

The Gospel of Mark

A Study Guide
Student 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?
2. How did sin disrupt our relationship with God?

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.

Questions for Discussion

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

Questions for Discussion

1. What does it mean to us that one does not put new wine into old wineskins?
2. If Jesus walked the earth today, what would his relationship be with old, established churches?

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.

Questions for Discussion

1. When we consider the way that Jesus trained his disciples, what implications should it have for us today?
2. Jesus encountered a great deal of opposition, even from close friends and family. Does that set expectations for the church today?

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 the 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.

Questions for Discussion

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

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

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.

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?
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?

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.

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

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.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do the Jews still have a special standing before God?
2. What do we learn about praying when we look at the prayer model of Jesus in the New Testament.

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.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why wouldn't Jesus give the Pharisees a sign and what can we learn from this?
2. Since God is our provider, does this mean that we have no responsibility towards obtaining our physical 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.

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

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 them 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.

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

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.

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

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.

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?
2. What sort of sacrifice is acceptable to God?

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.

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

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.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was it significant that the crucifixion occurred at Passover time?
2. If Jesus came to be our sacrifice, then why did he pray in the garden that God might spare him from this?

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.

Questions for Discussion

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

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

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.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was the resurrection of Jesus important?
2. According to Mark 16:15-18, what task does Jesus have for us to do today?

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.