. His wrath will be poured out upon those who have rebelled against him and have chosen evil over righteousness. They have corrupted his creation and have brought persecution and pain to those who have been faithful to him. In the end, his judgment will obliterate them and the evil that they have embraced from the earth. Once more the earth will be made an idyllic place, fit for him to dwell with those who are faithful. His purpose in creation will again be fulfilled; he will walk in fellowship with his creation.

There are consequences to our choices. If we choose faithfulness to God then we will be among the elect that walk with him in his Kingdom. If we chose rebellion then we receive the wrath and judgment that are stored up for the wicked. If the description of the end-time events did not include the turmoil of judgment, then we would not really understand the consequence of our choices.

Chapter 14

Discussion

Read Chapter 14 of Mark.

This chapter focuses on the last night of Jesus' life on earth. The major events in Chapter 14 include:

- A woman anointing Jesus for his death.
- The Passover meal, known as the Last Supper.
- Jesus' time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- The betrayal and arrest of Jesus.
- The trial of Jesus.
- Peter denying Jesus three times.

The chapter opens by noting that the chief priests and the Jewish teachers were looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus. They were concerned about doing it at a time when people were not around because they were concerned about the popular support that Jesus had.

Jesus was having dinner at the home of a man named Simon. A woman entered the home with a jar of very expensive perfume and poured out the perfume on Jesus. Some of the people there criticized the woman. They said that this was a waste of the perfume. It could have been sold and the money used to feed the poor.

In fact, the Gospel of John (John 12:4-6) tells us that Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples and the one who ultimately betrayed Jesus, was the one who criticized the woman for this. It also tells us that Judas did not really care about poor people. He was the keeper of the treasury for the Jesus' ministry and he used to steal from the funds. He wanted the money for himself. Jesus knew it.

Jesus did care about poor people. He spent his life ministering primarily to the needy. He fed them and healed them and brought them hope. He taught his church to care for those in need. There are two primary themes in all of Scripture and one of them is that God cares how we treat each other. The other one, however, is that God cares how we relate to him. The woman with the perfume was responding to that relationship. She was making a sacrifice motivated out of devotion to her Lord. Jesus accepted it because it was an appropriate thing to do.

Furthermore, Jesus noted that the woman was anointing him for his burial. This may seem like a bit of a strange thing for him to say. There had been no serious threats on his life at

this point. He had not been arrested. His disciples probably did not realize that he was even in any real danger. Jesus, however, knew that his death was imminent. He knew what faced him over the next few days.

Judas apparently was offended at Jesus' rebuke. Judas was never sold out to the cause of Jesus. He had begun to feel that being a disciple had little to offer him; it was not bringing him power, glory, or wealth as he desired. Thus he met with the enemies of Jesus and conspired with them to betray Jesus into their hands.

The time of year was Passover. This is an annual celebration among the Jews, remembering the time that God led them out of slavery in Egypt, recorded in the book of Exodus. This was (and still is) a religious high point of the year to the Jews. They ate a traditional Passover meal to commemorate the occasion. Jesus sent some of his disciples into Jerusalem to make arrangements for the Passover meal. Later that evening he met with the disciples there to observe the meal.

Jesus knew that this was his last meal on earth. He knew that this was the last time he would meet with his disciples before his death. During the meal he informed the disciples that one of them would betray him. They were all shocked (all except for Judas). Mark 14:22-25 says,

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."

These words are a bit confusing to us, but Jesus was giving a powerful word picture to his disciples. Just as the bread is broken and crushed, so the body of Jesus would be broken and crushed the next day. Just as the wine is poured out, so would the blood of Jesus be poured out the next day. All of this was being done for the benefit of his followers. Just as the bread and the wine nourish those who take it, so the sacrifice of Jesus brings life to those who receive. Scripture teaches us that the penalty for sin is death. Jesus, who lived without sin, was accepting that penalty on our behalf. If we trust him to save us, then our sin problem is defeated. Just as the bread and wine sustain physical life, so the sacrifice of Jesus sustains spiritual life.

After the meal, Jesus went with the eleven disciples (Judas left at some point during the meal) to the Mount of Olives, to a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. He informed the disciples that they would scatter when he was arrested. Peter protested and said that he would never leave the side of Jesus. Jesus told Peter that he would not only run away,

but that he would deny knowing Jesus three times that very night. Peter said that it would never happen.

Jesus had come to the garden to pray. He felt a terrible weight on him because of what would happen that night. He prayed that God might somehow spare him from the terrible things that were about to happen, but at the same time he submitted to the Father's will, trusting God to preserve him completely – even through death.

Thus Jesus asked his disciples to watch and pray while he went off by himself to pray. He spent some time alone with the Father and then returned to find the disciples asleep. He woke them up and asked them again to wait and pray. Then he went to pray some more. He returned a second time and found them sleeping again. He woke them again and went to pray a third time. He returned a third time to find them sleeping. At this time, soldiers appeared to arrest him.

Those who had come to seize Jesus were led by Judas. He walked over to Jesus, called him "Rabbi" (which is Hebrew for "teacher,") and gave him a kiss. This was a signal to the mob as to whom they should arrest. They grabbed Jesus. One of the followers of Jesus (the Gospel of John tells us that it was Peter) grabbed a sword and cut off the ear of one of the men in the crowd. Jesus had no intention of violence breaking out. He came into the world to be the sacrifice and to submit to what was happening. A sword would not change anything. Luke tells us that Jesus healed the man's ear.

Jesus told people to put away their swords. He reminded them that he had always been peaceful and open. They did not need violence to arrest him. He would go with them peaceably. At that point, his disciples scattered, just as he had predicted. He was taken to the home of the high priest. Peter kept his distance from Jesus (he did not want to get arrested as well) but he followed and kept an eye on the situation.

The chief priests and elders conducted a hasty, phony trial. They brought a number of false witnesses that made various charges against Jesus, but none of them could agree on anything that he might have done. They had no basis for charging him with wrongdoing. It did not matter. They were not looking for the truth.

Finally they asked him if he was the Son of God. He said that he was. That was all that they needed. To them, this was blasphemy. A man claiming equality with God was worthy of death. They did not want to hear anything more.

They began to beat Jesus and to spit on him. They did everything possible to humiliate him and cause him physical pain.

As Peter stood watching from a distance, somebody noticed him and said to him, "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus." Out of fear, Peter denied it. He was afraid that he, too would be arrested if he identified himself with Jesus at this point. Somebody else recognized him and again asked him the same thing. Again Peter denied it, probably a bit

more vigorously the second time. Later a third person asked Peter if he was one of Jesus' associates. This time he loudly protested, saying that he did not know Jesus. At that point the rooster crowed. Peter remembered that Jesus had said that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter realized what he had done. He was bitterly disappointed in himself and he began to weep.

Leader Notes

- It was common to anoint bodies with spices and perfumes in preparation for burial. Normally the spices and perfumes would be poured on the body and then burial cloths would be wrapped around it. Presumably the fragrances would help to neutralize some of the stench of the decaying body. If they buried bodies in graves like we typically do today then it might not have mattered, but tombs in that time and place were reused. A tomb was typically cave-like, perhaps carved into the side of a rock formation. They were typically made to hold multiple bodies, perhaps an entire family. At some point the cave would be reentered.
- We might wonder how the disciples could repeatedly fall asleep at such an important time, but we must remember what was going on with them. They still did not fully understand what was happening. They were confused and upset at the things Jesus was telling them, about being betrayed, arrested, and killed. Furthermore they had been up all night. The combination of exhaustion and depression would be enough to put anyone to sleep no matter how devoted he might want to be. As Jesus told them, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."
- Verses 51-52 say, "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." This may well be a bit of autobiographical information inserted by Mark. Since it really has nothing to do with the story as it is happening, it is likely a personal incident put in by the author. If this is so, then Mark was the young man and was present when Jesus was arrested.
- Peter's denial of Jesus seems to have taken a great toll on him. After the resurrection, Peter felt that by his denial he had disqualified himself from service. Surely anyone who would deny even knowing Jesus three times was not qualified to be an apostle. Peter went back home and resumed his life of fishing. In John 21, the resurrected Jesus went to Capernaum and found Peter. Three times he asked Peter whether or not Peter loved him. Three times (one for each time Peter had denied Jesus) he gave Peter a chance to affirm his devotion to Jesus. Each time Peter said that he loved Jesus. Each time Jesus charged Peter with the task, "Feed my sheep." In spite of Peter's failure, Jesus wanted him "on the team." Jesus can work around our failures. We must not let them defeat us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was it significant that the crucifixion occurred at Passover time?

The Passover was an extremely important milestone in Jewish history. The nation had been enslaved in Egypt. The people were held captive. God had sent Moses to them to lead them out of their captivity. Pharaoh's heart was hard against God and would not let the Jews go. God brought various plagues on the land to demonstrate his power and wrath to Pharaoh, but Pharaoh still would not let the people go. God finally sent one last plague. The firstborn of every home in Egypt would be killed in a single night. Special provision was made for the Jews, however. If they would sacrifice a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on their door posts, then the angel of death would pass over their homes and their firstborn would be spared.

The plague came just as had been promised. Death spread over the entire land. Those who followed God's commandments and took upon themselves the blood of the sacrificial lamb were spared. The Jews who came out of the plague left the land of slavery, beginning a journey to freedom.

The events of the Passover were so significant because they were a foreshadow of the sacrifice of Jesus. We are all held captive by sin. It has a control over our lives and it brings us death. Jesus was the Lamb of God, sacrificed at the time of Passover. Those of us who will take the blood of this sacrifice upon ourselves win a victory over death and we leave our land of slavery, beginning a journey to freedom. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, we have eternal life. Furthermore we are empowered to rise above a life controlled by sin and to walk towards the freedom of righteousness.

2. If Jesus came to be our sacrifice, then why did he pray in the garden that God might spare him from this?

Jesus was the Son of God, but he was also entirely human. He faced the events of that night with heartbreaking anguish. Not only was he about to face excruciating physical pain and torture, but he was facing extreme mental anguish as well. He had devoted his life to teaching his disciples, preparing them to carry on after his death. He was not convinced that they were prepared to function without him. They were still bickering among themselves about who would be the greatest. They still did not completely understand who he was or why he had come.

This was all a crushing weight for him to bear, especially in the face of his own death. Jesus was always honest with the Father. He expressed his feelings to God and asked the Father to search his depth of wisdom to see if there might be another way to bring about the salvation of the world. Still, no matter what, he was willing to submit to the will of his Father. He trusted the Father completely. He knew that he was about to die and to suffer great physical pain, but he knew that God would bring victory and glory out of that.

God will always preserve those who are faithful. That may mean preserving them through death rather than from death.

Chapter 15

Discussion

Read Chapter 15 of Mark.

Chapter 15 describes the terrible events that led to the death of Jesus. Recall that in Chapter 14 the Jews conducted their own middle-of-the-night trial of Jesus. They could not really find any grounds for charging him, but they brought him before Pilate anyway.

Pilate was the Roman governor in the area. He had the authority to sentence a prisoner to death if he so desired. The Jews wanted Jesus put to death, so they brought him here. They began to accuse him of many things. Pilate realized that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death and he really did not want to get involved in the situation.

It was a custom for the Romans to release one prisoner each year at Passover time as a gesture of good will to the Jews. There was a man in prison by the name of Barabbas. He had been involved in a Jewish uprising against Rome and had committed murder. Pilate had him brought out and presented both Barabbas and Jesus to the crowd. He asked them which one they would like to have released.

The priests and the elders were organized. They spread out in the crowds and encouraged the people to call for the release of Barabbas. When Pilate realized that they were calling for the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus, he asked them what should be done with Jesus. Again the priests and elders worked the crowds and got them to call for the death of Jesus. “Crucify him,” they shouted. Again they shouted it, louder and louder. Pilate did not really want to send an innocent man to his death, but even more than that he did not want a riot on his hands. Thus he released Barabbas and sentenced Jesus to death.

The torture of Jesus by the Romans began with a flogging. The Romans used whips with bits of rock, bone, or metal embedded in them. When they struck a man with the whip, they would rake it across his back in such a manner that they would rip off as much skin as possible. It was a terrible thing. More than likely when they were finished with the flogging Jesus had no more skin left on his back.

The soldiers mocked Jesus. They said, “This is the king of the Jews. Let us dress him up like a king.” They put a purple robe on him. Then they decided that a king needed a crown. They gathered thorns and fashioned them into a crown. These are not little rosebush thorns. They have some BIG thorns in Israel – several inches long and as sharp as needles. They would not have placed this gently on his head. They would have mashed it in so that the thorns would have penetrated the flesh and hit the bone of the scalp. Having dressed Jesus “like a king,” they mocked him by bowing down and paying phony

homage. They beat him and spit upon him. Then they put his own clothes back on him and led him away to be crucified.

Normally a prisoner who was to be crucified had to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Remember that Jesus had been beaten, flogged, and humiliated. He probably had no skin left on his back. Furthermore he had been awake all night. In this physical state, they placed a cross onto his bare back and told him to walk to the execution site.

Jesus began the journey, but at some point fell under the weight of the cross. His strength was gone and he could not carry it. The Roman soldiers grabbed an onlooker out of the crowd, a man named Simon of Cyrene. They forced Simon to carry Jesus' cross for him. They continued to the place of execution.

Once there, they offered Jesus some drugged wine to dull the pain. Jesus refused. They took his clothes and the soldiers gambled to see which one of them could have Jesus' garment. In "the third hour," which was around 9:00 AM (they measure time from 6:00 AM, which is approximately dawn) they nailed his hands and feet to the cross. They put a plaque over his head which said "King of the Jews." He was executed between two criminals.

While he hung on the cross, people made fun of him. Even the two criminals shouted insults at him.

At around noon (the sixth hour), the land became dark for three hours. About 3:00 PM (the ninth hour), Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Some people thought he was crying out to Elijah. Others thought he was crying out for something to drink. In fact, he was giving up his spirit. At that point he died.

The veil in the temple was miraculously torn in two (from top to bottom) when he died.

Joseph of Arimathea was one of the leaders of the Jews, however he had been a supporter of Jesus. When he died, Joseph went to Pilate and asked for his body. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly (death by crucifixion normally took several days) but he granted Joseph the request. Passover began at sunset that evening and Jews were not supposed to have contact with dead bodies during Passover. Thus Joseph hastily prepared the body for burial and laid it in a private tomb. A stone was rolled over the mouth of the tomb to seal it. Some of the women who had been followers of Jesus observed this and saw where the body had been laid.

Leader Notes

Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly. An execution by crucifixion normally took days.

A crucifixion was a terrible and painful ordeal, but the death came not from the wounds in the hands or feet. Death came by suffocation.

When a person was nailed to the cross, there were two places where the body weight could be supported. The person could push up against the nails in the feet, sending fiery pain shooting through the body, or the person could let the weight hang from the wounds in hands, again causing excruciating pain. The time on the cross was spent shifting between these two terrible sources of pain.

Hanging from the hands was a passive act. Pushing against the feet required effort. Thus the prisoner spent most of his time hanging from his hands. Because of the way that the weight was distributed, however, a person could not breathe when his weight was hanging from his outstretched hands. In order to take a breath, a person had to push up on the nails in the feet.

Eventually, the condemned man would lose the ability and the will to push against those foot wounds. When that happened, he would cease to breathe and he would suffocate.

Some of the other gospel accounts mentioned that they considered breaking the legs of Jesus to hasten the death. Breaking the legs meant that they could no longer shift their body weight in order to breathe. Thus they would die quickly. It was not necessary to break the legs of Jesus because he had died so quickly.

The fact that Jesus died so quickly is an indication that he gave up his life. It was not taken from him. He was in control of the situation. Jesus gave himself up freely as our sacrifice. He freely submitted to the shame and the pain of the cross and freely gave up his life as a sacrifice for us, winning us victory over sin and death.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why did Jesus cry out that God had forsaken him on the cross?

Jesus spent his entire life in close communion and fellowship with the Father. He had never felt isolated from God. At the time that Jesus went to the cross, however, he took on himself the guilt of the sin of the world. For the first time, he felt the pain of isolation from God, because God always separates himself from sin. The pain of isolation from the Father was to Jesus more painful than the physical torture he was suffering. It was not the physical wounds or the humiliation that caused Jesus to cry out; it was the pain of separation from God.

2. Why is it significant that the veil of the temple was torn in two when Jesus died?

The temple was the dwelling place of God on the earth. The innermost room of the temple was a place called the Holy of Holies. The presence of God rested in this

chamber. The chamber was separated from the rest of the temple by a very large and thick veil. God had to be separated from the presence of men because of sin. God will not dwell in the presence of sin. Sin caused separation from God in the Garden of Eden and we were still living with the consequences of that.

When Jesus died, sin was defeated. To signify that, God himself tore the veil of the temple in two, from top to bottom. Separation was no longer necessary because sin had been defeated.

This is so significant. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, his followers now have free access to God. We are not separated by a thick veil or any other thing. God bids us to enter his throne room and to dwell in his presence. The tearing of the veil of the temple was a dramatic illustration that the reconciliation and restoration was complete.

Chapter 16

Discussion

Read Chapter 16 of Mark.

The tragedy of Friday could not compare to the victory of Sunday!

The followers of Jesus spent the Sabbath (Saturday) in grief and mourning. Some of the women were concerned that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared the body for burial in haste and had not done it as carefully as they would have liked. They wanted to go to the tomb and properly anoint the body with spices, which is how people were normally buried at that time. They would not do this on the Sabbath, however, because it was against Jewish law to have contact with a dead body on the Sabbath. Thus they waited until Sunday morning to go to the tomb.

As they approached the tomb, they wondered how they would get in. A large stone had been rolled over the mouth of the tomb to seal it. They were not strong enough to remove the stone. When they arrived, however, they discovered that the stone had already been rolled out of the way. Mark 16:5-7 says:

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“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.’”

This “young man” was probably an angel. He informed the women that Jesus had risen from the dead. Just as Jesus had promised, he had won victory over death. The women were instructed to go and tell the disciples about the resurrection. The women were bewildered and afraid.

Then Jesus himself appeared to one of the women, Mary Magdalene. Having seen the risen Savior, she went and told the disciples. They did not believe her. Jesus later appeared to the disciples themselves so that they would know it was all true. Finally the things that he had told them made sense. They had seen the completion of the promises and they understood that victory over sin and death was really possible. This knowledge and the encounter with the risen Christ changed them from a band of scared and confused individuals to a team of crusaders that would change the world.

Jesus charged them for that task. Mark 16:15-20 says:

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Jesus told the eleven disciples (Judas was gone at this point) to take the things that they knew and to go tell the world. They were to offer the message of the Gospel to all men. All men should have the opportunity to receive the truth about Jesus or to reject it. Those who believe would be baptized and brought in as citizens of the Kingdom of God. The followers of Jesus would be empowered to do the same things that he did, to take authority over demons, to heal the sick, to minister in the name of Jesus and to receive God’s protection from harm.

After Jesus had spent time with his disciples and had given them this charge, he was taken up into heaven. He remains there until that day when he will come for his church. His disciples did as he said. They went out into the world and spread the good news, preaching and ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit. That goes on until today. God is still in the business of building up his church.

Leader Notes

- Some people interpret the resurrection as a spiritual phenomenon. Realize that the tomb was EMPTY! There was no physical body there. Jesus was bodily resurrected from the grave. He was not simply some spirit hovering about the earth. He came back in his glorified body and walked among men as a living, breathing, eating, drinking, touchable physical resurrected Savior.
- The verse that says “they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all” has been a controversial one throughout the ages. First of all, the last twelve verses of Mark probably were not in the original manuscript of the book. That point aside, what is the implication of this verse? Some churches (there are a handful in the United States) take this very literally. As part of their worship services, they take poisonous snakes out of boxes and pass them around. The faithful handle the snakes with their hands and typically (not always) escape being bitten. Some reportedly drink poisonous liquids during their services as well. They

are very literally placing their lives into the hands of God based on their interpretation of this Scripture.

It is not my place to say that they are right or wrong in doing this. That is not how I read this verse, however. My interpretation says that if we are faithful to the calling of God on our lives, then we enjoy his protection. Often this means protecting us from physical harm. As I have stated repeatedly, however, at times this means that God will protect us through death rather than from death.

It seems imprudent to go looking for trouble (such as handling deadly snakes) because trouble will find us without our help. Psalm 91:1 says, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” There is great wisdom in that. The one who benefits from the shelter of God is the one who rests in his shadow. If you want the protection of God, cling to his legs, like a little child that does not want to be separated from his parent. Move within his shadow. There is his protection. The Psalm does not say, “Oh God, Chase me wherever I wander and shelter me from all of the trouble that I seek.” If God really does lead you to handle snakes or to drink poison, then you should do it. Otherwise do not put him to the test. I have never felt led by him to do so.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was the resurrection of Jesus important?

The resurrection of Jesus was the ultimate confirmation by God of who Jesus was. Many prophets have come and gone throughout history. Jesus is the only one who has died and come back from the grave, never to die again. His resurrection was the ultimate validation of the truths that he taught. Furthermore it was absolute confirmation that sin, and the consequence of sin – death, had been defeated. Because Jesus was able to conquer death, he is able to lead us in victory over death. His resurrection opened the door to eternal life for us all.

2. According to Mark 16:15-18, what task does Jesus have for us to do today?

His church should be about the business of doing the same things he did. We should be preaching his message and spreading his truth. We should be offering people the opportunity to accept or reject the truth of Jesus. We should baptize new followers. We should minister in the empowering of the Holy Spirit, just as he did. Signs and wonders should accompany the proclamation of the Kingdom message. We should take authority over demons, sickness, and other things that plague mankind and we should bring the wholeness of the Kingdom of God. We are the instruments of his ministry in the world today. We should be about his business.

Conclusion

In this survey of Mark, we have seen the Gospel – the good news about Jesus.

Man sinned – rebelled against God. Sin brought death into the world. Because we have all chosen to sin, we all live under the penalty of sin.

Jesus is the one person who lived his life without sin. He was the Son of God and allowed himself to be born of a woman. He came to earth to live among us and to teach us how to properly relate to God. He modeled for us a sinless life, one of pure devotion to God. He showed us how our lives could be if we allowed the Holy Spirit to empower us for living as citizens of the Kingdom of God. Then he allowed himself to be executed on our behalf, the sinless one paying the death penalty for each of us. Having defeated sin and death, he rose again in victory. The Bible says that he was the first of many who will experience resurrection. All who accept his sacrifice for sin and trust him to save them will follow him in victory over sin and death.

Have you made that step of trusting Jesus to save you? You do not have to be “good enough” or “righteous enough” for Jesus to save you. None of us are. None of us come to Jesus because we are good enough. That was the point. We are all sinners. All of us had rebelled against God. None of us could approach him on our own merit. Thus since we could not come to him, Jesus came to us. He accepts us just as we are. Once we have accepted him, then he empowers us to change, to overcome our sinfulness and to move towards righteousness.

If you have never asked Jesus to save you, today is the best day to do it. There may not be a tomorrow. Right now, ask him to save you. Just say this out loud (but mean it in your heart):

Jesus, I know that I have sinned. I know that I hurt you when I sin. I know that you came to forgive me and to help me change. I want that. I ask you to come into my life and to take control. Change me and make me a citizen of your Kingdom. Let me be filled with the Holy Spirit so that I can begin to live in victory rather than defeat. Thank you for caring so much for me that you died for me. Amen.

Let somebody know what you have done. Tell your pastor. If you do not have one, then find a church and begin to participate. Be involved in Bible study so that you can grow in your knowledge and faith.

There is no greater thing in life than your relationship with God. May he bless you.