

**The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
(Mark 1:1)**

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so . . . ” For many of us this is perhaps the first thing we learned about Jesus. However, as we get older we start to ask bigger questions. This leads us to not simply take the word of others, but instead to actually read the Bible for ourselves and find out about this love of Jesus. Where do we start? Many suggest we start with the Book of Mark because it is brief and fast-paced, “as understandable as a newspaper” according to Philip Yancey, initially written for those with little to no understanding of the Christian faith.

Is it really that simple? Yes and no.

As Gordon Fee says, “The four Gospels form a unique literary genre [style], for which there are few real analogies.” (113) They contain collections of Jesus’ teachings and sayings, but they are not books *by* Jesus; rather, they are books *about* Jesus.

God chose to give what we know about the earthly ministry of Jesus through the Gospels. They are the best resource we have to learn about our Lord. Yet we don’t exactly read them like we would read a biography about Abraham Lincoln from the library! Again, we refer to Gordon Fee.

These books, which tell us virtually all we know about Jesus, are nonetheless not biographies – although they are partly biographical. Nor are they like the contemporary “lives” of great men – although they record the life of the greatest man. They are, to use the phrase of the second-century church father Justin Martyr, “the memoirs of the apostles” . . . they record the facts *about* Jesus, recall the teaching *of* Jesus, and each bears witness *to* Jesus. (116)

WHERE DO WE START?

Whenever we read anything in the Bible, it is valuable to ask three questions:

1. What did it say THEN? (when it was written)
2. What does it MEAN? (to us)
3. How can I APPLY that? (today!)

Here in the introduction, we will only address the first question. The studies that follow will help to guide us through the second and third questions.

What did it say then?

It is important to keep in mind both the historical setting of Jesus AND the historical setting of Mark. In other words, we need to have some understanding of the cultural and religious values in place in first century Palestine. We also need to have some sense of the author and his reasons for writing.

Jesus' audience: Remember, there had been a four hundred year silence for the people of God. They had not heard anything from God since the prophet Malachi. The Jews had been oppressed for centuries by various empires and dispersed throughout the Middle East. They waited for a Messiah to deliver them and lead them again as the Chosen People. Many hoped and believed that this Messiah would return them to the glory days of King David, and be like King David in authority and power. As this new teacher Jesus appeared, he spoke with authority to poor, relatively unschooled people that lived in a hardworking, agriculturally-based world outside the bigger city of Jerusalem. Various Jewish leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and the Sanhedrin) were divided over the proper way to worship God and practice faith. Meanwhile, the Roman empire did not respect their faith at all, and simply wanted them to live quietly and obediently under the thumb of Roman rule.

Mark's audience: Scholars believe that Mark prepared his Gospel primarily for Christians in Rome and Italy around 64 AD. At that point, the Christian community was in great crisis. The Roman emperor at the time was Nero, a brutal tyrant who ruled through intimidation and terror. In the early years of his reign, Christians were relatively ignored. Nero reserved his energies for gaining power and influence within the aristocracy, by whom he was universally hated.

However, the situation for Christians changed radically in 64 AD after a disastrous fire swept through Rome. Of the fourteen wards of the city, only four were spared. Many significant buildings were reduced to rubble and ash, as were three entire wards. Popular resentment of Nero led to rumors that Nero himself had set the fire. Despite efforts on his part to repair the widespread damage, rumors continued, and a scapegoat had to be found. ***Blame for the fire was placed on Christians.***

Tacitus, the renowned Latin historian of the time, wrote this about the persecution:

To suppress this rumor [about Nero setting the fire himself], Nero fabricated scapegoats – and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians – as they were popularly called . . . first, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. (Lane, 14)

He went on further to say that the Christians “were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.”

With this in mind, we now see that Mark’s task was to lay out the Christian faith in a context of suffering and martyrdom. He showed his immediate audience that Jesus faced a situation similar to theirs. This in turn taught them how to proclaim the gospel in light of their situation.

More specifically, it is clear that Mark was especially interested in explaining the nature of Jesus’ messiahship. Right from the beginning we are told that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1:1). Yet soon after it becomes evident that only Jesus seems to know the true nature of his messianic destiny – that of the “suffering servant” referred to in Isaiah 53 (see Mark 1:34, for example).

Studying Mark with your homegroup: To gain anything from this study, it is crucial that we come prepared to our homegroups. Not only will discussion fall flat if we do not come prepared -- we will pass up an opportunity to truly engage and participate in the evening discussion. **Consider reading Mark daily in your devotional reading.** Use the study questions and the study pointers listed below to give you direction in your study.

1st week of Homegroup – we will be starting homegroups a week before sermons begin with the book of Mark. No preparation beforehand is needed that first week. Take time to simply read Mark 1:1-3:6 OUT LOUD, and then give initial impressions.

READING THE BIBLE – the short version

Finally, here are some important considerations to keep in mind when you are reading the Book of Mark – and any other book of the Bible:

- ™ **LANGUAGE:** Underline key words. Look up definitions. Find reoccurring words. Look for contrasts in actions, words and images. Think about the tone of voice that Jesus might have used when speaking. Put yourself in the place of his listeners. Try to envision and enter each situation described.
- ™ **AUDIENCE:** Ask yourself: *Who is Jesus speaking to at each point? His close disciples, the larger crowds, or his opponents?*
- ™ **TRUTH:** Ask yourself: *What theological truth am I learning here about the nature of God? Humankind? Sin? Salvation? The Christian life?*
- ™ **CONTEXT:** Keep in mind that the Gospel of Mark, like the epistles, was written to be read the entire way through. As you read a certain passage, ask yourself: *What precedes it? What follows it?* We must be very careful to not pick apart one passage too much, but rather see it in its context.

INTRODUCTION

- ™ **SO WHAT?:** Carefully ask yourself: *How do we apply this today? How does this shape a Christian worldview? Where else in the Bible can I learn about this issue?*
- ™ **WHAT ABOUT ME?:** *What am I going to do with what I have just learned?*

EXAMPLE OF THE MANUSCRIPT STUDY FORMAT*

(see page 5 for ideas as to how to access a manuscript copy of the Gospel of Mark)

Read the text through once. Write down responses and questions in the margins. Then read the text again slowly, making note of the language used. Perhaps come up with your own simple system of marks. In this example, the following marks were used:

Double underline = what does that word mean?

Circle = reoccurring word

Triangle = any names/titles of God

Square = words indicating location

MARK 1:1-8 (New International Version)

1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" --

3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."

4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. (Why did he do that?)

7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. (Why would he say that? What tone of voice did John have when he said this?)

8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. (Why is there such an emphasis on baptism? Why does he contrast water baptism with baptism in the Holy Spirit?)

(Refer to page 3, under the section titled "Reading the Bible" for ideas as to what else you can look for in the text.)

**Ideas for this method of study were taken directly from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.*

STUDY ONE Mark 1:1-3:6

Jesus and His Disciples

“He’s the greatest guy - you’ve gotta meet him!”
“She’s so much fun – you’ll love her!”

You’ve gone away to college, and are coming home for a long weekend. You’ve got a new roommate, and you two have become great friends quickly. You’ve described her to your family and friends, told a few funny stories, sent home a couple of photos. Everyone’s looking forward to finally meeting her because no one can really know someone without meeting them in person.



The Gospels were written in an attempt to capture the life, power and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospel writers hoped to spark the interest of their readers, and prompt them to ask more questions, pursue further information -- perhaps receive the gift of new life!

This opening passage might seem like a big chunk of Scripture to start off a homegroup study. But if you sat down and read it right now, it would take you . . . about five minutes. Mark’s goal is to grab our attention immediately, to give a concise first impression.

READ THIS IN A NEW WAY – here are some options:

- 1. Try reading in a new translation – perhaps the Message, New Living Translation, or J.B. Phillips’ paraphrase.**
- 2. Go online to <http://bible.gospelcom.net> and print it out – this version does not have paragraph breaks or titles. Allow yourself to respond to the text at first.**
- 3. If you have a Bible software program on your computer, print out this passage in a manuscript format, with wide margins and no verse or chapter references. (See example on page 4 of this style of study).**

Read and mark up the passage as you go. Highlight Jesus’ statements. Notice how people respond to him. Pay attention to location and action -- trace his ministry on a map in the back of your Bible. Make a list of the people we meet here. Look up any words you don’t understand.

What stands out to you in your own reading? Discuss this as a homegroup.

Gordon Fee tells us:

These chapters are an artistic masterpiece, so well constructed that many readers will probably get Mark's point even though not recognizing he has done it.

There are three strands to Jesus' public ministry that are of special interest to Mark: popularity with the crowds, discipleship for the few, and opposition from the authorities. Notice how skillfully, by selecting and arranging narratives, Mark sets these before us. (128)

If you are reading from a manuscript version of the Book of Mark (without chapter, paragraph and verse breaks), try to figure out where separate stories begin and end. Come up with your own title for each one.

Notice how Mark strings these stories and occurrences together to paint a picture of Jesus' ministry. What new things about Jesus do you notice that you never knew before?

Just before Jesus calls the first disciples, Mark tells us the content of Jesus' message. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe." (1:15) The "kingdom of God" (sometimes referred to as "kingdom of heaven" in the Book of Matthew or just "kingdom") indicates God's rule, authority, sovereignty operating in the lives of his people. How do these verses shed light on the nature of this **kingdom**?

Colossians 1:13

Matthew 12:28

Mark 10:13-16

Gordon Fee says that:

One dare not think he or she can properly interpret the Gospels without a clear understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus.
(131)

Fee continues:

Precisely because the kingdom, the time of God's rule, has been inaugurated with Jesus' own coming we are called to *life* in the kingdom, which means life under his lordship, freely accepted and forgiven, but committed to the ethics of the new age [of the Messiah], and to seeing them worked out in our own lives and world in this present age. (133-134)

Some theologians describe this as living in "the now and the not yet." As believers, we have one foot in heaven and one foot on earth. The Apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20 that "our citizenship is in heaven."

Did you experience the tension between your earthly and heavenly citizenship this week? How?

In Mark 1:18, we are told "at once [the disciples] left their nets and followed him." In Greek, the word "followed" is *akoloutheo* (akolouqew). This word is especially used in the Gospels, where it occurred 70 times (with only 10 other uses in the rest of the New Testament). *Akoloutheo* has no parallel in the Old Testament because it is used to describe the unique relationship we have available to us only through Jesus. To *follow* Jesus is to identify with him by accepting his way of life. To follow the call. To become like him. Christian Blendinger, a German theologian, says that "Jesus did not wait for voluntary followers. He called men with divine authority as God himself called the prophets in the Old Testament."¹ Not only this, Blendinger continues, but "one who takes up the new 'calling' gives the old one up."

Consider using this as your weekly dessert question in homegroup, and answer it for yourself this week: How did you *akoloutheo* Jesus this week?

¹ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Zondervan Pub. Co., vol. 1, 1971, p. 482.

SERMON NOTES

STUDY TWO Mark 4:1-33
The Parables of the Kingdom

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)*

Quick. Don't spend too much time thinking about this. What are you praying for (and about) when you pray for these things?

Recall the comment of Gordon Fee in the first study:

One dare not think he or she can properly interpret the Gospels without a clear understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. (131)

Read Mark 4:1-33. Again, try to read it in a new translation, or in manuscript form without paragraph breaks and titles. Write down your impressions. Try to delineate your own paragraphs and sections. Note the details of audience, location, response, etc.

C.H. Dodd tells us that a parable

is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to rouse it into active thought. (Ramm, 276)

Furthermore, Bernard Ramm tells us that a parable is not to be confused with a fable (which is trivial and fantastic), a myth, or a strict allegory (which finds meaning in every single element in the story). A parable relies on a common earthly image from daily life to connect the hearer to eternal truths. (276)

Recall that Jesus taught primarily to people very familiar with farming and agricultural imagery. *Stretch your imagination for a moment: What if Jesus was speaking to us in Santa Barbara today?* Are there some common, earthly images from our life experience that could help to communicate Jesus' points made in these parables?

Bernard Ramm tells us that Jesus used parables

as a method of teaching the *responsive* disciple. . . parables were used by our Lord as instruments of his revelation to those who had ears to hear. Parables contain much that every Christian servant needs to know about the kingdom of God. (277-278)

The second intent of teaching in parables

was to hide the truth from the *unresponsive* and so aid in the hardening of their heart as they continuously rebelled against God. This is the special import of the citation from Isaiah 6 [cf. Mark 4:11-12]. The truth taught in a parable is veiled and so is a test of a person's spiritual responsiveness, of whether he has the spiritual intention to follow through and learn its meaning. (278)

Most Bible translators delineate four separate parables here, that all seem to relate to the kingdom of God (see 4:11, 26). They also build on each other as they enlarge our understanding of the kingdom of God. Before exploring each one, what do you learn about the kingdom here from your initial reading?

Parable of the sower (4:1-20)

Parables of the lamp and the measure (4:21-25)

Parable of the secretly growing seed (4:26-29)

Parable of the mustard seed (4:30-32)

Parable of the Soils: Here we find one of Jesus' most famous parables. We get off to an easy start because we also have his interpretation to guide us! In spite of what was said above concerning parables, Jesus tends to give a mild allegorical interpretation. What does the "seed" represent?

Assuming each soil type is representative of the condition of a person's heart, describe the four types of soil.



Parables of the lamp and the measure: Take a guess -- why do you think Jesus put these two quick metaphors together?

Recall in 1:34 (and 3:12, 5:43, 7:36, 8:30, for a few other examples) that Jesus wanted to keep his true identity hidden in the beginning of his ministry. Theologians call this the "messianic secret." Robert Guelich tells us that, in part, the messianic secret

corresponds to [Mark's] portrait of Jesus as Messiah, Son of God whose true significance could only be grasped in the light of the cross.¹

Don't forget that the Jews expected Messiah to appear as a victorious warrior-king similar to King David, who would conquer their oppressors (at this point, the Roman Empire) and re-establish Israel as the pre-eminent power on earth. Jesus comes as the suffering servant, whose victory will be over sin and death, not mere earthly powers! Since he is going to act in direct conflict with prevailing Jewish expectations, Mark creates tension by showing us how Jesus kept his true identity hidden.

Returning to the brief parables of the lamp and the measure, Jesus appears to be telling us that although his true identity was hidden at that earlier point in his ministry, its full

¹ Robert Guelich, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, InterVarsity Press, 1992, p. 522.

meaning will be revealed soon. A qualification of discipleship will be to participate in revealing this secret!

The parable of the secretly growing seed: Only Mark records this particular parable. The emphasis is really quite different from the parable of the sower. In that parable the importance for growth is on the condition of the soil. Here the seed itself has power for growth and production.

What is this parable trying to tell us about the nature of God's kingdom?

Does God need you, Santa Barbara Community Church, the Harvest Crusade or Westmont College for the expansion of the kingdom? Why or why not?

The parable of the mustard seed: The mustard seed is the smallest seed Jesus' audience is familiar with, and is referred to as the "smallest seed one plants in the ground." Some critics might want to nit-pick and claim scientific inaccuracy. Obviously, Jesus is not giving a lesson in botany. The point of the parable is plain. The kingdom of God (his rule and reign in the lives of individuals) has small and insignificant beginnings, but one day grows into something large and strong. In Palestine the tiny mustard seed grows into a tree-like shrub often over 10 feet tall.

How does this parable help to shape your vision for the work of the kingdom? Your own efforts at ministry and witness?

Think about the persecuted church around the world, which often suffers because she exists in lands such as Afghanistan, India or Saudi Arabia, where other faiths predominate. How could this parable be an encouragement to them? (Think about praying for them at the end of your time together as a homegroup.)

In his book *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, George Ladd provides many instructive insights regarding the kingdom of God:

The biblical idea of the kingdom of God is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. (14)

The parables of the kingdom make it clear that in some sense, the kingdom is present and at work in the world. (18)

The life and fellowship of a Christian church ought to be a fellowship of people among whom God's will is done – a bit of heaven on earth. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” in my life, as it in heaven. (23)

Close with this last prayer, for “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” in our lives, and in Santa Barbara Community Church. Rejoice that we are citizens of the kingdom of God!

SERMON NOTES

STUDY THREE Mark 4:35-5:43
Four Miracles -- One Reality



Plug in “miracle” into a search engine on the internet, and a wide variety of locations turn up:

- The Orlando Miracle > a Women’s NBA professional basketball team
- The Children’s Miracle Network > a site dedicated to children’s hospitals
- Miracle Strip Park > an amusement park in Panama City, Florida
- Miracle-Ear > hearing aid products
- Miracle > a white buffalo born in Montana, apparently considered sacred by some American Indians.

Then there’s *Touched By A Miracle*, a Course in Miracles, Miracle Whip, and *The Miracle on 34th Street* . . . you get the picture. The word “miracle” has been used, misused, and abused. C.S. Lewis, who had much to say about miracles, and even wrote a

book about them titled, simply, *Miracles*, said,

Seeing is not believing. This is the first thing to get clear in talking about miracles. Whatever experiences we may have, we shall not regard them as miraculous if we already hold a philosophy which excludes the supernatural.

The senses are not infallible . . . experience by itself proves nothing. . . The experience of a miracle in fact requires two conditions. First we must believe in a normal stability of nature, which means we must recognize that the data offered by our senses recur in regular patterns. Secondly, we must believe in some reality beyond Nature. (*God in the Dock*, pp 25-27)

Before diving in with the study, record some of your own impressions. Read Mark 4:35-5:43. Hopefully by now you’re developing the habit of looking for key words, statements by Jesus, an awareness of each audience he speaks to, and any other words or questions that stand out. Make note of those here.

In this section Mark recounts for us four miracles but only one reality -- Jesus is truly divine and he has come with power and authority. His power, as God's son, is all encompassing.

Compare each of the four miracles. What is similar? What is different?

Can you imagine what it would have been like to have witnessed one of these miracles! Have some fun. If you could have been present at only one of these miracles, which one would it be? Share with the group why you picked the miracle you did.

TRIUMPH OVER HOSTILE POWERS

Mark 4:35-41

We really don't know why Jesus wanted to go to the other side of the lake. Quite possibly he was simply tired from teaching and the constant crowds. At any rate, during the journey a "furious" storm came up. The Sea of Galilee, because of its geographical location, has frequent storms that are sudden and violent. Lying at the bottom of a deep valley, 680' below sea level, and surrounded by hills and mountains (9,200' Mt. Hermon is not far away) the Sea of Galilee is very susceptible to changes in the atmosphere.

More important, what we see is that Jesus is not only Lord of the kingdom of God, as we studied last week, but also Lord of all creation.

Turn to **Colossians 1:15-20**, and write down all of the qualities listed in regard to the person of God, Jesus Christ.

H.C. Kee, in an article in *New Testament Studies*, points out something significant. The word that Jesus used to cast out a demon in Mark 1:25 is the same word that Jesus uses to calm the storm: *phimoo* (fimow).¹

Turn back to Mark 1:21-28. Note the questions addressed to Jesus by the evil spirit:

“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?”

Kee goes so far as to call both of these miracles (1:21-25 and 4:35-41) “exorcism stories.” He then says that they signify that “Satan’s rule is being threatened by the inbreaking of God’s reign through the ministry of Jesus.” (245) Indeed -- the power of evil will end as the kingdom of God comes! William Lane says that “Jesus addressed the raging storm as a ‘force’ threatening him and his disciples.” (177)

Now re-read Mark 4:35-41, and focus on Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples:

“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

What are you afraid of right now? Where do you lack faith? Do you sense anything evil in those things that threaten you? How do you rely on the authority and reign of Christ in dealing with your fears?

5:1-20 This is a rather eerie story. Since it was evening when they started to cross the lake, it was probably dark or close to it when they arrive at the other side. Suddenly, a demon-possessed madman, naked, who lives in tombs with dead people runs down to your boat as you are about to land! Yikes!

Why is it difficult for modern people to believe in the demonic? Have you ever encountered the demonic?

C.S. Lewis counsels: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” (*The Screwtape Letters*, p. 3) Into which error do you tend to fall? What about SBCC?

¹ Howard Clark Kee, “The Terminology of Mark’s Exorcism Stories,” *New Testament Studies* 14, 1967-1968.

After this tremendous miracle we read in verse 17: “Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.” Why did they do this? What is it about Jesus that frightened them? Do we do the same sort of thing at times? Share with the group the last time you asked Jesus to leave a region of your life. What were you afraid of?

5:25-34 Sandwiched between the report of Jairus' sick daughter and her death is the story of Jesus' healing of the woman with a hemorrhage. We don't really know the exact nature of this woman's illness, only that she had been subject to some sort of bleeding for 12 years! Her desperation compels her to touch, cautiously, (“She came up behind him in the crowd” v. 27) the clothes of Jesus.¹

Jesus knows that “power” had gone out of him (5:30) and asks the seemingly pointless question, “Who touched my clothes?” William Lane explains:

Certainly not every contact with the person of Jesus resulted in a transmission of power. Involved in the situation was not a unilateral event in which touch released power, but a mutual event in which the personal relationship between Jesus and the woman released power. Jesus, therefore, could not allow the woman to recede into the crowd still entertaining ideas tinged with superstition and magic. (193)

It must have taken great courage for the woman to speak up in the crowd, especially since she was regarded as ceremonially unclean due to her issue of blood. The fact that she suffered for twelve years also made her, most likely, a social outcast.

William Lane says that “her touch had brought together two elements -- faith and Jesus -- and that had made it effective. Power had gone forth from Jesus to the woman for the precise reason that she sought healing *from* him.”

Do you need healing from Jesus? How can you, and your homegroup, pray about this?

5:35-43 Jesus chooses to do this miracle with a more intimate group. The only people present are Jairus, his wife, and the three disciples, Peter, James and John.

How is this miracle different from the others we have looked at? Is it more spectacular?

¹ The word translated “healed” is *sesoken* which more literally means “saved”. When Mark uses this word he has in mind both physical healing and spiritual salvation. For Mark the two are closely intertwined (cf. 2:1-12).

What does Mark hope his readers will understand about Jesus after reading these four miracles?

A worship song titled *God of Wonders* speaks to some of the issues we studied this week:

*Lord of all creation,
Of water, earth, and sky
The heavens are Your tabernacle
Glory to the Lord on high*

*Early in the morning,
I will celebrate the light
When I stumble in the darkness
I will call Your name by night.*

*God of wonders, beyond our galaxy
You are holy, holy
The universe declares Your majesty
You are holy, holy*

*Lord of heaven and earth
Lord of heaven and earth*

*God of wonders, beyond our galaxy
You are holy holy
Precious Lord, reveal your love to me
Father, holy, holy*

End in praise that we worship the God of Wonders!

SERMON NOTES

STUDY FOUR Mark 6:1-54

The Training of the Twelve

Erik Weihenmayer has scaled Mts. Kilimanjaro, McKinley, Aconcagua and El Capitan. On May 25, 2001, he scaled Mt. Everest. Erik Weihenmayer is blind. How does he do it? With great support from a team of climbers, and with great practice. In preparing for his climb on Everest, he crossed the particularly difficult Khumbu icefall over ten times, each time practicing and learning. The first time he crossed it, it took him 13 hours. The last time, it took him 5 hours, which is the average time for any expert sighted climber.



Training. Preparation. Discipline. Goal setting. Practice. All of these things come into play as we prepare for a new endeavor or challenge that requires great effort.

“Disciple” in the Greek is *mathetes*, which comes from the verb *manthano*, “to learn.” It indicates thought, accompanied by endeavor.

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:17-18)

Recall in Study One we looked at the verb *akoloutheo*, “to follow,” and its unique meaning in the New Testament: ***To identify with someone by accepting their way of life. To follow the call. To become like them.***

In Mark 6:1, we find *akoloutheo* again, as his disciples followed Jesus into his hometown. The emphasis in chapter 6 falls on the training of Jesus' disciples. In both miracles, the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water, Mark wants us to focus on the response of the disciples and not so much on the miracles themselves. Read the chapter from this angle, asking yourself two questions:

- ™ How is Jesus training his disciples?
- ™ What is the content of their training?

Before you start, take a few moments and write down some thoughts. How have you been discipled? If you have discipled others – how did you go about it? Are there things you wished you had learned earlier?

In verses 1-6 Jesus goes back to his hometown and, as he often did, began to teach in the synagogue.¹ This is most likely the first time the folks in Jesus' hometown heard him teach. Mark tells us they were “amazed.” They were also incredulous. Eugene Peterson's paraphrase helps us get a feel for the scene.

On the Sabbath, he gave a lecture in the meeting place. He made a real hit, impressing everyone. “We had no idea he was this good!” they said. “How did he get so wise all of a sudden, get such ability?” But in the next breath they were cutting him down: “He's just a carpenter - Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?” They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further. (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, 85)

At the end of verse 3 Mark says *they took offense* at him. The Greek word is *skandalizomai* from which we get the English word *scandal*. Different translators have struggled to get the sense of the word: *are repelled* (Moffat), *fall away* (RSV), *stumble* (ASV), *fell foul of him* (NEB). The basic idea is that someone is offended to the point of abandoning.

Why do you think those in Jesus' hometown had a hard time accepting him? Can you relate to this situation yourself?

In the presence of this animosity it seems that Jesus is restricted in his miracle working activity. Craig Keener comments:

That Jesus is “unable” to do works because of their unbelief presumes a limitation not of his power but of his mission: to heal without morally directed faith would be to act like the pagan magicians of antiquity. (149)

If we think back through the miracles that we have already seen in Mark we will remember that one of his great emphases is that Jesus performs miracles in response to faith. Do we pray for miracles? Why or why not?

¹ While Nazareth is not specifically mentioned here it seems obvious that this is the location being referred to as "hometown." Even though Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he had been brought up in and his family continued to live in Nazareth.

In verses 6-13 we see the beginning of short-term missions. Notice that Jesus does not begin by explaining to his disciples how to write a support letter! Make a simple list of Jesus' instructions to his disciples.¹

Make note of what sorts of ministry the disciples performed in verses 12-13. What stands out to you?

Jesus sends out his disciples “two by two.” You find this same principle of team or group ministry at work throughout the Gospels and the book of Acts. Why do you think this is the case? Is this how you function? SBCC?

Mark then moves into a surprisingly lengthy digression about John the Baptist. In the grisly story of John's death we see that he lost his life, in part, because he offended Herod by condemning his adulterous relationship with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. To what extent should we play the role of John the Baptist in Santa Barbara with the people we meet? What might it cost us?

¹ Why should the disciples “shake the dust off” their feet if their message was not received? Lane clarifies what is happening: “It was the custom of pious Jews who had traveled outside of Israel to remove carefully from their feet all dust of the alien lands in which they had traveled. By this action they dissociated themselves from the pollution of those lands and their ultimate judgement. An analogous action on the part of the disciples would declare that a village was pagan in character.” (Lane, 208)

Chapter 6 ends with two of the more famous miracles of Jesus: the feeding of the 5000 and his walking on the water at the Sea of Galilee. Utilize the habits you have developed in your reading of Mark: (See pages 3-5 of this study guide)

- Read it in manuscript form.
- Note what stands out -- new details, puzzling statements, powerful moments.
- Pay close attention to every person portrayed: their responses, their words, their efforts.

As you read this section notice how the focus is on the disciples: their response and participation in the miracles. Jesus is training these men in the work of the kingdom. What we have is really a seminary, first century style!

Notice Jesus' directives to them:

"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." (v. 31)

"You give them something to eat." (v. 37)

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (v. 50)

What do we learn about faith and ministry from these firm words? How could you apply them this week?

After Jesus climbed into the boat, Mark tells us:

[The disciples] were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. (verses 51b-52)

Walter Wessel helps us to understand this:

Had they understood about the loaves, i.e., that the sovereign Lord of the universe was in action there, they would have been prepared to understand walking on water and calming waves. Their problem was a christological one. Not unlike Jesus' opponents, "their hearts were hardened." (676)

In discussion and prayer, ask one another:

"In what areas of your life is your heart hardened toward Jesus?"

"Are you not looking for and seeing his sovereignty in the world? Why or why not?"

SERMON NOTES

STUDY FIVE Mark 7:1-37

Confrontation with the Pharisees

Freddy Zamoran is a missionary in Nicaragua. His ministry is amazing and extensive – a modern-day Apostle Paul in Central America! However, his seventeen-year old daughter Marisol is clearly a missionary in her own right as well. After participating in an Awana club here in the U.S. at the ages of 10 and 12, she and her older sister Violeta decided to start a similar outreach club to the youth in their community outside the capital city of Managua, all on their own! Forty to fifty teens from the neighborhood, primarily unbelievers, were convening in their living room each Friday night for games, songs and a message about Jesus.

The group got so big they had to move it to a local church. What happened after that? Several people started complaining about the students that were hanging out in the building: the girls wore pants and earrings, the boys were loud - some of them even smoked. They asked, “Why are these kids looking like this? Don’t they understand they shouldn’t look like that if they go to church?”

Too often Christians “shoot their own.” Despite the very real struggles we face from the evil one, we can be easily discouraged by the bitterness and infighting that exists among fellow believers. It is often alienating, and can make one very cynical.

Jesus encountered the greatest resistance in his ministry from those that had the same goals as he did -- both Jesus and the Pharisees wanted to see God’s covenant relationship with Israel lived out in fullness.

Read Mark 7:1-37. Note any confusing words or images here, or make extensive notes on your manuscript copy of the text. Don’t forget to note the different stories and sections, how they are used, and any dialogue that Jesus has with others, along with the responses of his observers.

After the feeding of the 5000, the popularity of Jesus undoubtedly soared. The hope of free food had a lot of people wanting to join this movement! His increasingly high profile coupled with his unusual teachings was a cause for concern in Jerusalem. Accordingly, the religious authorities sent a second fact-finding delegation of Pharisees and teachers of the law (the first group came in 3:22) to investigate what was going on in Galilee.

Note vv. 1-23. Obviously this group was not thinking about hygiene.¹ Their concern centers around the “tradition of the elders” (v. 3). Wessel give us some background:

This ['tradition of the elders'] consisted in a great mass of oral tradition that had arisen about the law. About A.D. 200 it was written down in the Mishnah, but in Jesus' day was still in oral form. Its purpose was to regulate a man's life completely. If the law was silent or vague about a particular subject, one could be sure that the tradition would be vocal and explicit. The tradition, created and promulgated by the great rabbis, was passed on from one generation to the next and was considered binding. (678)

Jesus responds by applying Isaiah's prophecy of judgment to them! This was not a good way to make friends. His concern was with the condition of a person's heart, while theirs was with externals.

Think through your faith. How do you tend to *let go of the commandments of God* and hold on to some contemporary traditions? Does SBCC do this?

Jesus is fairly tough on the disciples, asking them why they are so *dull* (v. 18).² It must have been quite a shock to the disciples to hear that external things don't defile a person. What makes a person unclean comes from within, out of the heart.

What sort of external things do you do in your life that make you think you are spiritually clean? How can you avoid this tendency?



¹ Since Mark is writing to Gentile readers who may not understand what is going on here, he adds an explanatory parenthesis in verses 3-4.

² Eugene Peterson's paraphrase gets to the point: “Are you being willfully stupid?”

Read verses 24-30. Tyre was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, northwest of Galilee in Phoenicia, which is present day Lebanon.

What do you find encouraging about this woman's faith?

The more we study Scripture the more we notice the little things. These little things often lead us to bigger, important truths. Try to find Tyre (most Bibles have some sort of maps in the back). Closer study will tell you that traveling to Tyre took Jesus out of wholly Jewish territory. Furthermore, Tyre was a city of importance, associated with an empire and a former enemy of Israel.

Jesus appears to be alone here in Tyre. In fact, we don't really know why he was there. Perhaps he just wanted to be alone for awhile! Right away however, in verse 24, we see that this is not possible. Jewish crowds followed him everywhere.

The woman that Jesus encounters is described as Greek. Donald English tells us:

The description as *Greek* must be understood religiously, not nationally. She is a pagan, not a Jew, is the point. In relation to Jewish traditional practices she is breaking all the rules, hence one link with the previous story. (148)

To make a play on the trendy bracelet of our age, "What will Jesus do?" He's opposed by his own religious leaders, doubted by his family, followed often for the wrong reasons, endlessly pressed by crowds, and recognized by evil spirits. Now he is faced with a desperate, pagan woman.

Jesus' response is intriguing. "First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take children's bread and toss it to their dogs."¹ This does not seem kind in the least, and very unlike the Jesus most of us picture in our heads. Can you guess as to a reason for his response?

¹ Verse 27 is difficult. Some see it as a metaphor contrasting Israel as *children* and Gentiles as *dogs*. Rejecting this view Lane comments, "On the contrary, he alludes to a current domestic scene, particularly in a Hellenistic household. The table is set and the family is gathered. It is inappropriate to interrupt the meal and allow the household dogs to carry off the children's bread." (262)

Jesus is making a theological point with profound implications. Recall that right at the start of Mark we are given Jesus' "mission statement":

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15)

The woman presses her request to Jesus (vs. 28) in spite of his cold response to her; he tells her,

"For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

Jesus shows that the kingdom of God, which is near, will be open to anyone -- not just the Jews! This is great news, even though we may not hear it with our 21st century ears. What we do see in this entire chapter, however, is that Jesus will flout society's boundaries and conventions for the sake of the kingdom. He refuses to dwell within traditional religious expectations merely for their own sake.

We see that Christ will cross national, religious, gender and societal boundaries. As Donald English says,

The Christian church must see herself as committed to breaking down barriers which prolong human need or prevent the needy from being helped. One does not necessarily agree with another person's theology, nationhood, life style, nor outlook by meeting their need. One simply shows the love of God to another human being. The world needs to see Christians following their Master more clearly at this point. (150)

How are you practicing this in your life now? Are you encouraged or overwhelmed by this insight? Why?

The healing of the deaf and mute man, verses 31-37, is a story unique to Mark's Gospel. Again, Jesus shows his authority. This miracle is somewhat different in that Jesus did more than just lay hands on him. Wessel comments that, "Here his actions seem to be done to help the man exercise faith -- the fingers placed in his ears apparently indicate they were to be unblocked and the saliva on the tongue indicates it was going to be restored to normal use." (684)

The result of the miracle was that the people were *overwhelmed*. The word means “beyond measure” or “in the extreme.”

As we have gone through Mark we have already seen many miracles. Admittedly this is not the same as being there in person, but, nevertheless, how do you find yourself responding? Are you overwhelmed at the power and authority of Jesus?

As a group, talk through what your response should be . . . then respond!

SERMON NOTES

STUDY SIX Mark 8:1-38

Jesus Challenges the Disciples

One of the hardest things to do when reading a Gospel is to *not* read it with preconceived notions. We all have our own mental pictures of Jesus, perhaps culled from years of Sunday school posters and bad paintings. It is challenging to not subconsciously approach each story with a “been there, done that” attitude.

“I remember reading this as a kid . . . I already know the point of this story . . . ”

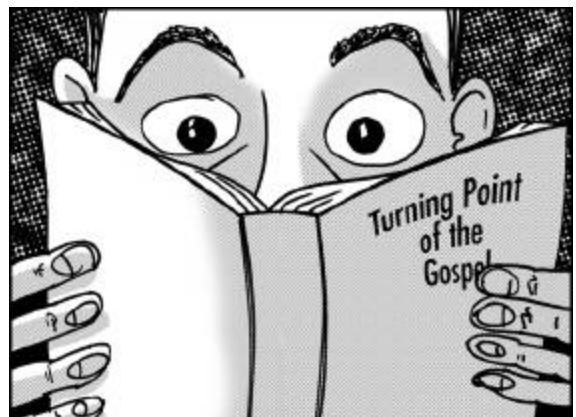
Furthermore, we already know the end of this story before we even begin reading. Do you realize that that almost never happens when you read any other book? In fact, that is often what motivates us to read until the end . . . Will Frodo actually finish his quest and destroy the Ring? Will Romeo and Juliet’s families accept their marriage? Will Charlie finally find the Golden Ticket?

At this point in our study of Mark, we have a great opportunity to try out what it must have been like for one of his original readers. The Gospels were written to encourage new believers and, more importantly, to preach to the unsaved; in other words, for those that have never read a Gospel book, they do not know “the rest of the story.” For them, Mark creates plot tension. There is a distinct plot structure in the Gospel of Mark; it appears that he strung the stories and events together in such a way that would compel his readers to think, “What’s next?”

While almost all scholars differ in regard to the specifics of this structure, all would agree to a few basic things. Obviously, Jesus is the protagonist! David Rhoads and Donald Michie, in an intriguing book titled *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, go on to say:

One way to look at plot is to see the ways in which options narrow or expand as the plot develops. The plot of Mark fits well Aristotle’s definition of a story having a beginning, middle, and an end: at the beginning, many things are possible; in the middle, the possibilities narrow; and at the end, everything seems necessary and inevitable. (74)

This study’s section is widely considered to be the middle, the “hinge,” the turning point in the Gospel. By the end of chapter eight, Jesus will start speaking clearly and openly about his death, and that to follow him will demand great sacrifice. In turn, he will soon begin his “death march” toward Jerusalem.



Take a little extra time this week to review the previous studies. Try to come up with a summary statement of what you learned about Jesus from each study.

STUDY ONE:

STUDY TWO:

STUDY THREE:

STUDY FOUR:

STUDY FIVE:

Read Mark 8:1-38. Keep in mind that in the midst of the constant presence of crowds, Jesus was seeking to train his disciples. As we have seen already, they often didn't get the point. Many times they are afraid when Jesus manifests his miracle working power. They need to have his teachings explained again and again. Mark has already commented several times that they had "hard hearts." In chapter 8, Jesus continues his Kingdom work, teaching and showing his authority through miracles. The thread, however, that runs through this chapter is his challenges to the disciples. It is time to grow up and see Jesus for who he is. Notice how Jesus is challenging his followers.

Compassion is always a hallmark of Jesus' ministry. In this case it is because a "large crowd" had been with him for 3 days with nothing to eat! Can you imagine skipping even one meal to listen to your favorite Bible teacher? Jesus' magnetism and teaching authority must have really been impressive! The feeding of the four thousand is in many ways quite similar to the feeding of the five thousand we saw in 6:30-44. It does seem odd in some ways that Mark would include both feedings.

Contrast the two feedings – similarities & differences:

Mark 6:31-44

Mark 8:1-9

Keep in mind the plot structure idea discussed at the beginning. How is this miracle itself a challenge for the disciples to wake up?

The miracle is followed by a discussion about yeast and bread. Jesus warns them to “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (v. 15). What is going on with all this talk about bread and yeast? Wessel gives us some help:

Here, as generally in Scripture, yeast is a symbol of evil; and, only a very small amount of it is necessary to leaven a loaf of bread, so evil has a permeating power. Here the yeast of the Pharisees clearly refers to their desire for a sign from God to validate the action of Jesus. The yeast of Herod is mentioned because he too (cf. Luke 23:8) desired a sign, Jesus is warning his disciples not to make the same mistake the Pharisees and Herod did. He is appealing to them to understand that the authority he possesses cannot be proved by a sign. Only by faith can they recognize him as the bringer of God's salvation. (689)

There seems to be two reasons for the disciples' lack of understanding:

1. hard hearts (v. 17)
2. poor memory (v. 18)

Think through the relationship between a hard heart and not remembering what God has done. Next to those two reasons listed above, write down some practical things than a believer can do to remedy a hard heart and a poor memory.

The healing of the blind man (vv. 22-26) is an incident which is only recorded in Mark's Gospel.¹ There are two aspects of this miracle that are unusual. The first is that Jesus took the man outside the village to perform the healing.² The second is the fact that the miracle takes place in two stages. *Could it be that Mark places this story here to anticipate the opening of the eyes of the disciples?*

¹ Bethsaida is located on the east bank of the Jordan River, where it flows into the Sea of Galilee.

² Wessel comments: “Most of the miracles in Mark were done in public. Only on three occasions did Jesus withdraw from the people to heal: viz., the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:35-43), where Jesus' motive is clearly to rid himself of the commotion caused by the professional mourners; the healing of the deaf mute (7:31-37), where Jesus wanted to establish a personal contact with the man to help his faith; and the present incident, where the motive seems to be the same as in the healing of the deaf mute.” (691)

Beginning in verse 27 we come to a pivotal section in Mark's Gospel, the "hinge" on which this book turns dramatically. Through his miraculous power and authoritative teaching, Jesus has been challenging the disciples to recognize him as "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (v. 1:1). Now he poses the question to them directly: "Who do people say that I am?"¹ The disciples respond with several popular opinions: John the Baptist, Elijah (returned or revived) or possibly one of the prophets. Jesus is direct and to the point. He is not really concerned with popular opinion as such. What he really wants to know is what they think.

His use of *hymeis* ("you"), the emphatic pronoun, is particularly important. The NIV catches this nuance by repeating the "you": "But what about you? . . . Who do you say I am?" In other words Jesus is asking, "Who do you, my most intimate and trusted friends -- in contrast to the other people who neither know me or understand me -- think I am?" (693)

When Peter calls Jesus the "Christ," what is he saying? Share with the group what brought you to a place where you could answer the question as Peter did.

Re-read 8:31-38. Chapter 8 ends with a startling challenge to his disciples. Jesus must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die and on the third day rise again. (8:31-9:1). Up to this point this had not been clearly stated. Put yourself in the place of the disciples. You've been struggling to understand Jesus and now, after you think you've gotten it (8:29), he really throws you for a loop! It is certainly not what they expected.²

Jesus lists what will be required of himself, and what will be required of his true disciples. Make a list here:

Jesus, the Christ, the Son of Man

True Disciples

¹ Jesus led his disciples about 25 miles north of Bethsaida to Caesarea Philippi, a center for pagan worship.

² From this point forward Jesus uses his favorite expression to refer to himself, "Son of Man," with increasing frequency. The title occurs 81 times in the NT and 14 times in Mark. It is clearly a messianic title. The most helpful OT text that sheds light on it, is Daniel 7:13-14. Wessel says, "This passage, depicting the Son of Man as a heavenly figure who at the end of time brings the kingdom to the oppressed on earth, is especially reflected in the sayings of Jesus in Mark's Gospel that speak of the coming of the Son of Man 'in his Father's glory with the holy angels' (8:38, 13:26, 14:62)." (694)

Lane points out that, “Jesus has called his own disciples to the realization that suffering is not only his destiny but theirs.” (306) What Jesus is really saying is that he, not the self, must be at the center of life. Think through how this is a fundamental reorientation to how most people live their lives. In practical terms to what is Jesus calling his disciples?

In 8:34 we run into *akoloutheo* (follow) again. Recall that we have already done some study on this in Study One. There we were given a powerful definition:

Akoloutheo means to *follow* Jesus . . . to identify with him by accepting his way of life. To follow the call. To become like him. Christian Blending, a German theologian, says that “Jesus did not wait for voluntary followers. He called men with divine authority as God himself called the prophets in the Old Testament.”¹ Not only this, but “one who takes up the new ‘calling’ gives the old one up.”

Verse 35 expands on this definition:

“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

In what ways have you lost your life in Christ? Give some specific, practical examples. What have you gained?

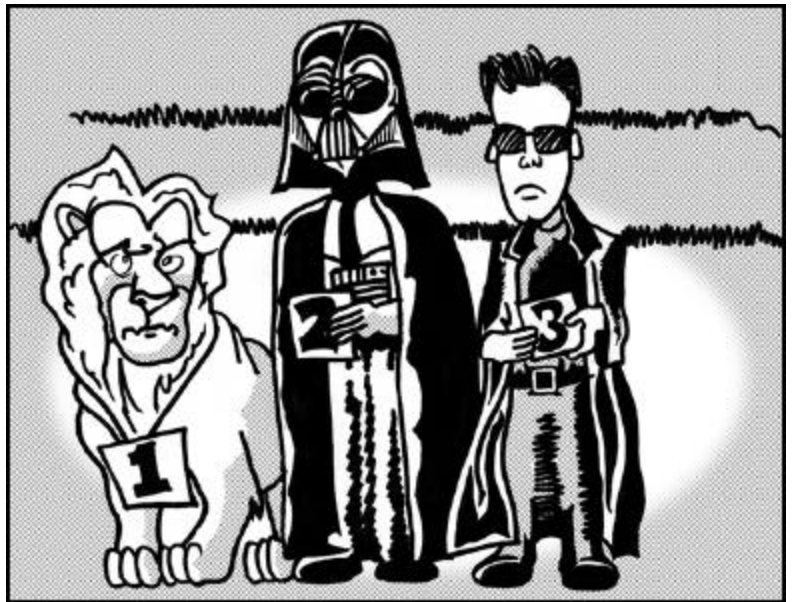
Think about memorizing, as a group, Mark 8:34-35 this week. Spend some time as a homegroup praying through Mark 8:31-38. Open with praise and thanksgiving, confess your sin, and pray about the many amazing claims and challenges given in this passage.

¹ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Zondervan Pub. Co., vol. 1, 1971, p. 482.

SERMON NOTES

STUDY SEVEN Mark 9:1-50
The Transfiguration -- and Transformation

Jean Valjean. . . Simba. . . Jay Gatsby
. . . Neo. . . Darth Vader. . . The plots of countless classic books and movies have hinged on mistaken identity, or on a key character revealing/discovering his true identity and calling. (EXTRA CREDIT: Can you think of any others?)



Sometimes the audience is clued in early on; sometimes not. In Mark 1:1, we are told,

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Though we learn of the “true identity” of Jesus right at the beginning (unlike his disciples), we also learn right along with them, in many ways, as Jesus’ character, calling and ministry unfold before us.

In chapter 9 of Mark, Jesus’ true identity is revealed to his closest disciples. In verse one the disciples are told,

“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

Indeed. Six days later, he takes his three closest disciples up to a high mountain, and gives them a glimpse of his glory.

Read 9:1-50. This section is thick with moving, powerful episodes. Read it carefully, and enjoy how our vision of Jesus continues to expand!

“After six days,” in verse two, suggests a historical rendering of this event, and not some legend that was concocted to elevate our view of Jesus. Regarding the Transfiguration, Donald English tells us that:

Mark . . . is saying that something took place which transcended normal experience. The mountain, in the Bible, is the place of divine revelation (Moriah and the sacrifice of Isaac averted, Gen. 22; Sinai and the giving of the law, Ex. 19; Horeb and reassurance for Elijah, 1 Kings 19). The cloud stands for the divine presence (Ex. 13:21; 19:9; 33:9). The brightness of Jesus’ garments is reminiscent of the Shekinah glory, the divine presence in a pillar of fire. All these images were part of the three disciples’ heritage. (164)

“Transfigured” in the Greek is *metamorphoo* (metamorfow); *meta* = change, *morphe* = form. This word is used only four times in the New Testament (twice in reference to Christ, and twice in reference to believers). All are written in the “passive” tense in Greek, which denotes an action *enacted upon* the subject by a force outside of it. In Romans 12:2, the same verb is used, and we are told,

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Under the power of God we can undergo a complete change in character and conduct. In other words, we do not simply copy Christ’s model; rather, we are changed to become like him!

How have you been *transformed* by Christ? Be prepared to share this with the group.

Contrast the words of God about his Son here in 9:7 with the words spoken to him in 1:11. Note the similarities and differences.

Why did the disciples inquire about Elijah (cf. Mal. 4:5-6)? Jesus gives an answer that in Mark’s Gospel doesn’t seem entirely clear. See Matthew 17:4-13 for some help.

In verses 14-32 we find the last exorcism story in Mark. Upon returning from the Transfiguration, Jesus, Peter, James and John find the rest of the disciples in a dispute with the teachers of the law. Evidently the argument centered around a boy possessed by a demon. Much to their chagrin, the disciples had been unsuccessful in casting out this particular demon.

Upset at the situation, Jesus responds, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I stay with you?” Verse 19 seems to be a reference to the disciples. As William Lane says,

Jesus’ poignant cry of exasperation is an expression of weariness which is close to heartbreak . . . The lack of faith and hardness of heart reproved on other occasions (4:40; 6:50, 52; 8:17-21) continued to characterize the disciples and betrayed a costly failure to understand the nature of their task and of the relationship that they must sustain to Jesus. (332)

Later, after Jesus had cast out the demon, the disciples ask: “Why couldn't we drive it out?” (v. 28) Wessel comments, “Apparently they had taken for granted the power given them or had come to believe that it was inherent in themselves. So they no longer depended prayerfully on God for it, and their failure showed in their lack of prayer.” (704)

What was Jesus teaching the disciples through this miracle?

At first glance, this next section contains a unique dialogue. Before continuing, jot down your immediate, gut-level reactions to some of the words exchanged.

“But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” (v. 22)

“‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.” (v. 23)

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (v. 24)

Donald English sheds some light on them:

Does Jesus' "*Everything is possible for him who believes*" mean, "I Jesus, can do everything because of the amount or quality of my faith," or "Everything is possible to you if only you had that amount or quality of faith," or "Everything is possible if you have faith in what I can do for you," placing the emphasis not upon the degree of faith but upon the relationship of trust between the man and Jesus? . . . The emphasis then is not on the quality of our faith but on the power of the Master with whom we are joined by faith. What is more, within that relationship there is room for our faith to grow. We are not left on our own. (168)

Where does your faith need to grow? How can God help your unbelief?

It must have been embarrassing to be caught in a conversation like the one found in verses 33-36. Think of the recent events: Peter's confession of Christ, the Transfiguration, the healing of a boy with a demon and now Jesus' disciples are arguing about who will be number one! Frustrated with their selfishness Jesus takes the posture of a rabbi, "sitting down" (v. 35), and teaches them about humility and being a servant. They must have felt like jerks given their conversation!

Notice how this kingdom ethic is a complete reversal of worldly values. Think through your life. Where are you attempting to be *last*? As a group, brainstorm how this servant mentality can be lived out in a dog-eat-dog world. What would it look like at work? school? SBCC? (Read Philippians 2:1-11 for additional insight.)

It was probably humiliating for the disciples to find someone casting out demons in Jesus' name immediately after their failure (vv. 38-41). Mark is showing us in this brief account that the work of the kingdom is not the exclusive territory of the twelve. Do these verses say anything about the unity of the church in our era? Should we hold back criticism of others whose style we don't like? At what point is criticism appropriate?

In verses 43-50 the main point is that discipleship has demanding requirements.¹ Radical steps must be taken to remove what would prevent one from following Jesus and from living the life of the kingdom. Failure to perform this spiritual surgery, Jesus says, may result in your being in danger of “hell.” Have you had to recently “cut off your foot” or “pluck out your eye”? What did you do?

End your time together discussing how to support each other in these demands of discipleship. Pray over Galatians 6:1-2 and Hebrews 10:23-25. Ask God to *transform* you!

¹ Verse 49 is very difficult to understand. One commentator counted over a dozen distinct interpretations! If the Holy Spirit has told you what it means, share it with the group; otherwise its interpretation will probably remain obscure.

SERMON NOTES

STUDY EIGHT Mark 10:1-52

The Ethics of the Kingdom

We have already spent eight weeks in the Book of Mark. May your knowledge and relationship with Christ be deepened as you examine his life in depth, perhaps for the first time!

Before you begin the study, write down sentences, phrases, words or concepts that are new to you out of this study as a church in the Book of Mark.

The Gospel of Mark built to a powerful crescendo at the end of chapter eight, but that does not mean the action wanes in the least. From this point, the path of Jesus and his disciples makes a radical turn toward Jerusalem and his openly predicted death. We sense that the disciples are more confused than ever, and the pressure from the crowds only intensifies.

Even after a quick reading of this week's text, one cannot miss the strong emotions flying within and around Jesus at this point:

- When Jesus saw this, he was *indignant*. (vs. 14)
- Jesus looked at him and *loved* him. (vs. 21)
- At this the man's face fell. He went away *sad*. (vs. 22)
- The disciples were *amazed* at his words. (vs. 24)
- The disciples were *even more amazed*. . . (vs. 26)
- The disciples were *astonished*, while those who followed were *afraid*. (vs. 32)
- When the ten heard about this, they became *indignant* with James and John. (vs. 41)

Read this week's study in manuscript form (without paragraph breaks and titles). Once again, you can find this at <http://bible.gospelcom.net> if need it. Look for key words, especially the emotional ones listed above, along with key statements and actions. Try to discern the breaks in the stories and sections on your own.

What do you think Mark is doing with these passages as he put them together?

Recall Gordon Fee in Study One:

These chapters are an artistic masterpiece, so well constructed that many readers will probably get Mark's point even though not recognizing he has done it.

There are three strands to Jesus' public ministry that are of special interest to Mark: popularity with the crowds, discipleship for the few, and opposition from the authorities. Notice how skillfully, by selecting and arranging narratives, Mark sets these before us. (128)

Mark 10 highlights these three strands to a remarkable degree:

- Popularity with the crowds
- Discipleship for the few
- Opposition from the authorities

How do you see these strands in this week's text? What are the implications of these encounters between Jesus and others?

Now let us address some of the specifics that we encounter here. In verses 1-12, the Pharisees try to pick a theological fight with Jesus, and with a topic that is still contentious in 2002! Donald English comments,

As so often, Jesus cuts through the discussion of details or the points of legal declarations, and points to the heart of the matter, God's will and purpose (compare Mt. 5:21-48). . . The real question is the positive one, namely, "What did God intend by giving marriage in the first place?" (173)

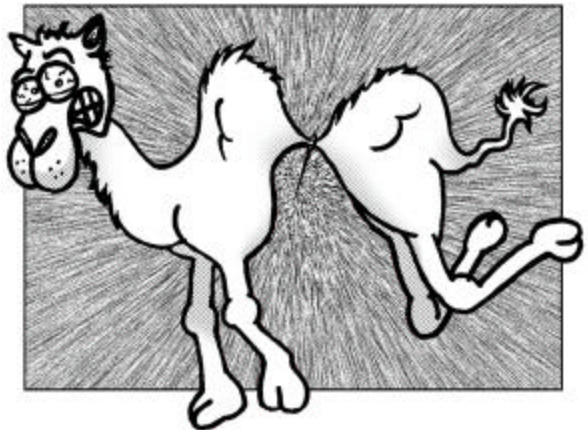
The issue of divorce is an emotional and volatile subject for many people today, and certainly for Christians. How does Jesus' teaching here respond to that question?

Be careful not to allow your conversation in homegroup to go off into tangents at this point. If confusion arises, or just strong responses and reactions, take time to pray over this passage.

The next two sections, little children and Jesus (vv. 13-16) and the rich young man (v. 17-31) both concern entrance into the Kingdom of God. When Jesus realized what the disciples were doing with the children he became “indignant” (v. 14). What is the relationship between children and the Kingdom of God to which Jesus was pointing (v. 14)? Does this mean we should be naive or simple in our faith?

The story of the rich young man is one of the more famous encounters that Jesus has.¹ The discussion brings up the issue of faith and wealth. What is Jesus’ concern here?

Do you think Jesus would say these words to all rich people or just to this particular man? Do you see yourself as “rich”? Is it harder for a rich person to be a Christian? Why? (cf. 1 Timothy 6:6-10)



Lane points out,

The reference to the camel and the needle are to be taken literally, for the disciples’ reaction in verse 26 stems from a statement of real impossibility. The camel was the largest animal found on Palestinian soil. The violent contrast between the largest animal and the smallest opening express what, humanly speaking is impossible or absurd. (369)

Why is it so difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom?

¹ Luke calls him a “ruler” (18:18) which means most likely he was a ruler of some official council or court.

Often in Mark we have seen the cost of following Jesus. In vv. 29-31 we find a promise. Is this a comfort to you? Explain how you have “left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields” for your relationship with Christ.

In verses 32-34 we find Jesus' third major prediction of his death and resurrection (8:31 and 9:31 are the other two). Why does he keep predicting his death? Do the disciples understand all of this yet (cf. Luke 18:34)?

Gordon Fee tells us:

Mark's concern [for] the suffering servant nature of Jesus' messiahship is even more evident from the fact that he does not include any of Jesus' teaching of discipleship until *after* the first explanation of his own suffering in 8:31-33. The implication, as well as the explicit teaching, is clear. The cross and servanthood that Jesus experienced are also the marks of genuine discipleship. (120)

Recall the audience that Mark was speaking to -- Christians in Rome suffering incredibly under the persecution of Nero. How would these references to suffering have ministered to them? How do they speak to the suffering church today? How do they speak to us?

Read 10:35-52 together again as a group. Be creative -- select different homegroup members to read the different characters' words. Let yourselves go -- perhaps even act it out in the living room! Get a sense of the powerful demands being made on Jesus, and the widely divergent responses to his teachings and actions.

Make note of how both of these stories are held together by one question:

What do you want me to do for you?

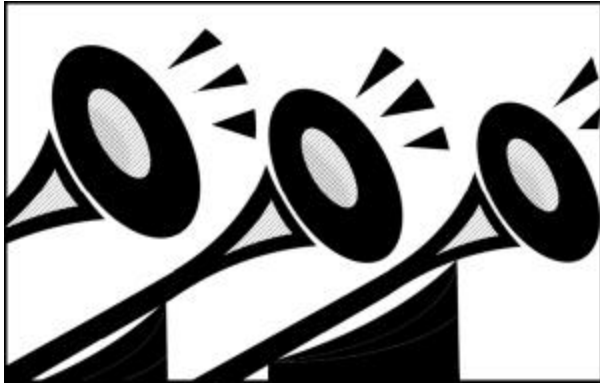
Contrast the responses of James and John with that of Bartimaeus, and then contrast how Jesus responds so differently in each situation.

What do you learn from these contrasts? Does anything personally strike you?

End with a return to verses 43-45, and pray over them as a group, building off of what you learned from tonight's study. Pray that the suffering servant would teach us his ways!

SERMON NOTES

STUDY NINE Mark 11:1-33
The Last Week in Jerusalem Begins



A Grand Entrance . . . think about the grandeur, the spectacle, the preparation that goes into the entrance of any important dignitary or figure into a public setting. “Hail to the Chief,” “O Britannia,” national anthems, marching bands, large flags whipping around, military troops standing at precise attention, red carpets, hundreds of security personnel, large crowds standing on tiptoe – any number of

these things are automatically put into place when the important person arrives. Even sports teams receive a massive parade when they return to their hometown triumphantly with their national championship title!

In Mark 11, we read what is traditionally known as “The Triumphal Entry” into Jerusalem, and is celebrated yearly on the church calendar as Palm Sunday.

While there is a great deal of hoopla at this entrance, you will notice that Jesus is singularly unimpressed. His gaze is fixed on one thing – the cross.

In preparation for this study, take a little extra time and read all four Gospel accounts of this entry into Jerusalem. Make note of similarities and qualities unique to each account:

Matt. 21:1-9

Mark 11:1-10

Luke 19:28-40

John 12:12-29

Donald English contrasts the four briefly, with his emphasis on Mark:

The different intentions of all four Gospel writers come out clearly in their account of the entry into Jerusalem . . . Mark simply tells the story without comment, yet the way he tells it provides another perspective. . . For Mark it is the lowliness and humility of the entry into Jerusalem which matters, not its triumphal nature. It is a kingship of hidden majesty, of humble power to save. (184-185)

It is striking how the pace of the Gospel changes dramatically with this entry into Jerusalem. Chapters one through ten were Mark's summary of the last *three years* of Jesus' ministry. He then devotes chapters eleven through sixteen (at least one-third of the Gospel) to the final *week* of his earthly ministry! Clearly, he is underscoring the most significant portion of Jesus' life and work. His confrontations with the opposition (especially the Pharisees) will reach a fever pitch; his relationships with those closest to him – the disciples – will come to a head; and at the end of the week, he will die a horrific death! Mark has definitely saved the best for last.

As the chapter begins, Jesus sends two of his disciples to the village ahead to get a colt. Read Zechariah 9:9 for background.

In light of this text, what is the significance of the colt that Jesus rides in to Jerusalem? ¹

It is difficult to know exactly what was in the minds of those shouting *Hosanna* (v. 9). The word "Hosanna" literally means "save now" or "save us," but had come to be used more commonly as an exclamation of praise, similar to "hallelujah". The crowds then quote Psalm 118:26, which was a common greeting for pilgrims coming into Jerusalem for the feasts of Tabernacles and Passover.

What do you think was in the minds of the people shouting "Hosanna"? Why does Jesus' entry into Jerusalem mean more to us today than to those who were present?

¹ Animals which had never been used for common work were considered appropriate for sacred tasks (cf. Num. 19:2, Deut. 21:3, I Sam. 6:7).

Rawlinson writes on the meaning of the Triumphal Entry:

On the whole, it seems to be the most probable conclusion that the entry in this peculiar fashion into Jerusalem was deliberate on the part of our Lord, and was meant to suggest that, though he was indeed the Messiah and the "Son of David," yet the Messiahship which he claimed was to be understood in a spiritual non-political sense, in terms of the prophecy of Zechariah, rather than in terms of the "Son of David" idea as interpreted by contemporary expectations. The time had in fact come for our Lord to put forward His Messianic claims, and to make his appeal to Jerusalem in a deliberately Messianic capacity. He does so, however, in a manner which is suggestive rather than explicit, and which was so calculated as to afford the minimum of pretext for a charge of quasi-political agitation. (151)

What follows Jesus' entry into Jerusalem are two stories of anger: the unfruitful fig tree and the clearing of the temple (vv. 12-26). The thread that ties these two stories together is the theme of judgment. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is a rather strange story and has given interpreters more than one headache! Why would Jesus curse a fig tree that wasn't even supposed to have figs on it? In trying to understand this perplexing portion of Mark read:

Jeremiah 29:17

Hosea 9:10

Nahum 3:12

What is the symbolism of the fig tree? Compare this story to Luke 13:6-9. What do you see?

Wessel helps us when he writes:

The best explanation is to see the miracle as an acted-out parable. Jesus' hunger provides the occasion for his use of this teaching device. The fig tree represents Israel. The tree is fully leafed out, and in such a state one would normally expect to find fruit. This symbolizes the hypocrisy and shame of the nation of Israel, which made her ripe for the judgment of God. (726)

Try to put yourself in the shoes of Jesus for just a moment. As he came into the temple area, what did he see, smell, hear? It must have been quite a scene with pilgrims speaking many languages, various animals being sold for sacrifice, and currencies being exchanged.¹ Barclay gives us some insight as to why Jesus was so angry.

This incident took place in the court of the Gentiles. Bit by bit the Court of the Gentiles had become almost entirely secularized. It had been meant to be a place of prayer and preparation, but there was in the time of Jesus a commercialized atmosphere of buying and selling which made prayer and meditation impossible. What made it worse was that the business which went on there was sheer exploitation of the pilgrims. (273)

What does this story teach us about worship?

In the two events we have just looked at, it is quite obvious that Jesus was angry. For many Christians anger is a real point of tension. There is a sense in which a Spirit-filled believer should never be angry. What do these stories teach you about anger? When is it appropriate to be angry? How did Jesus express his anger?

Verses 23-24 are two very misused texts. You will often hear the “health and wealth” or the “name it and claim it” preachers cite these verses for the most bizarre requests one can imagine! How can we guard against this type of misuse? How would you interpret and apply these verses?

¹ All four of the Gospels include the story of the cleansing of the temple. Only John, however, has Jesus using a whip. Read Malachi 3:1-3 to see how this act was a messianic fulfillment.

The focus of these verses is on *faith* (“Have faith in God”) rather than prayer. We are to learn from the mistakes of Israel (symbolized immediately beforehand in the fig tree) and their lack of faith. Is your faith growing or weakening in this season of your life? How is this evident in your life (be specific)?

In verses 27-33 we see that Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders continues unabated. Notice how the issue of authority is at the center of Jesus' conflict. Think back through our study of Mark.

From the very beginning of this Gospel Mark has placed emphasis in the power and authority of Jesus, showing that he is “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (v. 1:1). Again we see that Jesus is very clever in his dealings with religious leaders.

How is Jesus' authority present in your life? Within Santa Barbara Community Church? End in praise for the unshakable authority that Jesus has for eternity!

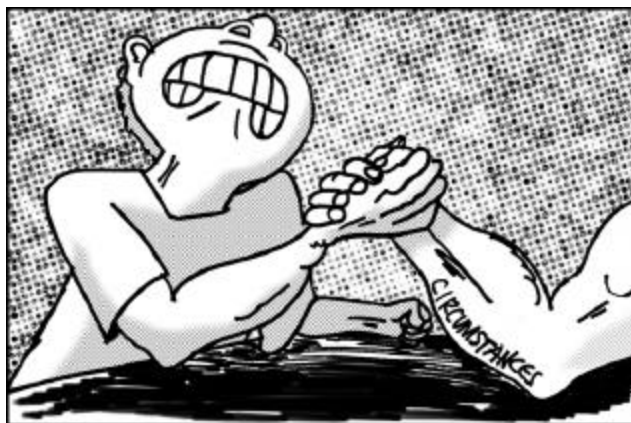
SERMON NOTES

STUDY TEN Mark 12:1-44
Conflict “Resolution”

- ➔ *A husband and wife divorce after twelve years of marriage and three children, citing “irreconcilable differences.”*
- ➔ *An employee is fired after receiving several poor evaluations from her supervisor – apparently she simply could not get along with the other employees on her project team.*
- ➔ *A son gets kicked out of his house after one too many fights with his parents over his attitude at home and late nights out partying with friends.*

Take a moment and list one or two of the most significant conflicts you have had to deal with in your lifetime. Did they get resolved well or poorly? Why?

This is a chapter that can be summed up in one word: CONFLICT! As you read along, imagine the feelings you would have had as a participant or observer in each situation, where all parties involved are full of adrenaline, passionate conviction, and resolve.



Read this week’s portion of Mark, 12:1-44. As always, take some time to note all of the details, characters, locations, and topics. Especially track the modes of communication used (parable, rhetoric, etc.) and how the conversations unfold. Notice the intensity of interaction in every conversation.

Rhoads and Michie see chapter twelve as integral to an overriding goal in the Book of Mark:

Mark’s story is unified around one overall goal: Jesus’ struggles to establish the rule of God in the face of obstacles and opposition . . .this is a conflict between living on God’s terms and living on human terms . . . This conflict is also life-threatening, because the fate of Jesus -- and the fate of the authorities -- is in the balance. Jesus is superior in debate and cleverly evades their efforts to indict him, and through most of the story he has the populace on his side. As Jesus escalates the conflict by going to Jerusalem and attacking the temple, so also the opposition broadens, and their strategies escalate. (73, 84-85)

Identify each confrontation in this chapter. What more do you learn about Jesus from each one?

In verses 1-12 we find Jesus teaching his last parable, the Parable of the Tenants. Clearly, it is an indictment against the religious leaders of the day. Scholars disagree over whether or not this parable should be read as an allegory. Most of Jesus’ parables make one key point. Jesus did on occasion, however, use allegory (Mark 4:13-20). The problem with allegory is that one can go wild assigning meaning to every detail in the story. Wessel takes a level-headed approach:

Its allegorical features, however, seem fairly obvious: the vineyard is Israel; the owner is God; the tenants are the Jewish leaders; the servants are the prophets; and the only son and heir is Jesus. Other details of the parable such as the wall, winepress, and tower have no separate significance. (731)

Normally Jesus does not answer his own questions. In this parable he follows his question (v. 9) with his own answer.

Why does Jesus quote Psalm 118:22-23? Who is the “capstone”? (cf. Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:7)

In verses 13-17 Jesus again comes into conflict with the leadership of Israel. It is ironic that the Pharisees and Herodians come together in an attempt to catch Jesus saying

something incorrect. The Herodians, supporters of Herod, would normally be at odds with the Pharisees. A common enemy makes for strange alliances!

The question posed is not a sincere one, but nevertheless brings up the legitimate issue of the Christian's responsibility to the state. What does Jesus say our responsibility is to the state? Some Christian groups who are pacifists, Mennonites and Quakers for example, refuse to pay taxes. What would Jesus say to them? Read the following verses for a more complete understanding of the Christian's relationship to the state.

Romans 13:1-7

I Timothy 2:1-6

I Peter 2:13-17

Now, in verses 18-27, it is the Sadducees turn to try to trick Jesus into saying something that will indict him. This is the first time that Mark mentions the Sadducees -- a little background is in order. Barclay writes:

The Sadducees were not a large Jewish party. They were aristocratic and wealthy. They included most of the priests; the office of high priest was regularly held by a Sadducee. Being the wealthy and aristocratic party, they were not unnaturally collaborationist, for they wished to retain their comforts and their privileges. It was from them came those who were prepared to collaborate with the Romans in the government of the country.

They differed very widely from the Pharisees in certain matters. First, they accepted only the written Scriptures and attached more importance to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, than to all the rest. They did not accept the mass of oral law and tradition, the rules and regulations which were so dear to the Pharisees. It was on the written Mosaic Law that they took their stand. Second, they did not believe in immortality, nor in spirits and angels. They said that in the early books of the Bible there was no evidence for immortality, and they did not accept it. (288)

The Sadducees' question comes from a provision in Mosaic Law (Deut. 25:5-6) that said that if a man died without children, his brother had to marry his widow. The idea was to make sure the family line continued and to protect the widow. The question of the Sadducees is so absurd that some scholars think it may have been a well-known Sadducean joke used to poke fun at the Pharisees' teaching about the resurrection.

What can we learn from how Jesus responds to an obviously insincere, trick question? Can we emulate Jesus' methods when we encounter similar situations?

In verses 28-34 one of the teachers of the law, apparently with sincere motives, asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus responds by quoting two passages from the Old Testament (Deut. 6:1-5, Lev. 19:8).

The setting of this scene is especially important (see 11:27, 12:35, 13:1). It is powerful to consider that in the midst of the temple, where thousands were striving to give offerings to God in order to somehow gain forgiveness, Jesus declares, in essence, that “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1Sam. 15:22).

William Lane remarks on this passage:

Because the whole man is the object of God’s covenant love, the whole man is claimed by God for himself. To love God in the way defined by the great commandment is to seek God for his own sake, to have pleasure in him and to strive impulsively after him. Jesus demands a decision and readiness for God, and for God alone, in an unconditional manner. (432)

C.S. Lewis writes,

God knows quite well how hard we find it to love Him more than anyone or anything else, and He won’t be angry with us as long as we are trying. And He will help us. (*Letters to Children*, 52)

Discuss all of this as a homegroup. What do you find difficult, comforting and thrilling in this commandment? How have you lived it out this week?

While Jesus continues his teaching (vv. 35-40), he asks the question, “In what sense is the Messiah the son of David?” The crowd loves what they hear. Picture the scene. Again, this is happening in the temple courts, where undoubtedly the teachers of the law are listening. After Jesus’ question about David, he launches into an attack on the hypocrisy of these scribes and Pharisees!¹

¹ Wessel tell us that, “Teachers of the law wore long white linen robes that were fringed and reached almost to the ground. They were shown special respect by the majority of people, being addressed by the honorific titles ‘Rabbi,’ ‘Father,’ and ‘Master.’ In the synagogue they occupied the bench in front of the ark that contained the sacred scrolls of the Law and Prophets (v. 39). There the teachers could be seen by all the worshipers in the synagogue. They were often invited to banquets because of their prestige and were given special places of honor.” (739)

What does this conflict teach you about your own spiritual life? How can we avoid the pitfalls of spiritual pride? Be specific in your struggles and strategies.

The chapter ends with the story of the widow's offering (vv. 41-44). The two copper coins she gives were the smallest coins in circulation in Palestine at the time. Why do you think Mark placed this incident at the end of this conflict-filled section?

What does this story teach you about giving? Is giving a part of your worship and discipleship? Why or why not?

SERMON NOTES

STUDY ELEVEN Mark 13:1-37

The Olivet Discourse

Just Do It . . . STOP . . . Thrive . . . Don't Leave Home Without It . . . Go For It . . . Be All That You Can Be . . . Get the Feeling . . . Check It Out . . .

IMPERATIVES. Flip through any magazine, surf through cable TV channels, or listen to the radio, and you will receive a barrage of urgent commands. We live in a culture of *NOW*, where it is believed that our options are only limited by our imaginations and our will to succeed. Put your mind to it, and it will happen.

Live awhile on this planet, however, and you will see it's a lie. In truth, we are not masters of our destiny. Many unpredictable things come our way. Life is not always what you expect.

The ministry of Jesus existed within a world of many competing factions, all demanding complete allegiance: the Jewish leadership, the Herodians, the greater Roman Empire. All felt threatened to some degree by the growing appeal of this mysterious rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. All spouted their own imperatives also.

Up to this point, in his confrontations with the authorities, Jesus engages in clever debate. He often responds to their trick questions with more profound queries that get to the heart of the matter. While he has started to challenge the disciples since the end of chapter eight (*Who do you say I am?*), his urgency reaches a new intensity here. He is now full of imperatives himself.

About this section, Walter Wessel says:

It has a distinctive exhortative character. The entire chapter is filled with exhortation and admonition. There are *nineteen imperatives in vv. 5-37*. This makes it abundantly clear that the main purpose of the discourse is not to satisfy curiosity about the future but to give practical, ethical teaching. (742, italics added)

Donald English says that this passage has a “sustained use of a different style of expression from that in the rest of the Gospel.” (203)

Read Mark 13:1-37. Pay special attention to the language that Jesus uses. Try to find the nineteen imperatives. Write them down here.

Think about what has happened so far in the plot of Mark, and what lies ahead. Why would Jesus shift gears at this point in his ministry?

Much of Jesus' words here are *apocalyptic*¹ in nature. Similar vocabulary is used in the books of Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament. Not only do they refer to things in the future, but there is a keen sense of urgency as they lay out the battle between good and evil. God will eventually put everything right, but there will be crisis upon crisis leading up to the final resolution.

Keep in mind that the opposition to Jesus is reaching critical mass, and Jesus is actually egging them on! He sees life through the lenses of his predictions to the disciples:

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

Mark 9:31 [B]ecause he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."

Mark 10:33-34 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn

¹ "Apocalyptic" writings are writings from God that employ symbolic language to tell of a divine intervention to take place in the near future of God's relationship with his creation.

him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

The discourse begins as the disciples admire the beauty and grandeur of the temple. By all accounts it was a magnificent building and courtyard area that dominated the city of Jerusalem. What a shock when Jesus predicts its destruction! ¹ Between v. 2 and v. 3 the location shifts to the Mount of Olives, which has a commanding view of Jerusalem and especially of the temple. The teaching is hence called the Olivet Discourse.

Whenever discussions come up about the end times, whether it is the 1st or 20th century, everyone wants to know, “When will these things happen?” (v. 4) Does Jesus ever tell the disciples when the end will come? What is the primary concern of Jesus in this sermon?

Jesus warns his listeners to:

“Be on your guard” -- v. 9

“Stand firm” -- v. 13

“So be on your guard” -- v. 23

“Be on your guard! Be alert!” -- v. 33

“What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!” -- v. 37

How should we hear these warnings in 2002? How should SBCC be alert corporately, on guard, and watchful?

Verse 14 is one of the most difficult in the entire New Testament. The phrase, “abomination that causes desolation,” is an expression from the Old Testament Book of Daniel (cf. Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). Interpretations abound. Many see the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes captured Jerusalem, and desecrated the temple by erecting an altar to Zeus and sacrificing a pig on it! Since Jesus

¹ This prediction was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus finally took the besieged city. The ancient historian Josephus tells us that 97,000 were taken captive and 1,100,000 died by the starvation and the sword. (Barclay, 311)

uses the same expression here, however, it is clear that its fulfillment is not limited to those events. It is probably best to see the “abomination that causes desolation” as having fulfillment in both the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the end of the age.

The language of verses 19-27 probably refers to the period of time known as the Tribulation (cf. Daniel 12:1, Jeremiah 30:7). This will be a terrible time of “distress unequalled from the beginning when God created the world.” (v. 19)

In sharp contrast to the shrill warnings of verses 14-25 are the descriptions of God’s glory and ultimate justice in verses 26-31, followed by further warnings in 32-37. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells his disciples:



“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

We are to shrewdly heed the warnings about the chaos of the end times, but also live in the peace and assurance of our salvation. Practically speaking, how do we live this out?

It is popular in many circles to come perilously close to predicting when Jesus will return. The *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Johnson are fictionalized accounts of the end times, and have been on the bestseller lists for the last several years. In light of verses 32-37, how should we respond to such teaching? Why is it important to avoid “date setting?”

We live in distressing times. Much of this chapter sounds very contemporary. What spiritual guidance do you find here? How can Jesus' words affect how you will live your life this year?

Read II Peter 3:8-16. Since everything will ultimately be destroyed by fire, what type of people ought we to be?

The end of the Book of Revelation says:

Rev. 22:17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Rev. 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Rev. 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

Pray through these verses as a homegroup, and rejoice in the *blessed assurance* we have as his children.

SERMON NOTES

STUDY TWELVE Mark 14, 15, 16

The Last Supper, The Next to the Last Word, and the Last Word

As we come to the end of Mark's Gospel we are going to look at the Last Supper, the Next to the Last Word (trial and crucifixion), and the Last Word (resurrection) as a whole.

Just as we started this study, we will end by reading a slightly longer section of the text to bring this compelling story to its conclusion. Read these three chapters, attempting to get a feel for the events of the last few days of Jesus' life.

These three chapters are especially full of stark, intriguing and descriptive details. For example:

- 14:1 . . . the teachers of the law were looking for some *sly* way to arrest Jesus . . .
- 14:51-52 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, *he fled naked*, leaving his garment behind.
- 15:15 *Wanting to satisfy the crowd*, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

Read Mark 14-16. Avoid the “been there, done that” attitude as you read. Set aside a quiet section of time to read these chapters as a whole. Make note of striking details, locations, words and descriptions.

These chapters are truly the heart of the Christian message (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). William Wessel says,

The importance of the passion [suffering and death] and resurrection of our Lord for the early church is evidenced by the relatively large amount of space the narrative takes in each of the Gospels and especially in Mark. Out of Mark's 661 verses, 128 are devoted to the passion and resurrection story, and a total of 242

are devoted to the last week (from the triumphal entry to the resurrection) of our Lord's life. (754)

Why are the passion and resurrection of Christ central to our faith?

The woman who broke the jar of perfume over Jesus remains nameless in Mark's Gospel (v. 3-9). We know from John's Gospel, however, that it was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3). Note the contrast in the way the religious leaders treat Jesus in Mark 14:1-2 as opposed to Mary.

How does Jesus respond to those who reprimand Mary?

As Jesus is eating the Passover meal with his disciples (verses 10-21), he announces that one of them will betray him. Doesn't it seem curious that each one asks him, "Surely not I?" As Walter Wessel says, their responses "were prompted by fear and lack of confidence in their own spiritual and moral strength." (759)

Can you relate to the disciples at this point? Why or why not?

In verses 22-26 Jesus takes the elements of Passover and gives them new meaning instituting what has come to be known as the Lord's Supper. (Read Exodus 12 to refresh your understanding of this important Jewish holy day.)

The bread was the unleavened bread of the Passover meal and the cup was the wine that was drunk after the meal was eaten.¹ The cup, representative of his blood, and the bread, representative of his body, were to remind them of a new blood "covenant" (cf. Exodus 24:8). Given the rich imagery and background of the Passover meal, how does this enhance your understanding of the Lord's Supper?

¹ Verse 23 says Jesus "gave thanks." The verb used here is *eucharisteo*, from which we get the word "Eucharist."

Peter is a disciple with whom we can identify. He always means well, but . . .

In 14:27-31, Jesus foretells Peter's triple denial. Notice a poignant detail in 14:37 -- After finding Peter asleep (rather than in prayer), Jesus reverts to calling him by his given name, Simon, after having called him Peter, his affectionate nickname, for a long time.

After this shocking prediction the disciples go to the garden of Gethsemane (this garden was located somewhere on the lower slopes of the Mt. of Olives and was one of Jesus' favorite spots -- cf. Luke 22:3, John 18:2).

Here the disciples fall asleep, even after, in deep anguish, Jesus asks them to "stay here and keep watch" (v. 14:34). Rhoads and Michie remark,

Unlike the opponents [of Jesus], the disciples (apart from Judas) do not destroy Jesus to save their lives. They are not against Jesus. Rather, they fail at being for him. And those closest to Jesus fail the most. (127)

Why does Mark include these remarkable details about the disciples? What can we learn from them?

Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin (Jewish high court) is obviously a set up (vv. 53-65). The last straw is when the high priest asks him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62)

Turn to Exodus 3:1-14. It is stunning that when Moses inquires of God as to whom he should say has sent him to lead the Israelites, God says,

“I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” (Exodus 3:14)

Jesus follows his affirmative as the Christ immediately with a Son of Man saying that brings together Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1.

As a result, the high priest tears his clothes in disgust! Why does he do this?

Death by crucifixion was a terrible way to die. Cicero said it was the “cruellest and most hideous punishment possible.” Think about Jesus' death theologically. Why did Jesus have to die? What did he accomplish? Look up the following verses to formulate your understanding of this crucial tenet to our faith.

Romans 3:23-26

Romans 4:25

Romans 5:6-8

1Peter 1:18-19

Shortly before Jesus dies he utters some of the most agonizing words in Scripture, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34). The meaning of this cry is beyond our ability to fully comprehend. Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21 lends insight: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” This helps explain the anguish Jesus demonstrated in the garden of Gethsemane.

Be ready to share with your group some of what you think Jesus may have meant by this cry.

In 15:38 we find an event that all the Gospel authors record. Read Hebrews 9:1-14, and 10:19-22. What significance is given to this event by the writer of Hebrews?

Mark's Gospel ends with the Last Word -- the resurrection of Jesus. It was an event that Jesus' disciples certainly were not expecting, even though they had been told in advance.

It is intriguing, as noted in the New International Version, that there is some disagreement about whether or not verses 9-20 were part of Mark's original Gospel. It is certainly impossible for us to discern which is the correct ending, given that scholars have debated it for centuries! (See Wessel and English especially for expanded commentary on this section.)

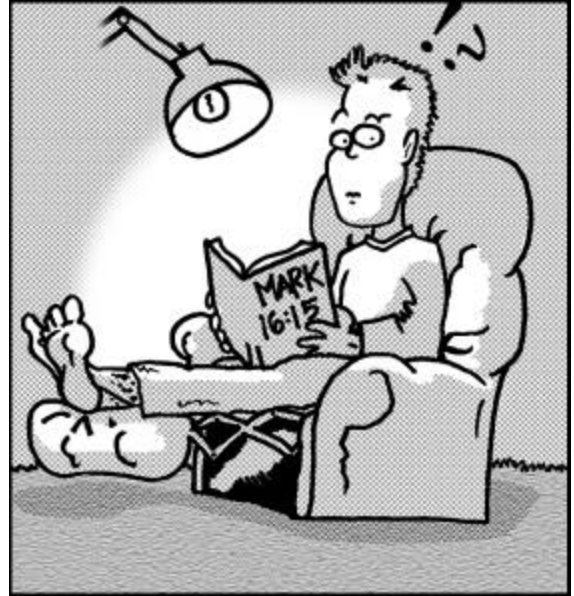
Nevertheless, Rhoads and Michie use the possible ending in 16:8 to challenge us now:

The ending of Mark points the readers to a new beginning -- back to the beginning of the story, back to Galilee [see 16:7], to begin again the quest to follow Jesus faithfully. (142)

We started in Galilee, and now we see the disciples are sent back there at the conclusion of the story. Come full circle yourself -- how has your faith and understanding of our Lord Jesus Christ changed during these few months in Mark?

Rhoads and Michie continue their challenge:

For those of us so used to stories with a resolution, it is tempting to dull the shock of this ending by adding in what we know from other Gospels or the history of the Christian movement. But imagine reading a story or seeing a film in which virtually everything is left up in the air, unresolved at the end. Mark's story is such a story: It is not resolved. It cries out for a resolution, cries out for the hope that someone will proclaim the good news. And who is left at the end of the story to do this? Not Jesus. Not the disciples. Not the women who fled the grave. Only the readers are left to complete the story! (143)



Spend time praying as a homegroup that you would “complete the story.”

Pray that you would “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (v. 16:15).

SERMON NOTES

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