

DISCIPLE

A study in the Gospel of Mark



Welcome to the Gospel of Mark!

This study is designed to help you grow as a disciple of Jesus. Whether you have followed him for a long time, a short time or are still trying to figure Jesus out, this study is for you! A few quick notes about this guide:

- The **Daily Reading** plan is intended to help you engage the scriptures each day. Not every chapter is broken down the same and some weeks you'll read the same text multiple times.
- We recommend using the **Christian Standard Bible** translation. You can find print copies on Amazon.com or an online version at bible.com.
- God will often use other people's perspectives to deepen our understanding of him. Consider joining a **missional community**. The **discussion questions** at the beginning of each chapter are built to provoke thought and encourage authentic conversation.
- Our **Sunday sermons** will follow the chapter each week. We encourage you to make worshiping together on Sunday a priority during this study. For more info visit www.dsbc.church/mark.
- The **recommended prayers** provided are not meant to be a script to read, but an encouragement to pray through whatever the scripture brings to mind. These shift from individual to corporate and can be rephrased based on your context.
- The **commentary** provided is meant to help explain some of the harder to understand aspects of the text. Much of the commentary was written by members of the DSBC family. Occasionally, we have included helpful material from other sources, which are noted.

This guide was developed by an amazing team of staff and volunteers from within DSBC. Huge thanks for their months of effort, prayer and dedication to helping you grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Daily Reading Plan

We encourage you to read a select portion of the Gospel of Mark daily, pray in response to the text, write notes and consider how to apply it in your life. Each chapter is broken up differently. Some passages are extremely short, others are longer, flowing portions. Occasionally, the reading will repeat in order to encourage deeper engagement.

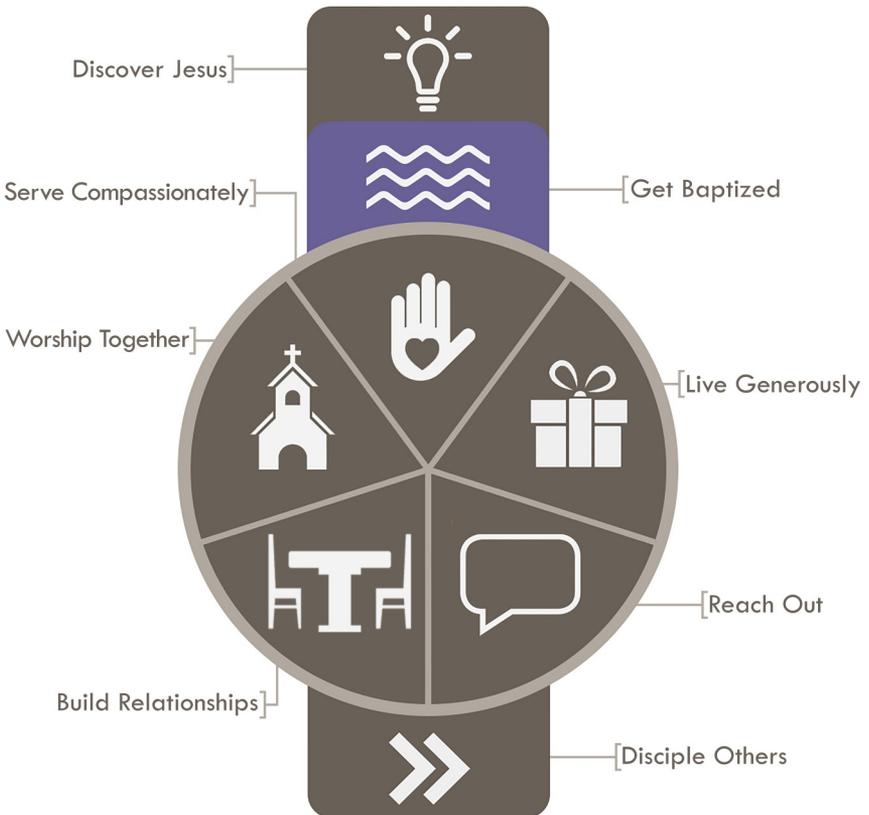
There are no readings assigned to Sundays.

Week	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	1:1-11	1:12-13	1:14-20	1:21-28	1:29-38	1:39-45
2	2:1-12	2:13-17	2:18-22	2:23-28	2:1-28	2:1-28
3	3:1-6	3:7-12	3:13-19	3:20-30	3:31-35	3:1-35
4	4:1-12	4:13-20	4:21-25	4:26-29	4:30-34	4:35-41
5	5:1-43	5:1-43	5:1-43	5:1-43	5:1-43	5:1-43
6	6:1-6	6:7-13	6:14-29	6:30-44	6:45-52	6:53-56
7	7:1-23	7:1-23	7:1-23	7:1-23	7:24-30	7:31-37
8	8:1-10	8:11-21	8:22-26	8:27-30	8:31-33	8:34-38
9	9:1-13	9:14-29	9:30-32	9:33-37	9:38-41	9:42-50
10	10:1-12	10:13-16	10:17-31	10:32-34	10:35-45	10:46-52
11	11:1-11	11:12-14	11:15-19	11:20-26	11:27-33	11:1-33
12	12:1-12	12:13-27	12:28-34	12:35-37	12:38-40	12:41-44
13	13:1-8	13:9-13	13:14-23	13:24-27	13:28-31	13:32-37
14	14:1-11	14:12-21	14:22-31	14:32-42	14:43-52	14:53-72
15	15:1-15	15:16-32	15:33-41	15:42-47	15:1-47	16:1-8

Next Steps at DSBC

Our goal is to equip you to live as a disciple of Jesus. The image below is meant to show some of the various activities Jesus calls his disciples to do as they follow him. This is not meant to be a 'roadmap'. Faith journeys are often non-linear and messy. However, this tool can help us prayerfully consider the next step that God is calling us to take. Discover how you can take your next step at www.dsbc.church/next.

At the beginning of each chapter, we highlight some of the key aspects of discipleship that show up in the text. As you read the scripture, keep an eye out for how these aspects of discipleship are modeled.



Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

It is generally agreed that the Mark, who is associated with the Apostle Peter, is the author of this Gospel. He is first identified in connection with his mother, who lived in the house in Jerusalem where Peter goes upon his release from prison in Acts 12:12. Scholars generally accept this house as the location where Jesus held the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-16).

When Mark records Jesus' arrest in the garden, he adds a strange detail that likely implicates him as the author (Mark 14: 50-52). As the disciples flee, so does an unnamed young man who, as it turns out, is stripped bare as he runs. Due to the odd nature of this detail, it is believed that this "streaking" man was none other than the author himself.

Mark also appears as he accompanies Paul and Barnabas when they returned to Antioch (Acts 12:25). Here we find this young man possessing two names, known as John Mark in the early church. According to Acts 13:5, he goes with Paul and Barnabas as a "helper" on their first missionary journey. This brought him into close relationship with Paul and Barnabas. Such a venture quickly ended for him, however, because at Perga, in Pamphylia, he deserts the group and flees back to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

Paul was disappointed at Mark's desertion and when he and Barnabas get ready for a second missionary journey, Barnabas, who was a cousin of Mark, proposes to bring him along with them once again. Paul is so disturbed by this proposal the two missionaries part from one another and go their separate ways. Later on we find Paul's attitude of Mark is much more positive as he has matured in his faith. (Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4:11.)

It is believed that Mark wrote this gospel to the general gentile population of the Mediterranean world in around 65-67 A.D.



In the opening of Mark's gospel, we **discover** who Jesus is, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Mark proceeds to show that Jesus is the promised savior, the one who is able to forgive sins, heal the brokenness in the world and give life abundant to all who call on his name. Jesus himself calls all to, "Repent and believe the good news!" That's what 'gospel' means... Good news!

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus is **baptized**, giving an example to all those who would follow him, those who would become his disciples, to be baptized.

In this chapter, Jesus lays out a three-fold pattern for his disciples: Disciple (1:17-20), teach (1:21-22) and serve (1:29-34). Keep your eyes open, as we will likely see this pattern repeated in the chapters ahead.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. What did Jesus call people to do in Mark 1:15?
2. What is the good news that Jesus proclaims?
3. Jesus often does three key activities with his disciples. He draws them near to him, teaches and serves them. Where do you see this pattern in Chapter 1?
4. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 1:1-11

Prayer

Lord, I am so thankful for the way you love me. Please help me to walk out the will you have for my life. Thank you for the encouragement and guidance of your Word. I ask that you bless me with the desire and strength to be who I am meant to be as your disciple. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Who was John the Baptist? Why do you think his ministry was important?
2. What does the immersion underwater symbolize?
3. If you have been baptized, reflect on your baptism. What did the event mean to you?
4. Why do you think Jesus calls his disciples to be baptized?

Commentary

By beginning with John the Baptists' ministry and the brief reference of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the coming Messiah, Mark links Judaism's ultimate fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus. Apart from this, there is no detailed breakdown of Jesus' genealogy or the supernatural circumstances of Jesus' birth, as it wouldn't appeal to a gentile audience that considered Judea a backwater province.

Before John, 400-years had elapsed since the prophet Malachi appeared in Israel, whose account is recorded as the last book in the Old Testament. Malachi echoed Isaiah's prophecy that God will send a messenger, "who will prepare the way before me," Malachi 3:1. John is that messenger, performing his final and greatest act of ministry by baptizing Jesus. God the Father confirms this with the Holy Spirit descending on the Son, speaking his approval from heaven.

Jesus humbled himself enough to be baptized by John, which serves an example for all of his disciples.

Mark 1:12-13

Prayer

Lord, you created me and know me inside and out. Search me and reveal to me those areas of my life that make me vulnerable to temptation and help me to overcome them. Thank you for your loving kindness and consideration of me as I walk the path of discipleship with you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think Jesus had to be tempted? What does that have to do with how Jesus relates to us?
2. What are the temptations in your life that the enemy tries to exploit?
3. What steps have you taken to make yourself less vulnerable?
4. When tempted, how should we resist? What have you tried in the past and how well did it work?

Commentary

Hebrews 4:15 states that in Jesus we, “do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are – yet was without sin.” The Spirit purposefully led Jesus into the wilderness so he would know what it is to be tempted to sin. Having faced temptation himself, Jesus knows how difficult it is to resist the temptation to sin and rely solely on God’s provision to overcome it.

Everyone has areas of weakness in their lives. That’s what makes us human! For some of us it may be sex, money or material things. For others it may be drugs or alcohol, control or power. James writes, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death,” James 1:14-15. Satan is a master deceiver. One of his most clever tricks is to never bring up the consequences of giving into temptation.

Mark 1:14-20

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your tremendous generosity and all the blessings you have bestowed upon me. Please help me to remember that all I have belongs to you and I desire to follow you completely, unhindered by anything that may divide my heart. Thank you for calling to follow you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What motivated these men to leave everything to follow Jesus?
2. Why did Jesus choose ordinary people as his disciples?
3. What can we learn from these men?

Commentary

When Jesus called his first disciples, take note of what is remarkable about them, or rather, unremarkable. These men were not part of the religious establishment nor did they possess great wealth and prominence. These are ordinary fishermen. He would later call Levi the tax collector to be his disciple, which was the most hated profession in ancient Israel. It is these men that Jesus will use to turn the world upside down.

In forsaking their own lives to follow Jesus, most of them would ultimately die violent deaths as martyrs for the gospel. Let's examine the first two mentioned: Peter and his brother Andrew. Peter, the chief apostle, was swept up in Nero's persecutions in Rome around 64 A.D. and was crucified upside-down because he deemed himself unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. His brother Andrew was also crucified on an x-shaped cross in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) while spreading the gospel.

Mark 1:21-28

Prayer

Dear Lord, I am in awe of your power! Thank you for using it to guard and protect me. Remind me that because I am your child, evil has no authority over me and I am free of his hold. Please help me see through the enemy's lies, dispelling them by your word and reminding me of every good thing I have in You. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do the miracles of Jesus give weight to His teachings? How does one relate to the other?
2. What comfort can we draw on the miracles of Jesus? What are the larger implications?
3. When it comes to the supernatural, why is it better to be grounded in the Word than anything else? What are the dangers of not relying on the Word in evaluating spiritual truths?

Commentary

Mark's gospel is packed with the miracles of Jesus. It is by signs and miracles that Jesus proves he is the Son of God and validates his teachings as authoritative. It is a demonstration that the kingdom of God has come in force. To the Roman Christians living in the heart of the most powerful empire of the world, Mark's emphasis on the miracles and acts of power must have resonated. Their emperors claimed to be gods, but they were mere mortals like everyone else.

When we read instances of Jesus driving out demons, it can get our imaginations going about the unseen spiritual realm of angels and demons. How encouraging is it to realize that God uses all his authority and power to protect us and act on our behalf! He is our great protector and strong tower, our salvation and shield (Psalm 18).

In putting our faith in Jesus, we are now considered children of God (1 John 3:1)! Just as any parent wants to protect their children from harm, how much more so does God regard those that belong to Him? As Paul puts it, "if God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31. A disciple can rest with a godly confidence in the power and authority of our God.

Mark 1:29-38

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to cherish the time we spend together. I confess that it can be hard for me to always carve out space for you in my day. Help me make time to spend just with you every day. Thank you for your graceful and loving patience with me. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Have there been times when you sense God's presence?
2. What are the practices you have found that draw you closer to God?
3. What are the things that distract you most from spending time with God?

Commentary

One of the most impactful lessons we can learn from the life of Jesus is the time he takes to commune with God the Father.

No matter how busy Jesus was, He always took time to be alone with the Father. In imitation of Christ, we understand how important it is to carve out that time of fellowship for ourselves. In the passage we learn that Jesus woke up early, while it was still dark, to pray in a quiet place. In establishing a new routine, it helps to have an established “where” (a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted) and “when” (the time of day you carve out that time alone with God).

Having time with God is essential to our flourishing. God wants this time with us. He craves it! God sent his son to atone for our sin so that we may be united with him—that we may know him as he knows us! Jesus says “...this is eternal life: that they *know you*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent,” John 17:3. What better way to get to know someone than by spending time with them?

Mark 1:39-45

Prayer

Lord, thank you for your unending love. Please use me to reach your people and share your great love with those who need it most. Help me to receive your love and to let it overflow in my life so that I may be a blessing to everyone who is around me today. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Who are the “untouchables” in our society? Why are they regarded that way and as a disciple of Christ, how are we to relate to them?
2. Love involves action, not merely feeling. Have there been instances where you have loved someone even when you didn’t feel like doing so.
3. How do we gain the power to love someone we don’t like?

Commentary

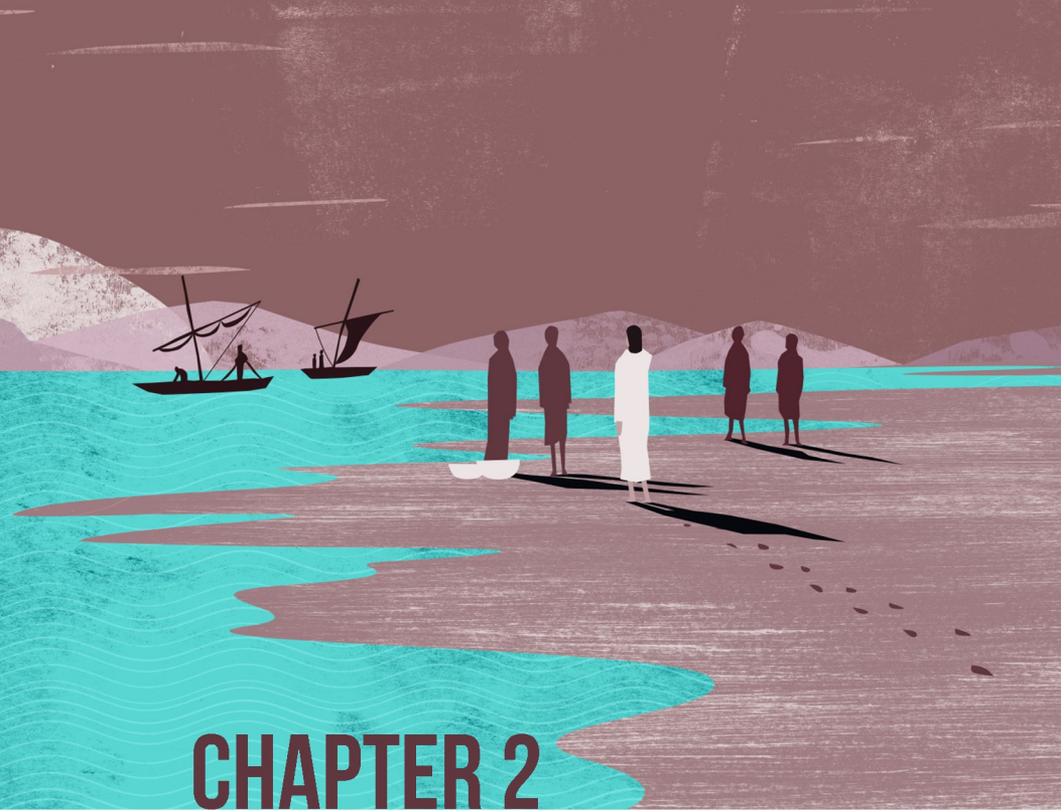
In the time of Mark's Gospel, the term 'leprosy' included various types of skin diseases. The term is not limited to modern leprosy (known as Hansen's disease). Those who were thought to have leprosy were considered "untouchable" in ancient Israel.

If out in public, a leper was required to shout "Unclean!" as a warning that someone with an infectious skin disease was in their midst.

Priests from other religions purported to have various cures for leprosy. However, the priests of Israel believed that only God could cure leprosy.

Ostracized by society, lepers were often cast out and forced to form their own communities on the outskirts of town. Yet Jesus was undaunted in his encounter with this leper. He was overwhelmed with compassion for him, and immediately acted in love.

Jesus did not 'keep a safe distance' from the man, rather, he touches him, showing that his love often breaks social norms and cultural taboos.



CHAPTER 2

Jesus shocks everyone when he **reaches out** to Levi (aka Matthew) and **builds relationships** with him and his 'sinner and tax collector' friends. Levi invited Jesus to a feast, to which Jesus likely brought his new disciples Simon (aka Peter), Andrew, James and John, along with him to dine with this scandalous crowd.

Jesus often calls his disciples to **build relationships** with people who are not like them. He calls them out of their comfort zone to discover how his love impacts all people, including the ones that are natural 'enemies'.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. This chapter is structured around four questions, three of which were discussed during a meal. What are the four questions asked and what were the answers given? (See verses 7,16,18,24).
2. In verse 14 we see Jesus calling Levi to be his disciple. Levi was another name for Matthew (the gospel writer) whose profession as a collector was viewed with derision. What modern professions would be likened to the ancient tax collectors?
3. Simon Peter and Andrew, two blue-collar Jewish fishermen who recently started following Jesus, are now faced with a new group member. Discuss how they likely would have felt sitting at the table with Levi's friends.
4. Jesus refers to himself as the 'bridegroom' multiple times. Read Isaiah 61:10. Who is Jesus implying he is?
5. Read Mark 2:25-26. Which historic figure does Jesus liken his actions to?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 2:1-12

Prayer

Father, help me to truly realize my need for forgiveness. Help me not lose sight of this need or of the sacrifice you provided for it. I give you thanks today for my forgiveness of sin. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What was the paralytic's primary need? What was his secondary need?
2. Why did Jesus' act of healing cause criticism?
3. Why do you think Jesus used the term 'Son of Man' to refer to himself?

Commentary

You will often hear this section referred to as the story of “Jesus heals the paralytic.” While that is part of this passage, the more remarkable item here is that Jesus says, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

None of those present were offended by Jesus’ miraculous healing of the paralytic, but how did some respond to his statement of forgiveness of sins? They said, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” They recognized that Jesus was equating himself with God.

When taken as a unit, this section shows the close relationship between healing and forgiveness, and the authority (note the very word in verse 10) of Jesus not only to heal but also to forgive. The emphasis is on forgiveness, not on healing.

In verse 2:10, the term “Son of Man” appears for the first of fourteen times in Mark. It is the most frequent title used in Mark for Jesus. Why did Jesus choose this term as his favorite self-designation? Could it be because it can be ambiguous? It could refer to an ordinary human being or to a supernatural being. It has overtones of both humanity and deity. By using it, Jesus forces people to make up their own minds as to what kind of person he was. Was he a man or “The Man?” Also, using this term enabled Jesus to avoid the terms Messiah or Christ, which often carried political or military connotations within Israel.

Mark 2:13-17

Prayer

Jesus, help me to realize my own sickness and sin. Also, please help me to see those around me not just as sinners, but as people who are sick and in need of healing. The healing that only You can provide. I thank you for calling me as your disciple, just as you called Levi. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did Jesus call Levi to believe in him and be one of his disciples?
2. Who do you think Jesus was referring to when he references the “sick” in verse 17?
3. How do you feel when you read Jesus’ words ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’?
4. What do you see as the most important principle in Mark 2:13-17?

Commentary

For the first time, in verse 15, we encounter the word “disciple.” This is the first of fifty-eight appearances of the word in the Gospel of Mark, an indication of how important discipleship is.

Levi (aka Matthew) is a tax collector. Jewish tax collectors not only collaborated with their roman occupiers, they often swindled their Jewish peers. Because of this, they were despised by most of their fellow citizens.

The word ‘sinners’ in verse 15 is used to convey the fact that the religious leaders despised them as they were not able to keep the law or their religious traditions. Both tax collectors and sinners were considered outcasts by the religious elite.

In this culture, to eat with someone was a sign of acceptance and community. It was extremely scandalous for Jesus to associate with these outcasts. It is interesting to consider how the other disciples would have felt being at this meal.

Mark 2:18-22

Prayer

Father, help me realize the joy in salvation that you have provided for me. Help me not become legalistic in the ways that I worship you. When I fast, help me fast for the right reasons. Help me to not judge others by my expectations of what it means to be your disciple. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Who was the bridegroom?
2. Have you ever fasted for religious reasons? What was the result?
3. Would you be willing to share your experience with your group?
4. Do you believe disciples of Jesus are called to fast? If so, for what reasons?

Commentary

In these verses Mark provides instruction about two issues in his church: fasting and the incompatibility of Christianity and Judaism. The only biblically prescribed fast was on the Day of Atonement, also known as Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16, especially verses 29, 31). However, the Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12). The Jews also sometimes fasted as a result of personal loss, sometimes as an expression of repentance, sometimes as preparation for prayer and sometimes merely as a meritorious act.

For disciples of Jesus, fasting is a matter of freedom, not obligation. While all of the reasons listed above may be good reasons to fast, there is no law. That does not mean that disciples of Jesus are never to fast. Jesus assumes his disciples will fast once He, the bridegroom, has left.

In verses 21 and 22, Judaism is the old garment and the old wineskin. Christianity is the new garment, the new wineskin and the new wine. This does not mean that the old is bad, but merely that its time has finished. Jesus ushers in a new era.

Mark 2:23-28

Prayer

Father, I pray that I would make you Lord over every day of my life. Help me not to fall into the idolatry of the scribes and Pharisees, worshipping you out of necessity for the “law”. Help me not judge others by my ideas of what it means to worship you and to honor the Sabbath. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. If you were making the rules, how much grain would you allow a person to gather on the Sabbath, if any?
2. Why do you think the Pharisees prescribed rules over and above the minimums required by God’s instructions in the Old Testament?
3. How do you know when you are observant to God because of rules or expectations versus a desire of your heart?

Commentary

Here we see the first of two Sabbath conflicts. The first mentioned here, Jesus' disciples gathering food on the Sabbath, and continued in Chapter 3 with Jesus' healing the man with the shriveled hand on the Sabbath.

Observance of the Sabbath was, and still is, one of the most distinctive elements of the Jewish faith. Not only do the Scriptures legislate about it, it has a large amount of commentary and instruction in the Mishnah (a book explaining the Old Testament and applying Jewish oral tradition). Whether it should be observed by Christians was a problem throughout the time of the apostles. Here, Mark makes some pronouncements of Jesus on the subject.

The problem here is that the Old Testament forbade work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). The question was what was defined as work. The scribes listed at least thirty-nine kinds of work that were prohibited, and reaping was third on the list. The Pharisees interpreted picking a few heads of grain as reaping!

In verses 25 and 26 Jesus sets forth the basic principle that human need should take precedence over ceremonial laws.

In verse 27 Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." This statement can seem rather enigmatic, however, I think it just means the Sabbath was established in order to give people rest. Exodus 34:21 says, "Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest." The Pharisees had been overzealous in their protection of the Sabbath, losing sight of its purpose and turning it into something burdensome and legalistic.

Jesus continues in verse 28 saying, "So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." Much of Jesus' ministry is accomplished on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21-27, 3:1-5, 6:1-5). This shows Jesus asserting his lordship over the Sabbath, claiming authority over its laws and limitations.



Jesus **builds relationships** with many people, but he uniquely **disciples others**, namely the twelve, and, occasionally, has deeper relationship with three in particular (Simon Peter, James and John). Though he preached to crowds of people, and blessed and served thousands, he intentionally chose to be with only a few at certain times.

His goal was to invest in them so that they would, in turn, invest in and **disciple others**.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. Looking at Mark 3:13-19, what do you notice about the people Jesus chooses to follow him?
2. What three things did Jesus call the 12 to do (Mark 3:14-15)? What would it look like to engage in those things today?
3. What was the primary method Jesus uses to communicate the message of the gospel?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 3:1-6

Prayer

Lord, please give us faith to entrust all areas of our lives to you and help us obey your commands. Please convict us of any hardness of heart we may have, any area of our lives that needs your help which we haven't surrendered to you yet. Please forgive us and change us to be more like you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Imagine that you were in the position of the man with the shriveled hand. How would you feel when Jesus said, "stand before us"?
2. What question did Jesus ask? Why do you think he asked it?
3. Why did the Pharisees and Herodians start to plot against Jesus?

Commentary

Pharisees try to catch Jesus breaking the rabbinic law, a set of rules meant to expand on God's commands to provide guidance in any situation a person might face. The Pharisees were well respected religious leaders who tried to follow all of the Jewish laws and traditions. They were too caught up in their rules to consider that a Messiah might not follow all these extra laws, but could just obey God's commands.

Jesus would appear to be a dangerous impostor, trying to lead people astray. They could also have a selfish motive. The Pharisees enjoyed a certain amount of status and power in the community, and competition wasn't a good thing. The rabbinic law in question stated that medical assistance could only be provided on Sabbath if it were a matter of life or death.

Isn't it ironic that the Pharisees were concerned with Jesus helping someone on Sabbath, but soon after were plotting to kill him and didn't see an issue with doing that on Sabbath (or any day)?

Herodians were a political group who supported King Herod. They wanted to be in his good graces and to share in his power. They were no friends of Pharisees, but in Jesus they saw a threat as well. They believed that if Jesus was the Messiah, he would likely overthrow King Herod and they would lose their power.

Mark 3:7-12

Prayer

God, please open our eyes to see all that you are. Not just a teacher and a healer, but the God of the universe. We want to follow you because of who you are, not because of what we hope you will do in our lives. Help us to demonstrate our love and faith through obeying your commands. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Imagining you were watching this scene play out. How would you feel when the demons cried out?
2. Jesus often concealed that He was the Messiah because many of the people he served had misinformed expectations of what he would do for them (i.e. overthrow the Roman government). Has there been a time in your life when Jesus did not meet your expectations?

Commentary

We see the crowds follow this great teacher and healer, but they don't really know who he is. He doesn't hold it against them; he helps all those who seek his help. The crowds are so great that he has to keep a boat at the ready. Think of the crowds of people trying to get the best deals on Black Friday. It can get out of hand quickly. Jesus wasn't giving away big screen TVs, he was healing people! No wonder crowds were a real concern, for the safety of themselves and his disciples.

Why did the demons cry out that Jesus is the Son of God? Perhaps it was in submission, as we see that they fell down before him. Still, it could have been a last ditch act of resistance. Sometimes knowing someone's hidden identity can allow another to influence that person. For example, if you know that somebody lied on their application, you could threaten to expose them if they don't do what you want. It could be that the demons were trying to push back, but they were no match for him. Jesus simply ordered them to keep quiet and they obeyed.

So why did Jesus keep his identity as the Son of God secret? Perhaps it was because people at the time expected the Messiah to free them from Roman occupation, to overthrow the government and rule them. God had a much bigger plan: to reconcile humanity with himself through Jesus's sacrifice.

If Jesus showed himself to be the Messiah at this time, people would likely get tunnel vision on what they expected him to do. They would hear what they wanted to hear and not really listen when he taught them about the kingdom of God.

Mark 3:13-19

Prayer

God, we want to spend more time with you. Please help us do that, and please bring us more opportunities to share your word with others.
Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you feel like you're not good enough to share with people about Jesus?
2. How can you learn from the example of the disciples?
3. This text shows that Jesus desired his disciples, and they came to him. How does that shape your understanding of your relationships with Jesus as one of his disciples?

Commentary

While many within the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel were rejecting their Messiah, Jesus chose 12 disciples to help establish the kingdom of God. Through them he was continuing the work God was doing in the Old Testament.

Why did Jesus want disciples anyway? Mark answers this question in verses 14 and 15: so they can be close to him, learn from him, preach and bring healing. Jesus spent extra time with the twelve, preparing them so they could be sent out to minister to others.

These twelve were not exactly 'leadership material'. Of them, four were fishermen, one was a hated tax collector and another was a zealot. Zealots were a radical Jewish sect who wanted to overthrow Roman occupation through violence.

The disciples didn't have the best reputation, were not trained preachers, didn't have a really strong knowledge of Scripture, they didn't even have a very strong faith. They simply followed with a willing heart and obeyed him the best they could.

It's great to see Jesus giving nicknames to disciples. He nicknamed Simon, "Peter" (meaning "the rock"). Another two, "the sons of thunder" (seems these two really got fired up about things). Jesus didn't talk down to his disciples; he connected with them on a personal level. Through a bit of humor and by demonstrating that he truly understood what made these guys tick, he built friendships and trust.

It is interesting to note that in Mark's list of the disciples, Simon Peter is first, and Judas is last. They serve as 'bookends' to the list of disciples.

Mark 3:20-30

Prayer

God, we want to serve you with all we have. Please don't let us get discouraged by those who would work against us. Help us rely on you and seek to please you. And please help us to encourage other disciples to stay strong. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Have there been times when others didn't understand why following Jesus is important to you?
2. Why do you think Jesus was accused of being in league with Satan?
3. Why do you think the religious establishment were trying to stop Jesus?

Commentary

Jesus' ministry was gaining great momentum. He gained such a following, that it became difficult even to get a bite to eat. As his family learned about this, they thought he wasn't in his right mind. They really didn't seem to understand his ministry at all. So they set out to "save" him from himself.

While Jesus' family was traveling from Nazareth to get him, he was ministering in Capernaum. His message has spread to Jerusalem and the religious leaders there, so they came to Capernaum to question Jesus.

We don't know if some were well-meaning and were simply ignorant of his message, or if they saw him as a challenger to their religious authority and power. Whatever the motive, they tried to stop him by claiming that he was in league with Satan and was casting out demons because Satan gave him power to do so.

Jesus explained that he was not in league with Satan. In fact, he was fighting against Satan by casting out demons. He was binding him up for final victory later at the cross. Jesus was fighting him on two fronts – by transforming people's minds and by casting out demons.

In an often misunderstood section, Jesus mentions a sin that will never be forgiven. What is the unforgivable sin? What Jesus likely meant here is that a systematic rejection of God - a purposeful opposition to him becomes an unforgivable sin. Not because God isn't willing to forgive it, but because the person is so set against God and their heart is so hardened, that they will never seek his forgiveness or recognize him as their God.

Mark 3:31-35

Prayer

Lord, we want to obey your perfect will. Please help us to seek you first and to obey you. We pray for those who don't know you yet. Please help us to encourage them and to help them find their way to you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Imagine you were sitting in that house with Jesus and he called you 'his family'. How would that make you feel?
2. How does this passage shape your view of the local church?
3. What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?

Commentary

Jesus family comes to him to silence him. They may have been receiving unwanted attention from their community or the religious establishment who were trying to defame Jesus. Jesus shows that his allegiance is not to them first, but to God and his will.

Jesus' statement to his family would likely have been extremely shocking to those who heard it, as it was radically counter-cultural.

For modern readers, this encounter could potentially be viewed as a very unflattering description of Jesus, interpreting it as him being callous and disrespectful of his family. However, Jesus wasn't saying that his biological family was not important to him. He was not putting them down. Rather, he was emphasizing how important to him those in the room were. He was elevating them to the same level as his family.



CHAPTER 4

Jesus uses parables to teach deep truth about his kingdom. In the famous ‘parable of the sower’ Jesus teaches his disciples to **reach out** indiscriminately to all different types of people. Jesus calls his disciples to, like the sower, spread the seed of the good news of Jesus to everyone. He shows us that he longs for those who are far from him to be brought near.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. How many times does 'listening' or 'hearing' come up in the text?
2. In the parable of the sower (4:1-20), Jesus teaches us about the seed of God's word falling on four soils. What does Jesus say about the seed in each soil?
3. Look at Mark 4:20. What does it mean to "hear the word" and "welcome it"?
4. What did the sea mean to Jesus' contemporaries?
5. Why did the disciples feel terrified after Jesus calmed the storm?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 4:1-20

Prayer

Lord, guide me in your Holy Spirit so that my heart can remain tender and sensitive to you, the fertile ground that bears fruit in your kingdom.

Please make me aware of any thorns or weeds that sap your word. May those whom I have shared Jesus with receive and accept the gospel, that they may bear much fruit in your name. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What kinds of “ground” do you think your faith in Jesus typifies at this moment?
2. What are the storms of life most prevalent today that batter those in the “shallow ground” category?
3. What are those things that act as “thorns and weeds” and sap the Word of God from our hearts? Do you have any of those in your own life?

Commentary

The parable of the sower used a common everyday experience of Jesus' audience to show how the gospel is received. Much "seed" will not find fertile ground and is trampled underfoot. How often have we shared the good news of Jesus with someone only to have them roll their eyes or say something like, "I'm glad that works for you."

A disciple of Jesus accepts the word and "plants" it in their heart. Studying the word, prayer and community with other disciples enables the roots of the word to go deep within. As the truth of the gospel penetrates and takes root in our hearts, it becomes our very foundation for life.

For those of us who follow Jesus and share the gospel with others, it can be easy to become discouraged when the message is rejected. As disciples of Jesus, we are not called to analyze the soil of others. We are simply called to reach out with the good news of Jesus.

Mark 4:21-25

Prayer

Lord, give me the courage and wisdom to let your light shine through me, and make me an effective ambassador for your kingdom. Please reveal those hidden sins and strongholds that act as a “bowl” over your light. Help me overcome them by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think Jesus gave this parable to his disciples?
2. What are those things in your life that may be clouding the light of Jesus within you?

Commentary

The metaphor of the lamp is commonly used in the Old Testament. Ancient oil lamps were a primary source of light and are commonly found by archeologists today. Placing a lamp on a stand, or tall place in a room increases the effectiveness of the light. Placing it low or hiding it away, decreases it's impact.

The statement about being measured by the standard you use to measure is an ancient Jewish proverb and would have been familiar to the disciples. Jesus adopts this common idea to teach that the degree to which one hears the parables, the extent to which one allows the kingdom to break upon oneself, will determine the measure of one's understanding.

Author Doug Moo comments "Those to whom the mystery of the kingdom of God is given in Jesus will receive even greater capacity to enter it. On the other hand, those who fail to receive the mystery in Jesus will discover that "even what he has will be taken from him" (see Prov 1:5 -6; 9:9). Understanding the kingdom of God is not a human ability but a capacity created by Jesus Christ within the heart of the believer."

Mark 4:26-29

Prayer

Lord, thank you for loving and caring for me so much that you want to make me who I am meant to be in Jesus. Help me cooperate as you prune those things in my life that require renovation so that I may walk in the fruit of your Spirit. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What are those things in your life that were hardest to let God do his “renovating” work on?
2. Have you ever been frustrated that the Kingdom of God seems to grow slowly?

Commentary

This parable is unique to Mark's gospel and speaks to the mystery of the Holy Spirit's work within us. It is supplemental to Jesus' parable on the sower, in that once the seed finds place in our lives, it begins to change us from the inside out. If we let the gospel grow within us and renew our minds, the things that used to enslave us slowly lose their grip; we will learn to desire the things of God more as God's thoughts become our thoughts. Theologians refer to this process as "sanctification."

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis comments on this, writing, "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes to rebuild that house. At first you understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But then he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense... he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of – throwing out a new wing here, an extra floor there, running up towers... you thought you were being made into a decent little cottage – but he is building a palace, and he intends to come and live in it himself."

Mark 4:30-34

Prayer

Lord, you are lord of history and all human affairs. You see the beginning and the end, and I am in awe of you. I pray that you guide our leaders in wisdom and compassion, and for the peace and safety of your church all over the world as they share your gospel with all who are willing to listen. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think Jesus wanted his audience to know from the parable of the mustard seed?
2. Why do you think Jesus describes the kingdom of God in such terms?
3. How does this parable shape our view of power?

Commentary

This parable uses the imagery of the annual mustard bush that was cultivated in the field and grown for its leaves as well as its grains. The smallness of its seeds was proverbial (see Matthew 17:20), but Jesus does not compare the kingdom of God to a mustard seed but to what happens to a mustard seed.

As God transforms a tiny speck of mustard seed into a six-to-ten-foot-high shrub, what God will accomplish through the death and resurrection of Jesus will be just as extraordinary. The tiniest of seeds grows into the greatest of shrubs, and how this happens is veiled in mystery.

The kingdom of God is already present in the work of Jesus but remains concealed and modest. Many would never guess that this inconspicuous presence manifests God's power and dominion that will reach out to all the nations. Religious professionals misjudged it. Even Jesus' own family missed it. The final stage will reveal a dramatic change from the beginning, but by then it will be too late for those who were unable to see what God was doing all along.

*Commentary by David Garland

Mark 4:35-41

Prayer

Lord, help me to keep my focus on you and on the promises in your word. Remind me of every good thing I have in Jesus and to cast all my anxieties and worry over to you, as you are Lord over all aspects of your creation. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. As you read about the stilling of the storm, imagine that you are one of the disciples in the boat as the storm begins. Describe your thoughts and feelings at the different points in the story. What is it like to be in this boat?
2. Consider your life. Has there been times when God strengthened you through in the midst of crisis?
3. What are the “storms” churning in your life right now? What would it look like for Jesus to bring calm in the midst of it?

Commentary

Jesus calls his disciples to sail to the other side of the lake, requiring them to leave the crowds and follow him. The mention of the other boats seems to indicate that more than just the twelve followed. As many of the disciples were fishermen by trade, navigating the lake by boat likely did not seem to be a scary proposition.

Ironically, these same disciples were terrified at the sudden storm that arose while Jesus slept. The concern of the mariner disciples likely speaks to the intensity of the storm. Extreme wind and wave were two of the most powerful forces known at the time. The sea was often used metaphorically for a great abyss, a source of death and chaos (see Revelation 21:1).

After freaking out at the wind and the waves, the disciples question Jesus' concern for their well being, upset that he is resting in their great time of need. Some commentators have noted the irony that some of these disciples were ones to sleep in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14) in the hours leading up to Jesus' crucifixion.

Jesus commands the wind and the waves to be still and they obey. The disciples are terrified. Jesus has not only healed the sick and cast out demons, he has commanded one of the most powerful force known in the world at that time.



CHAPTER 5

Jesus brought his disciples to ‘the other side’ to engage with people and minister in places they’d normally never go near. He took them to **compassionately serve** the sick, the poor, the vulnerable and outcasts – people who were different. The people the world often considered last were the people often Jesus took his disciples to serve first.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. There are at least 5 things in this chapter that are considered 'unclean'. What are they?
2. How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus taking to so many 'unclean' places around so many 'unclean' people?
3. Compare and contrast the main characters in Chapter 5. How do they differ? How are they similar?
4. What do these accounts teach us about faith?
5. Which of the characters do you most identify with?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?
3. Who are the 'unclean' people Jesus is calling you to love?

Mark 5:1-43

Prayer

Father, help me to trust in your perfect timing, rely on your ultimate power and rest in your complete love. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you think the events in this chapter relate to each other?
2. Which of the characters in this chapter do you most identify with? Why?
3. How might Jairus have felt as Jesus spent time talking with the woman with the flow of blood? Have you ever been frustrated at God's timing?
4. How does this passage shape the way you trust in Jesus' timing?

Commentary

This story of two broken men and two desperate daughters reveals Jesus' compassion as he engages with those considered outcasts, unclean and desperate.

Jesus and the disciples travel to the country of the Gerasenes and a man possessed by many demons falls at Jesus' feet. Jesus casts the demons into a herd of pigs, not an unusual sight in the gentile region known as the Decapolis. Those nearby beg him to leave, and Jesus obliges and heads back across the sea. When he arrives, a respected religious leader (Jairus) falls at Jesus' feet. Jairus pleads with Jesus to heal his 12-year-old daughter. Jesus agrees and they head to Jairus' house.

On the way, a woman who has been stricken for 12 years (note that she has been ill as long as Jairus' daughter has been alive) with a chronic condition. The constant flow of blood would have rendered her 'unclean' in the eyes of her community and likely rendered her an outcast. Unclean. Untouchable. Desperate not only for healing, but acceptance and love.

Jesus not only heals the woman, he calls her 'daughter'. Just as Jairus loved his daughter, so too, Jesus loves this outcast.

As the conversation winds down, Jairus is told that his daughter has died. He was too late! But Jesus is Lord of all, even over death, and so they continue to the home. By the time they arrive, there are mourners gathered, some of who were likely 'professional' mourners who were culturally expected to be present. They laugh at Jesus when he says that the girl is merely sleeping.

In perhaps one of the most tender moments recorded in Mark's gospel, Jesus approaches the corpse of the girl, touches her hand (a huge cultural taboo) and calls her to rise.



CHAPTER 6

Even in the midst of conflict and rejection, Jesus empowers and authorizes his disciples to intentionally **reach out**, **compassionately serve** others and **build relationships** with each other.

He called them to proclaim the good news, and pray for and bring healing to the sick and broken. When they were done, he called them as a group to join with him away from the crowds. This is not meant to be an exclusive club, as Jesus and his disciples approach a gathered crowd. Jesus expands the community and feeds their souls with the gospel and feeds their bellies with bread and fish.

In the life of a disciple of Jesus, words, actions and relationships are interwoven.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. Mark 6:7-13 is the first time Jesus sends his disciples to spread the good news and serve others without him. What instructions did He give them?
2. Look at verse 11. What did Jesus anticipate they'd encounter?
3. In chapter 2 ,we saw low-level opposition to Jesus and his disciples. Now, the opposition is intensifying. What are the ways you see opposition to Jesus or his disciples in this text?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 6:1-6

Prayer

Jesus, I thank you for giving me your written word, so I can gain an application for my life this day. Please give me the understanding of what you desire to bring into my life from these verses. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Have you ever thought about how your personal history might impact peoples' view of you as a disciples of Jesus?
2. How does this passage impact your life?
3. How does the townspeople's rejection of Jesus differ from the opposition he faced from the religious elite?

Commentary

In these opening verses the mountainous town of Nazareth is not mentioned specifically, but the Greek word meaning “home country” is used.

At this time, it was customary for a Jewish man who returned to his hometown to attend the upcoming Sabbath service and speak on any spiritual lessons he’d learned while on his journey. This is the actual setting in which we find Jesus teaching the people in his home town. It was a homecoming which shocked many who were in attendance. They knew his family and they also knew of his childhood.

The town folk “took offense at Him.” They questioned his education and family pedigree. Verse 5 tells us, “And He could do no miracle there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he wondered at their unbelief.”

Mark 6:7-13

Prayer

Jesus, May I represent you accurately in all my interactions today. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. When Jesus called his disciples he graphically minimized what they are to possess during their mission. What does this teach us regarding trusting God to provide for our needs ?
2. How do you think the disciples felt as Jesus was sending them out on their own?
3. How is the sending out of the twelve a model for discipleship?

Commentary

In the verses before us today we read about Jesus sending his disciples out on a mission. He gave them authority over “unclean spirits”. The idea behind this action was to commission them as his delegates.

Their deeds were to be an extension of his own. The twelve were “sent two by two” which apparently was a Jewish custom as we see elsewhere in this Gospel and the Book of Acts. Also, their testimony about Jesus’ authority needed to be established, based upon two or three witnesses, consistent with Deuteronomy 17:6.

Inherent in their commissioning was the need for a complete trust in God to supply every one of their needs. Notice how you can see physical needs as the ones primarily emphasized. The list he allows on this venture are limited, deliberately, to undermine any feeling of self-sufficiency.

Moreover, Jesus sends them out with urgency. The message is clearly stated in verse 12, “They went out and preached that men should repent!” If such a message was not listened to, they were to move on.

When Jesus says, “shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them” he invokes an ancient custom. In those days, every time a Jewish person travelled to Samaria, Perea or any non-Jewish territory, he or she was required to stop at a border building when returning home to remove the Gentile dust and impurity from ones’ clothes and feet.

Mark 6:14-29

Prayer

Jesus, as I prepare to look at your word today, may I be open-minded with an accepting heart and discerning mind to apply today's scripture into my life. And may I use the story of John the Baptist's martyrdom to intensify a personal confidence in your control over every event in this world today! Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you respond to Herod's actions against John the Baptist?
2. Herod sold out John the Baptist to garner favor with others. Have you ever experienced anything like this before?
3. Though Herod was both cruel and murderous, we are reminded that God is still on his throne and sovereign over all. Have you ever felt the tension of God's reign and the deeds of evil power-mongers?

Commentary

In today's verses we meet a man named Herod. Of necessity it requires us to become knowledgeable about Herod Antipas. For the remainder of Jesus' life he is under this man's surveillance and curiosity. Did you know there are five men with the name Herod mentioned in the New Testament? Herod is the surname of a whole family of men originating in the pagan land of Edom.

During the three-year ministry of Jesus, Herod Antipas is the one in power. Unger's Bible Dictionary tells us, this "devious, not to be trusted, scoundrel of a king" marries the wife of his own half-brother Philip, while still being the husband of a daughter of an Arabian king.

Herodias, the wife to Herod Philip remains married to Philip, while openly living with and illegally marrying his audacious brother Herod Antipas. And the plot thickens. Herodias' daughter, Salome, is Philip's offspring. This young female dances at a stag party given by Antipas. Antipas is so inebriated he offers her "up-to-half his kingdom" as a reward for her entertainment. She goes straight to her mom (Antipas and Philip's wife) who instructs her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. You see, John had publicly called out Antipas and Herodias on their incestuous lifestyle. This passage describes John's execution at her request.

Mark 6:30-44

Prayer

Jesus, I come to your word today with a need to be reminded of your incredible mighty power to do miracles. And may I see how your power touches my life every day in ways I don't even comprehend until all is said and done. You deserve all the glory and honor for meeting my needs today as you met the needs of the crowd you fed on the green slope, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. I stand in awe of you, Jesus! Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus told his disciples to give the crowd something to eat. What is the role he wants his disciples to play?
2. What does this suggest to you about your responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus?
3. How is the love of Jesus shown through the acts of his disciples?
4. How is Jesus calling you to compassionately serve others?

Commentary

The account of the feeding of 5,000 is also included in the other three Gospels (Matthew 14, Luke 9, John 6) and is the second 'nature miracle' in Mark's gospel.

Notice that Jesus leads his disciples to a quiet place to rest from the rigors of ministry. In doing so, he seems to oppose the idea that his disciples are expected to exhaust every ounce of energy they have for ministry. That means, not putting their health and strength in jeopardy. As one Phoenix pastor often says, "Jesus died for the church. You don't have to."

Throughout the gospels, Jesus' own work ethic frequently embodied planned times of solitude. That was where he met alone with his Heavenly Father and refreshed his heart, soul, mind and strength.

However, in this passage, we find that the time of solitude is interrupted. Instead of responding with indifference or anger, Jesus is saturated and responds with compassion for this huge crowd of people.

Matthew 14:21 informs us, "The number of those who ate was about 5,000 men, beside women and children." We see a much larger crowd than just the 5,000!

Mark 6:45-52

Prayer

Jesus, may I discover the essence of having faith in each event and incident which occurs within the events of this day. May the experience of Peter as he walked toward Jesus on the water teach me how to make faith a way of life for me. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the ways you can follow in Jesus' example of taking time for reflection, prayer and meditation with God?
2. What does this passage teach us about the presence of Jesus in our lives?
3. Like the disciples, have you found it hard to trust Jesus, even though he has proven himself in the past?

Commentary

In this passage we find the Jesus sending his disciples ahead of him in a boat. The purpose is clearly implied. The Son of God seeks time to be with God the Father.

Once in the boat, the twelve disciples find themselves straining against an oppressive wind. Jesus, “was about to pass them by,” verse 48. This account portrays these guys being so distracted with the task at hand it takes quite a while before “...they saw Him walking on the sea.”

The Sea of Galilee often has horrendous gusts of gale-force wind that can whip up large swells instantly.

At such a moment a person appears walking on top of the rolling waves. The logical assumption is “He’s a ghost”! The disciples panic. Twelve adult men begin screaming and hollering and are terrified. This includes some of them who are fishermen by trade.

Mark 6:53-56

Prayer

Jesus, you know my every weakness, my every illness and my every need. I have no secrets from you. At this very moment I approach your presence with a sense of awe. Though I live life as if my perceptions are accurate regarding who I am, I humbly come before you as the object of your personal love. May I dwell mentally within such truth regardless of what I encounter throughout the day. May others also see how actively you are in my daily activities. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus brings his disciples along when he engages the sick and powerless. How is Jesus calling you to engage the hurting in your city?
2. Consider the hurting, powerless, poor and sick in your community. How does this text shape your view of them?
3. How do you feel when you consider the needs of others?

Commentary

In these four short verses we have a capsule view of what drew people to Jesus. It was his healing ministry. Humanity is beset by brokenness in all dimensions of life: body, mind, emotions, relationships and spirit. No wonder the appearance of the promised Messiah brings healing whenever people neared his venue.

As we know, healing ministry attracts headlines. It did so even back in the first century. We read in verse 54, “immediately the people recognized him and ran about the whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard he was.” He is now extremely popular. We read in verse 56, “Wherever he entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring him that they might just touch the fringe of his cloak...and as many as touched it were being cured.” Throughout the rural landscape of Galilee exciting news is spreading!

Many preachers were travelling up and down the fringes of the Sea of Galilee in the first century. This speaks to the hopelessness of Galileans during the Roman occupation of Israel. A ray of hope arrives with the coming of Jesus. Excitement fills the air. Makeshift pallets are built to bring a tidal wave of hurting people out of the woodwork. The needy are everywhere: in the marketplaces, on the street corners and at open meeting places.



CHAPTER 7

Jesus experiences conflict from the religious establishment. He was viewed as a disrupter and a threat to their traditions. The religious leaders confronting Jesus often focused on 'doing all the right things' for God, but were apathetic toward a loving relationship with God.

Many of these leaders were good people who thought if they would devote themselves to practicing their religious traditions, they'd be 'good enough', and God would have to love them. They were close to church but far from God.

Though most people would have called them very religious, they still needed to **discover Jesus**.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. How does Jesus expose the hypocrisy of the religious power-players?
2. When Jesus speaks of the heart, what does he mean? How would you define “the heart”?
3. Jesus frequently speaks of hearts that are hardened. What does it mean to have a hardened heart?
4. How would you summarize Jesus’ teaching in Mark 7:1-23?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus’ life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 7:1-23

Prayer

God, we want to grow closer to you. Help us to avoid the urge to pretend to be perfect in front of others. We are a broken people, relying on your grace and strength. Help us point other broken people to you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Imagine you were one of the disciples in this scene. Would you be tempted to seek the approval of the religious elite?
2. What are some ways that religious folks live as hypocrites?
3. The religious elites were leveraging religious traditions to justify their greed. How would that look in today's culture?

Commentary

Did disciples try to eat food with dirty hands? No, they were being accused by the Pharisees of not performing a special ceremonial hand washing. This tradition symbolized washing away any uncleanness the observant Jewish person may have come in contact with throughout the day. It could be that they came in contact with a gentile in the market earlier, or they had to spend time with a non-observant Jew. The washing would remove any hint of these undesirables from their lives. This tradition, which likely stemmed from a well-intentioned desire to demonstrate being set apart for God, had turned into a public chest-thumping.

Jesus wasn't impressed. He said Isaiah has encountered that same hypocrisy in his days and rightly spoke out against it. Jesus isn't impressed by outside cleanliness, he looks at the heart.

Jesus calls out the Pharisees' hypocrisy using an example of how they use their tradition of Corban to avoid doing what God says. Corban was to declare something as set aside for God. If your friend asked you to lend them some money, but you were going to give it to church, you'd declare Corban. That money is already pledged to God and isn't yours to give. The thing is, declaring something "Corban" didn't mean they had to actually give that money to church and could still use it for themselves. Pharisees would use this as a loophole to avoid helping others, even their parents, whom they should honor according to God's commands. Once again, a tradition that likely started as a way to encourage people to give towards God's work was turned into a mockery of God's law.

Mark 7:24-30

Prayer

Lord, just like the Canaanite woman, we know we don't deserve your love, yet you gave it freely. Thank you! Please give us faith and humility, bless and protect our children and those in our community. Please help us to see people that are not like us as your children and to treat them with kindness and generosity. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus gave us a great example by showing kindness to someone from a different background. Consider the people in your life. Do they represent different backgrounds from yours?
2. Notice how the woman approaches Jesus. What words would you use to describe her attitude and approach?

Commentary

In this encounter we see Jesus continue to break away from the ceremonial cleanliness that would dictate not spending time with non-Jewish people.

Jesus went away in secret to spend some time by himself. Maybe it was to spend some time in prayer, maybe it was to reflect on and prepare for the approaching trials and crucifixion. His time is interrupted by a woman desperately needing help for her child.

The woman belonged to the Canaanite people group that resided in the political district of Syrian Phoenicia. Mark's primary audience were the Romans, so he highlighted that she was from Syrian Phoenicia, a region that had bitter rivalry with Jerusalem and was despised by most Jews. The same account is described by Matthew in his Gospel and he calls the woman a Canaanite, highlighting to his Jewish audience the fact that she belonged to the people group that was an enemy of the Jews. There is no conflict between the two accounts, the authors simply made it easier for their audience to understand where the woman was coming from and why it was such a big deal for Jesus to help her.

Jesus wasn't calling her a dirty stray dog, rather he was pointing out that Israel was the primary intended recipient of the Gospel. Just like a beloved household pet is fed after the children in the family, he was simply using this example to highlight that the Jewish people were the priority of his current ministry, not to insult the woman.

The woman begged Jesus and approached him with faith and humility. She clearly loved her daughter greatly and was desperate for help. She probably saw that Jesus was not like any other teachers and she'd put her trust in him. As a result, Jesus answered her plea and performed the only remote healing that we see in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 7:31-37

Prayer

Lord, we pray for all those who need your healing. Please show them your mercy and grace, and help us to encourage and support them. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Is there anything in this text that seems unusual to you?
2. How does this text shape your understanding of how to care for those that need physical healing?
3. Have you ever been frustrated in the way that Jesus responds to your prayers?

Commentary

The healing of the deaf-mute man is an account that is unique to the Gospel of Mark. It is yet another healing on Gentile territory. Perhaps Jesus was planting seeds in non-Jewish territories, so later when news of his resurrection would come to those regions, people's hearts would be more ready to receive him. Or perhaps it was a teaching moment for his disciples, who would be the ones spreading the message later.

Did you notice that Jesus responded to other people's request to heal the man? The man couldn't ask for himself, so other people asked for him.

Why didn't Jesus just heal the man? Why did he take the extra steps with the ears and the tongue? Jesus did this for the benefit of the man. He physically demonstrated to him that he was about to heal his ears and his tongue. He also looked up in prayer to show the man that his healing was going to come from God. Just like with other healings, Jesus found a way to give the man an opportunity to exercise his faith. Jesus always ties faith to healing. It doesn't mean that faith guarantees healing, but that healing should come through faith.



CHAPTER 8

Jesus asks one of his disciples a question we all must answer: *“Who do you say that I am?”* Just like today, there are many ways to answer the question, but only one truth. Peter answers that Jesus is the ‘Messiah’. For Peter, this word likely meant the one who would eliminate all of his people’s political enemies (i.e. Rome). This is likely why he contradicts Jesus after Jesus shares about his impending death, burial and resurrection. Though he knew a lot about Jesus, he hadn’t truly **discovered Jesus**.

Jesus responds to Peter’s rebuke by teaching that his disciples are to follow in his footsteps, taking up their own cross. To **live generously** and sacrificially with time, energy, talent, influence and resources.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. In 8:11-21, the Pharisees demand a sign. Given that Jesus has become extremely popular for the many miracles he has done, what type of sign do you think they were looking for?
2. Read Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32 and 10:32-34 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. What do you notice?
3. Why do you think Jesus foretells his death, burial and resurrection to his disciples so many times?
4. Peter refers to Jesus as the 'Messiah' (Mark 8:29). What do you think Peter thought the Messiah was there to do?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 8:1-10

Prayer

Father, I admit I have doubts. I admit I have been anxious for the future. Please help me to trust in you, to accept what I have already been given and to look forward to the ways you will continue to provide for me. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus expressed compassion and a desire to feed the crowd. His disciples said to him, "How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?" Considering Jesus had already fed the five-thousand, what do you think his disciples were thinking?
2. Have you ever been discouraged when what you have to give doesn't match the size of the need? How does this shape your view of Jesus' provision?

Commentary

Notice that chapter 8 seems a bit familiar. We find many parallels between Mark 6:31-7:37 and 8:1-30. You can observe them below:

6:31–44	Feeding a multitude	8:1–9
6:45–56	Crossing the lake	8:10
7:1–23	Dispute with the Pharisees	8:11–13
7:24–30	Discussion about bread	8:14–21
7:31–36	Healing	8:22–26
7:37	Confession of faith	8:27–30

Why did Mark record both multitude feedings? Many believe that the feeding of the five thousand symbolizes Jesus' provision for the Jews, while the feeding of the four thousand symbolizes his provision for the Gentiles.

The previous miracle to this occurred in the Gentile Decapolis (7:31). If we assume that Jesus had not traveled elsewhere, this setting would fit with the Gentiles' inclusion in the kingdom of God (see 7:14-37).

In verse 8:8, the great surplus emphasizes the fact that Jesus is capable of providing beyond our needs. We note that the word for basket refers to a large wicker or rope basket that was used for carrying provisions. This might indicate that the seven basketfuls here could contain even more than the twelve baskets indicated in Mark 6:43. The number twelve in the previous account is obviously relevant to Israel (the Jews). The number seven is often used to indicate fullness or completion.

At the conclusion of this section Jesus travels to Dalmanutha. This location is unknown, but is assumed to be on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Mark 8:11-21

Prayer

Jesus, open my eyes to your truth. Help me understand what it means to be your disciple . Give me the perseverance to study your word and illuminate for me what you have for me there. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. The disciples have witnessed the miraculous feedings of multitudes and yet are worried that they have no bread with them. Why do you think they feel this way?
2. What do you think Jesus meant by the 'leaven of the Pharisees'?

Commentary

In 8:14-21 we read of the disciples' failure to bring bread and a warning against leaven. It is not easy to understand what Jesus means by the "yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." It is also not incredible that in groping for the meaning, the disciples would think that Jesus was rebuking them for failing to bring bread. This account just contributes further to Mark's theme of the dullness of the disciples.

In 8:15, Jesus tells his disciples to "watch out." He then speaks of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Leaven, in the context of the Jewish Passover, symbolized all that must be removed from Israel when the nation transfers its allegiance from Pharaoh to God (Exodus 12:15-20). Here, the Pharisees and Herod are obstacles to the kingdom of God. Jesus could be warning his disciples against requesting a sign to shore up their faith as the Pharisees had just done.

Jesus questions his disciples "Do you not yet understand?" His disciples are exhibiting the same stubbornness as that of the Pharisees and Herodians.

Mark 8:22-26

Prayer

Father, I am often like the blind man. Help me to see clearly. Amen

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What, if any, is the significance to the two step process of healing that takes place here?
2. Compare this account to Mark 10:46-52. What do you notice?

Commentary

Bethsaida was a village on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was the hometown of Jesus' disciples Peter, Andrew and Philip (John 1:44).

This is the only example in the Gospels of a healing in two stages. An incomplete cure and a two-stage healing may have been thought by some to be discrediting to Jesus. This unique healing may be included to show a symbolic parallel to the disciples process of discerning who Jesus is. The disciples, like the blind man, had been "touched" by Jesus and had received a preliminary blessing. Their spiritual insight however, was far from complete. They too needed a second touch.

Jesus told the blind man, "Don't even go into the village." With the exception of the demon-possessed man healed in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1-17), Jesus has always been secretive about His individual healings. This command is particularly emphatic, possibly because people likely would notice a previously blind man walking through town.

Mark 8:27-30

Prayer

(A portion of the ancient 'Prayer of St. Patrick')

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the question Jesus asks his disciples?
2. What answers do people today commonly give to the question "who is Jesus?"
3. Who do you think Jesus is?

Commentary

Mark 8:27-33 is the structural center of this Gospel. It contains Peter's proclamation of who Jesus is and Jesus' explanation of what his journey will entail.

Caesarea Philippi was the capital of the territory ruled by Philip, the brother of Herod Antipas. It included the region of the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" This speculation around Jesus' identity suggests that some probably considered him to be a prophet – an agent of God's power – but not the Messiah. We see this in the responses of John the Baptist, Elijah and others.

Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" This seems to imply that they should have a better understanding of who he actually is than the common people.

"You are the Christ." Peter's response is the first time Jesus is identified as the anointed one by anyone in the narrative, but Mark told the reader the identity of Jesus at the beginning of the book (Mark 1:1). Nevertheless, the exchange that follows indicates that Peter still did not fully understand Jesus' mission.

Jesus tells them to "tell no one" about him. At this time many Jews expected the Messiah to be a political or military figure, someone who would free them from Roman rule. If they knew of Jesus' true identity, they might attempt to make him king, misunderstanding his true mission.

Mark 8:31-33

Prayer

Father, I pray that I need not be rebuked as Peter was. Help me to put Satan and his ways behind me and to look forward only to Jesus. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think the disciples expected the Messiah to be and do?
2. Why does Peter react so strongly to Jesus' prediction of his suffering and death?
3. Why does Jesus say 'Get behind me, Satan'?

Commentary

Following Peter's confession, Jesus now teaches them, making four points about his future:

1. He would suffer
2. He would be rejected
3. He would be killed
4. He would rise from the dead.

Peter rebukes Jesus for this teaching, believing Jesus' revelation his destiny has made him an obstacle to God's rule. Peter did identify Jesus as the Messiah, but he obviously does not understand what being the Messiah means.

Jesus confronts Peter's rebuke and misunderstanding of his mission with a sharp rebuke of his own, "Get behind me, Satan." This doesn't mean that Peter is Satan, or that Satan is directing Peter. He is implying that Peter's desires align better with Satan's: to convince Jesus to avoid suffering and death (Mark 4:1-11) rather than fulfill God's plan of death and resurrection.

Mark 8:34-38

Prayer

Father, help me understand what it means to take up my cross, to deny myself and to follow you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says 'deny yourself'?
2. How do you feel at Jesus' words in this passage?
3. What does it look like to be ashamed of Jesus?

Commentary

The reference in verse 34 to “the crowd” is a little surprising. It seems to indicate that this teaching is not just for the twelve, but for all of those who choose to follow Jesus. To “come after” and “follow” Jesus means to be his disciple.

We can have a misunderstanding of what it means to deny oneself, it often causes us to lean to asceticism. But, to deny oneself is not to do without something, or even many things. It is not asceticism, not self-rejection or self-hatred, nor is it even the disowning of particular sins. It is to renounce the self as the dominant element in our life. It is to replace the self with God-in-Christ as the object of our affections. It is to place the divine will of God before self-will.

The concept should never be cheapened by applying it to enduring some irritation or even a major burden. It is closely related to self-denial, involving a willingness to give up everything dear in life and even life itself for the sake of Jesus. It is a willingness to suffer for Jesus and for others. Such a concept of discipleship is so radical that many contemporary Christians in the west have difficulty relating to it.

Mark 8:35 says, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” Those who place themselves first, instead of the gospel, will be unsuccessful in their self-preservation goals. Jesus’ message leads to eternal life, anything else leads to standing in opposition to God, and ultimately to being on the wrong side of his judgment (Mark 8:38). The Romans reserved crucifixion primarily for those who revolted against the empire’s authority. Jesus is noting that allegiance to him may require the ultimate sacrifice.

In verse 38 it seems that Jesus is referencing his second coming on the day of judgment (Rev 20:11-15), but he also could be referencing his ascension (Luke 24:50-52).



CHAPTER 9

Three of Jesus' disciples witness the glory of Jesus in great splendor. They **discover Jesus** in a new, deeper way. In fact, they never stop discovering Jesus. After this event, Jesus finds some of his disciples attempting to **compassionately serve** a boy stricken by a demon. Though they had good intentions, they were not able to bring healing to the boy.

The boy's father, who was introduced to Jesus because of the **compassionate service** of the disciples, gave a profound request to Jesus, "*I believe, help my unbelief.*" He was **discovering Jesus**, but doubts still remained. Jesus invites his disciples to bring those doubts to him in prayer.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. What is the significance of Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus?
2. How are the events in this section similar to the baptism of Jesus (see Mark 1:9-11)?
3. Compare Mark 9:30-37 to Mark 8:31-38 and Mark 10:32-45. Do you notice a pattern?
4. Notice that the phrase 'kingdom of God' appears in Mark 9:1 and 9:47. What are some of the things this chapter reveals about the kingdom of God?
5. Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Your kingdom come." What does it mean for God's kingdom to come?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 9:1-13

Prayer

Jesus, sometimes we don't understand why things happen the way they do. Please draw us closer to you, help us to see the bigger picture. When we're confused or overwhelmed, please help us trust in your perfect plan. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How are the events in this section similar to the baptism of Jesus (Mark 1:9-11)?
2. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus?
3. Has there ever been a time in your life where God surprised you?

Commentary

The end of the last chapter spoke of the Second Coming. Here we transition to a glimpse of the kingdom the disciples were about to get with transfiguration. The mountain where the events took place was likely Mt. Hermon, which stands over 9,000 feet tall.

Why did God bring Moses and Elijah? Jesus was fulfilling what was foretold in the Old Testament which was represented by Moses' presence, and the prophets represented by Elijah's presence. It's interesting that both Moses and Elijah were spoken to by God on a mountain in the past.

Peter was moved by the experience and wanted to erect three shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. He didn't understand that Jesus wasn't ready to permanently enter into glory until death and resurrection. Peter jumped into action without taking the time to understand what was truly going on, which was not unusual for him.

God was speaking from a cloud, just like he was in Exodus. This would clearly be understood by the disciples, they would know exactly who was speaking.

Just as with many other miracles, Jesus instructed the disciples not to tell others what they had seen. He likely did this for the same reason he had in the past – the people may be confused about his mission. They expected the Messiah to free them from Rome. Once Jesus died and rose from the dead, the disciples could share this experience with others, reaffirming who Jesus is.

When Jesus says that Elijah has already come, he is referring to John the Baptist.

Mark 9:14-29

Prayer

Jesus, I need faith. I believe, but I often doubt. Help my unbelief. Strengthen my faith. Draw me closer to you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why did the disciples fail to cast out the demon?
2. Think of the times where you tried to power through a challenging situation on your own power without relying on God. How did that turn out? What would you do differently if you got a do-over?
3. How can you rely more on God for the battles against sin and evil? What daily habits could help you grow in this area?

Commentary

This is the last record of exorcism in Mark, and it's a special one.

Jesus' comment about the unbelieving generation was likely addressed to the disciples, who lacked the faith to perform the exorcism in his absence.

The child's father came to the disciples seeking their help. They let him down. Now he wasn't sure their master could help either. This explains his remark, "if you can do anything."

"All things are possible" has often been taken out of context. Jesus wasn't saying that we can have anything we pray for so long as we believe. He was saying that nothing is impossible for God, so when we pray, we must know in our heart that he is capable of anything and to trust in him.

As Jesus spoke to the father and reassured him that the healing was possible, the father's hope of his son's healing was being restored. In a beautiful display of honesty and humility, he admits to Jesus that his faith isn't very strong and he asks for help.

Jesus focused on the issue of the man's faith before performing the miracle. He could have simply healed the boy without the father's faith. But we see once again that as Jesus healed, he first spoke to the heart of the one asking for help. In doing so, he gave them a chance to exercise their faith and grow in their trust in God. This was a great teaching moment for the disciples and gave them a glimpse of what they might have gotten wrong as they tried the exorcism earlier.

The disciples later asked Jesus in private why they couldn't perform the exorcism. After all, they've been given authority to do so (Mark 6:7) and have successfully driven out demons before (Mark 6:13). Jesus' answer suggests that perhaps they had taken the power God gave them for granted. Maybe they began to think that the power came from them and didn't prayerfully depend on God the way they should have.

Mark 9:30-32

Prayer

Lord, help us to be open to your message. When we read your word, when we pray, help us understand what you want us to see. Open our eyes and our hearts to Your truth. Expose anything we've come to believe that didn't come from you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus again predicts his death. How does this prediction differ from the one he made in Mark 8:31-33?
2. Imagine you were one of the disciples traveling with Jesus. How would you feel upon hearing him mentioning his death again in this way?

Commentary

Jesus did not want anyone to know that he and his disciples were going through Galilee. As the events were progressing closer to his arrest, he wanted to spend more time with his disciples. Jesus demonstrated that a part of discipling others is spending time individually or in a small group with them, not just preaching to a crowd. If you are discipling others, consider if you are spending enough time in a small group or individual setting with them. If you are being disciplined, consider this as well.

Jesus told his disciples about his upcoming death and resurrection. He has shared this with them once already and will share it once more again soon. This time he added an extra detail: that he was going to be delivered or handed over, indicating that someone was going to betray him. He wanted them to know that his crucifixion was happening, that he didn't misspeak the first time. And he wanted them to remember that the death and the resurrection are all a part of the plan.

The disciples didn't understand what he was telling them. And the Gospel tells us that they were afraid to even ask. Why? Perhaps it was because this didn't line up with what they were hoping the Messiah would do and they didn't want him to tell them he didn't come to take over and rule. Perhaps it was because they were concerned about all this talk of death. Jesus was doing so many great things, he was on a mission from God and was gathering a following and influence. Why was he so preoccupied with this death idea? Maybe it was better to change the subject. Or perhaps they didn't want to ask him because the last time he spoke of death and resurrection, Peter tried to straighten him out and was rebuked for it.

Mark 9:33-37

Prayer

God, please help us to follow Jesus' teaching about serving others. Please help us to focus not on worldly success, but on how we can bless others to share your love and bring you glory. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What were the disciples arguing about?
2. Jesus just mentioned his impending death and his disciples are arguing about power. How does this compare to Mark 8:31-38 and Mark 10:32-45?
3. When you hear painful news, how do you react? How is your reaction similar or different than the disciples?

Commentary

The disciples were afraid to ask Jesus about his death and resurrection. Surely that's what they were discussing among themselves for the rest of their journey to Capernaum? Apparently not. They moved on to the subject of who would be greatest among them once Jesus came to power. Not only did they completely miss the point of what Jesus was teaching them, they managed to make it all about themselves.

Jesus knew what they were discussing. How difficult it must have been, being so close to unimaginable torture and death, to have those closest to him argue about which of them was more important! Yet Jesus patiently turned this into another teaching moment. He told them again of the Kingdom of God and that the true definition of greatness is not at all what they had thought.

Notice that Jesus never said that success is bad. He simply redirected their focus to what their state of heart was and what motivated their actions. Success is great as long as it doesn't become more important than God. Seeking success out of selfishness is what Jesus warned against.

Just as with the Canaanite woman, Jesus used family hierarchy to illustrate a point. Instead of comparing children to household pets, he was comparing adults to children. Children were considered to be less important by society's standards than adults at the time. Jesus taught that we are to show compassion to all, including those the society doesn't consider important. They are all God's children and are loved by him. Of course we know that children are close to Jesus' heart and that is likely the other reason he chose to use one for this lesson.

Mark 9:38-41

Prayer

God, please bless all those involved in ministering to children. Help us to be good examples to the children in our lives, to help them stay on the right path. Please also help us to be agents of peace and unity with others. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you think Jesus wants us to treat other disciples that think differently than we do?
2. How can you build unity with other Christians without compromising the gospel?
3. Is there someone in your life that you can help grow as a disciple of Jesus?

Commentary

Jesus' teaching about serving others in verse 37 was interrupted by John's question. The disciples were troubled by a man who must have been a believer but wasn't a part of their group. This man was successfully casting out demons using Jesus' authority. How was he doing that without even being around Jesus, while they just failed to help the possessed epileptic boy earlier?

Jesus explained that the person was doing good work under God's authority and this would only contribute to the spreading of Jesus' message. This was likely a humbling thing for them to hear. The disciples, who had previously been arguing about who'd be the greatest, were perhaps beginning to feel like an elite group who were the only ones that could perform miracles by God's power.

Jesus further stated that who isn't against us is for us. Wait, didn't Matthew record a similar statement in Matthew 12:30, which states that who isn't with us is against us? Aren't those two contradictory to each other? No. These were spoken at different times and illustrate God's patience with us. Jesus didn't want to force people to quickly make up their minds about him. But when the time would come to decide, the only place to be was on the side of Jesus. Both verses underscore that indifference towards Jesus is not an option.

Now that John's question has been addressed, Jesus resumed teaching on serving others. Jesus taught them that showing even the smallest act of kindness to a follower of Jesus is very meaningful to him. Any act we perform as an expression of our love for God is meaningful. And any time we help people, we honor him.

Mark 9:42-50

Prayer

God, please help us to see our sins the way you do and give us the strength to cut them out of our lives. Help us be the salt of this world, to make our community better and preserve it from decay and sin. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you feel as strongly about sin as God does?
2. What would it look like in your life if you were to take this passage seriously?
3. Jesus calls his disciples to be 'salt', which includes not only cutting out sin, but also pursuing justice and love in our community and around the world. How is God calling you to be 'salt' today?

Commentary

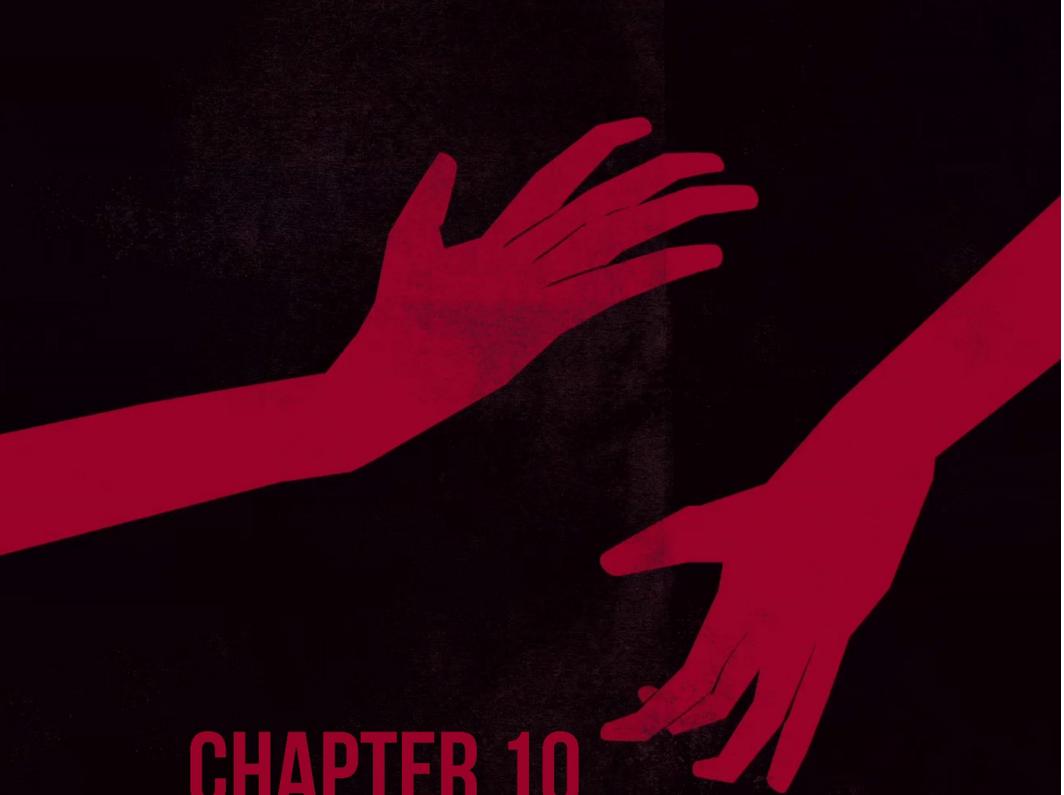
In verse 42, Jesus was likely referring to John's earlier question about the other believer who was casting out demons. He and other "little ones", which are newer believers who are not firmly rooted in God yet, are not to be caused to stumble or hindered in any way from following Jesus and doing his work.

Jesus didn't mean that we should physically cut off our limbs; he was emphasizing how critical it is to avoid sin at all costs. Removing sin can be costly - it can affect our relationships, jobs and habits we've come to enjoy. Whatever the cost, it's worth it.

The word we see translated as "hell" is from the Hebrew language, meaning "Valley of Hinnom." This was an actual valley on the southern border of Jerusalem where trash and human waste were burned. The valley came to symbolize eternal punishment, where the agony was both external (fire) and internal (worms).

In Leviticus 2:13 we learn that salt was to be added to sacrifices, signifying a covenant with God. Verse 49 likely means that all the believers who are 'salted' and set apart for God, will encounter the purifying fire of trials or persecution in their lives. For the persecuted Christians of Rome, as well as many persecuted Christians now, one of the fears could be that they are suffering because they made a mistake and God has forsaken them. Jesus' words encourage us in knowing that all true believers experience hardship at some point and this is not something that should cause our faith to waiver. Quite the opposite actually, as it's an opportunity to grow closer to God.

In the last verse, Jesus spoke of everyday table salt, which changes the flavor of food just as we are to change our world for the better. Salt also preserves food from decay, just as we should guard our loved ones and communities from moral decay. Jesus encouraged the disciples to not lose their devotion to God and to sacrificial service. This is the only way they'd stay at peace with one other.



CHAPTER 10

Jesus shows his disciples that following him means laying down personal preferences and using the power he gives us to **compassionately serve** others by **living generously**, using the resources he entrusts to us to invest in the flourishing of others.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. How does this chapter impact our views of sex, money and power?
2. Jesus teaches that, in marriage, husband and wife are 'one flesh'. What does this mean?
3. How does Jesus expose the Rich Young Ruler's idol?
4. How does Jesus' statement in Mark 10:27 shape the way we share the gospel with others?
5. How does Jesus statement in Mark 10:42-45 shape when, where and who we serve?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 10:1-12

Prayer

Jesus, in the scriptures you call yourself the groom, and you call the church the bride. Help me to understand the deep love you have for me, and how you long for relationship with me, the way a groom longs for his bride. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus is questioned by the religious leaders about the legality of divorce. Basically, they want to know when they are permitted to give a divorce while remaining in God's favor. How does Jesus answer their question?
2. What does this passage teach us about Jesus' view of marriage?
3. What does Jesus mean when he says, "What God has joined together, let no one separate"?
4. How does this passage conflict with the modern understanding of marriage and divorce?

Commentary

Though Jesus is attempting to remain unnoticed by the crowds, they continue to flock to him as he travels to Judea. The religious leaders continue to pester him with questions intended to undermine his credibility.

In the first salvo of questions, they attempt to pin Jesus down on a legal matter. Though the question is about divorce, they do not appear to want his opinion, but rather for him to get caught up in the question and lose favor with the crowd. Remember, ever since Mark 3:6, these leaders have been plotting to destroy Jesus.

While it is not clear why they raise the contentious issue of divorce, it may be that they believe the issue could be detrimental to Jesus, just as it was to John the Baptist (who Herod had killed back in Chapter 6).

Jesus answers the question by pointing back to the first marriage, recorded in the creation account in Genesis 1. This showcases God's ideal, a man and a woman in complete unity, intimacy and fidelity when two become one flesh.

Moses, having come after the creation account, gave regulations about divorce that were meant to protect women from abuse due to the hardness of hearts.

Mark 10:13-16

Prayer

Father, help me to see the children in my life as blessings. Help me to love them just as you have loved me. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why were the children brought to Jesus? What would it look like for you to do this for the children in your life?
2. Compare Jesus' interaction with the children to his interaction with the Pharisees. What does this teach you about Jesus' values?
3. Read the text again and consider the words Jesus said and the actions he took. Imagine that you were one of the children in this scene. How would you feel?
4. God calls us his sons and daughters. How does this passage illustrate this reality? How does this truth impact your identity?

Commentary

Immediately after the discussion about marriage, a group of children were brought before Jesus. It is likely that their parents wanted Jesus to bless them.

It is likely that the religious leaders, along with the disciples, viewed these little ones as an annoyance. They were getting in the way of 'grown-up' conversation. But Jesus, who is rich in mercy and love, welcomes the children and calls them to him.

Children at this time were often ignored and mistreated. Jesus uses the moment to show the value of children and to reveal that the Kingdom of God is not founded on pride and position, it is founded on humility and love.

The location of this event, sandwiched between the debate with the religious leaders about divorce and the discussion with the rich young ruler, seems to indicate that Jesus is intentionally contrasting power and humility. One does not enter the kingdom of God with money, power or moralistic religion. One enters like a child, in love and faith.

Mark 10:17-31

Prayer

Father, give me the strength and wisdom to steward well the material resources you have given me. All I have is yours. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How do we view wealth and money in our culture?
2. Why did the rich young ruler grieve?
3. What are ways that a disciple of Jesus can model the values of the Kingdom of God with their material and financial resources?
4. How does Jesus' teaching here shape my relationship with my financial and material resources?

Commentary

After Jesus welcomed the children to come to him, a wealthy young man approaches Jesus and asks him how he can inherit eternal life. The passage shows that the man relies on his material resources and moralistic religion. Notice that the man is not named in the text. He is defined by his wealth.

Jesus responds with the 10 Commandments that are related to human interaction. The 'do not defraud' is likely an combination of the 8th and 9th commandments.

Jesus intentionally leaves out the commandments relating to humanity's interactions with God (i.e. have no other gods before me). It is likely that Jesus here is pointing out that the man has made wealth his god. He has come to be defined by his material resources. This is likely why Jesus calls the man to sell his possessions and give to the poor.

The scripture says Jesus loved this man. He spoke to his heart, confronted his idols and called the man to follow him.

Jesus does not call all of his disciples to 'sell all' and give to the poor. Jesus does call his disciples to put him first in all things and to yield all our time, energy, talent and resources to him.

Mark 10:32-34

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your bountiful grace, love and mercy. Thank you for giving up your rights, laying down your life, allowing yourself to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, beaten and killed. Moreover, thank you that three days later you rose from the grave, conquering Satan, sin and death, and giving me life abundantly. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Immediately after teachings on marriage and money, Jesus again mentions his death. Why do you think Jesus repeats this prediction at this time?
2. Imagine you were one of Jesus' disciples walking with him towards Jerusalem. What would you be thinking? How would Jesus' words impact you?
3. Notice that Jesus walked ahead of his disciples towards Jerusalem. What does this teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?

Commentary

This is now the third time that Jesus has predicted his death. In great detail he shares what will become of him in just a few short days. The setting makes this prediction all the more powerful: “They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem.”

This journey that Jesus is on with his disciples will soon come to a close. He is marching, resolutely, towards a certain death. By this time, Jesus was a hugely popular figure and the religious establishment had been plotting his murder for quite some time (Mark 3:6)

This may be why those following Jesus were both astonished and afraid.

Following each of Jesus’ predictions about his death and resurrection, he teaches his disciples about power and sacrifice. Following his prediction in chapter 10, we see a teaching on suffering and service.

Mark 10:35-45

Prayer

Father, give me the wisdom and grace to use my influence to bless and serve others, especially the marginalized. Guard me against the temptation to leverage my influence in ways that build my kingdom. Keep my eyes and my heart focused on your kingdom. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Which of the disciples do you most resonate with in this text?
2. Imagine you were listening to this conversation for the first time. How would these words strike you?
3. How does Jesus' teaching shape your view of leadership, influence and power?

Commentary

James and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, ask that Jesus elevate their station by having them sit at his right and left hand. The fact that this question comes immediately after Jesus' prediction of his death may indicate that James and John felt that this would be their last opportunity to approach Jesus.

The question itself also shows their expectation of Jesus. Specifically, that he would be a political ruler who holds court from a throne room in Jerusalem. They were asking to be the equivalent of vice president and speaker of the house.

Jesus' answer shows deference to God the Father. Though Jesus is divine, there are differences of authority within the Trinity. Jesus, the son of God, consistently defers to the authority and direction of God the Father.

As is often the case, the other disciples get mad at James and John, likely because they desire these positions of prominence as well.

Jesus uses this opportunity to once again show that his disciples are to be marked by humility, service, grace and love. They are not to use positions of authority to get what they want or build their own kingdom. Rather, they are to steward their power and influence to bless and serve others. As he speaks, Jesus is living out what he is teaching. As he marches to Jerusalem, he will, in just a few days from this conversation, lay down his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:46-52

Prayer

Lord, thank you for revealing yourself to me. For showing me your love, your power and your grace. Help me to see you more vividly, in full, vibrant color. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. In light of what Jesus teaches us about being a disciple and his predictions of his death, what did it mean for Bartimaeus to follow Jesus on the road? Where did the road lead?
2. In the next chapter (Mark 11), Jesus will enter Jerusalem and begin the week leading up to the crucifixion. Why do you think the healing of Bartimaeus is the last thing Mark records before the entry into Jerusalem?

Commentary

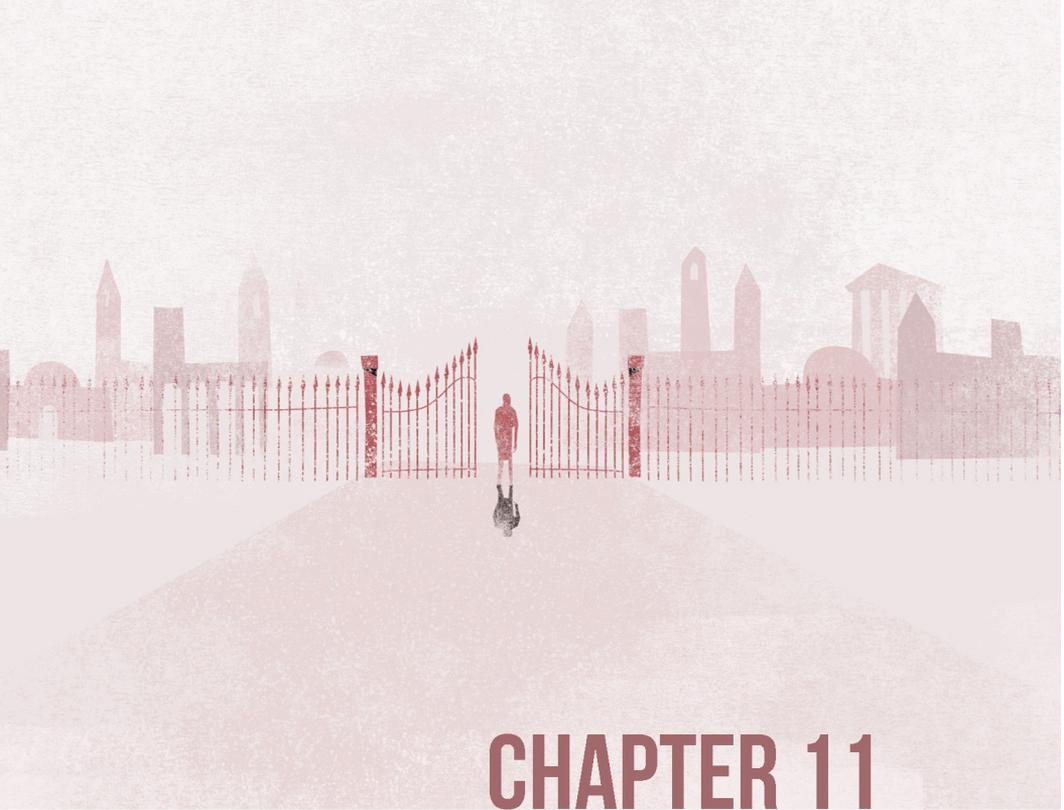
As Bartimaeus sits by the roadside crying out for Jesus, the crowds scold him. The poor sitting roadside in this region was a common occurrence, as Jericho was a high-traffic area on the road to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus was not only blind, he was an outcast, put on the outskirts of his community. Mark's gospel grants this man dignity by recording his name, a stark contrast to the nameless 'rich young ruler' earlier in this chapter.

This is the last miracle recorded by Mark before Jesus reaches Jerusalem. Jesus is marching toward certain death. The cross is 'just around the corner' and yet, like with the woman with the flow of blood in Mark 5, Jesus takes time to stop and engage with Bartimaeus.

Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" is similar to the one he asked James and John in the previous section. It forces the blind man to reflect on what he really needs from Jesus. His answer indicates faith that Jesus can give sight to the blind and turn a roadside beggar to a flourishing follower of Jesus.

It is likely that this miracle is also symbolic of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Notice that Jesus' three predictions of his death are 'sandwiched' between two miracles related to blind receiving sight (Mark 8:22).



CHAPTER 11

As he marches into Jerusalem, Jesus receives praise from the crowd at the city gates and conflict from the religious establishment in the temple. This temple was meant as a place of worship for people from all nations, but it had been corrupted by greed, pride and a lust for power. Jesus cleanses the temple and shows us that his disciples are meant to **worship together**, a unified yet diverse group of people, inclusive of all nations, ethnicities and cultures.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. How does Jesus' entry into the city compare to a 'triumphal entry' of a military or political leader?
2. Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus doesn't go to a government building or military headquarters. Jesus goes directly to the temple. What does this tell you about how Jesus' kingdom will come?
3. Jesus calls the temple by three names. What are they?
4. Look at Mark 11:18. Why were the chief priests and scribes looking for a way to kill Jesus?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 11:1-11

Prayer

Jesus, I come before you and give you thanks. I remember how you set your face firmly towards Jerusalem, with a single eye and pure intention, knowing what lay ahead but never turning aside. I remember how you rode into your city in triumph. I thank you that you enjoyed the Hallelujahs and Hosannas of ordinary people, living fully in the moment of delight, and accepting their praise. I thank you that you went into the heart of our evil and pain in a way that was both terrible and wonderful, as your kingship became your brokenness, and your dying became love's triumph. Jesus, in your mercy, hear my prayer. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Put yourself in the crowd that day. How do you feel when you see Jesus riding in? What are you hoping he will do?
2. How does Jesus show his power and design in the details of his entry into Jerusalem?
3. What is the first thing Jesus does upon entering the city?

Commentary

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is similar to the triumphal entry of a great general after conquering an enemy in battle. This ancient tradition was meant to showcase the splendor and glory of the one riding in. These leaders would commonly ride in on horses, chariots or even on elephants.

Here we find Jesus riding in without a military or a chariot, but on a borrowed donkey, an animal of peace. This image signifies the nature of God's kingdom and the humility of Jesus.

Although Mark does not quote Zechariah 9:9, he likely had it in mind when he recorded this event. It says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; he is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Moreover, the messianic nature of the entry is seen in the references to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4), the colt that previously had not been ridden (Zechariah 9:9), and the kingdom of David (2 Samuel 7).

The crowds shout 'Hosanna', which means 'save us, we pray' (Psalm 118:25-26) and was originally a plea for help; but it later also became a shout of praise, as it is here. The statement "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" was originally directed to pilgrims as they approached the temple, but Mark no doubt wanted his readers to apply it to Jesus and to see him as the coming Messiah.

Mark 11:12-14

Prayer

God, you are my life. You have breathed into me the breath of life and through you I have become a living being. My very existence and my being flow from you. In you I live and move and have my being. You are the vine and I am a true branch of yours. You have made me alive in Jesus. You came that I might have life and have it abundantly. I have you, Jesus. You are my life. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How does this scene strike you?
2. Consider how frequently Jesus uses agricultural components to illustrate truth. Why do you think he chose to communicate in this way?
3. What event occurs between this text and Mark 11:20-26? How might this help us understand the meaning of Jesus' curse on the fig tree?

Commentary

Why would Jesus destroy a fig tree? Simply for not having figs when they are out of season? The answer can be found in the Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching later in this passage beginning in verse 20. The cursing of the fig tree is a prophetic action symbolizing the coming judgment on unfaithful Israel by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. This is a parable 'acted out', similar to how the prophets that came before Jesus would communicate big ideas.

Jeremiah 8:13 says, "I will surely snatch them away," declares the Lord; "There will be no grapes on the vine and no figs on the fig tree, and the leaf will wither; and what I have given them will pass away."

Hosea 9:10 says, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season. But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame, and they became as detestable as that which they loved."

Joel 1:6-7 says, "For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness. It has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; their branches have become white."

Mark 11:15-19

Prayer

Father, Just as you called for your temple to be a 'house of prayer', please help me make my life a 'life of prayer'. Help me to pray frequently, with conviction, with purpose, with confidence, with faith and in your will.
Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. This so-called 'cleansing of the temple' was also a premeditated and deliberate act on the part of Jesus. What were the issues that Jesus was protesting and how are they still relevant today?
2. How do you think the marginalized and outcast would have felt watching Jesus as he kicked out the money changers?
3. If you were a religious leader at the temple at this time, how would you have responded to Jesus's actions?
4. How can corrupt or greedy leaders cause damage in the church today?

Commentary

This is another prophetic action with the same meaning as the cursing of the fig tree. It foresaw the coming judgment on unfaithful Israel by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.

After Jesus had overturned the tables of the moneychangers he says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a robbers’ den.” Jesus’ teaching here likely pulls from Isaiah 56:6-7, Numbers 15:14-16 and Jeremiah 7:11.

By quoting Jeremiah, Jesus seems to suggest that God would do the same to the temple of Herod (Jeremiah 7:12-15).

Moreover, Jesus’ condemning expression ‘den of robbers’ is likely aimed at the corrupt leadership and prideful aristocracy of the religious elite.

This event is commonly referred to as the ‘cleansing of the temple’, but that may not fully grasp what Jesus is doing here. Jesus does so much more than remove the greedy money changers. By becoming an atoning sacrifice for our sins and removing the wall of separation between God and people, Jesus eliminates the need for the temple altogether.

Mark 11:20-26

Prayer

Father, I pray that my life would be one of prayer. Help me to trust that you will provide my every need and help me to have faith that “all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” Give me the heart of submission to your will as exhibited through you son Jesus. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. In your opinion how effective was the object lesson of the withered tree?
2. Have you seen misuses of the phrase “whatever you ask”?
3. How do we know if what we ask is within God’s will?
4. Is it ok to ask God for something if we are not sure that it is in his will?

Commentary

The fig tree that Jesus cursed (Mark 11:12-14) had withered within 24 hours. It represents the judgment of God on Israel (Isaiah 34:4, Joel 1:7-12, Amos 4:9). The disciples ask him about it and he responds by teaching about faith, prayer and forgiveness.

Jesus seems to be highlighting the need to trust in God and bear fruit in him.

The metaphor of moving a mountain was used in ancient Jewish literature to signify something that is impossible apart from God.

We must be careful with the phrase from verse 24, “whatever you ask.” This statement cannot be applied without exception. We know that God delights to “give good things to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11) and is capable of granting any prayer, though we must ask with godly motives (James 4:3) and according to God’s will (1 John 5:14). Then we can have confidence that God will “supply every need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19), knowing that he will work “all things together for good” and will “graciously give us all things” (Romans 8:28, 32).

Mark 11:27-33

Prayer

Father, have there been times where I willfully refused to see your presence? Help me be alert to your voice in all my encounters. I pray for the wisdom to know when, instead of trying to have the last word, it may be better for me to keep silent or to say less. Help me be authentic in living out the authority God has given me and to accept the direction of those who have God-given authority in society and the church. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you know about Jesus' authority?
2. How did Jesus' show authority?
3. What two sources did Jesus mention as origins of authority?

Commentary

Here the elders represent the Jewish aristocracy of Jerusalem. They are probably aware of Jesus' association with King David and may know that his triumphant entry into Jerusalem was a public assertion of authority, but they question him by asking, "by what authority" (verse 28) he does these things. This most likely refers to Jesus' actions in the temple. Jesus does not answer their question directly, instead he responds with a question of his own: "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" This alludes to the source of his authority, the same source that legitimized John's ministry. It came from Heaven.

Since the ruling priests had sole jurisdiction over the temple, they alone could give authority to act as Jesus did in the temple. Either Jesus had to admit that he had not been given the right to act by any human authority and thus was unauthorized, or he had to claim to have been given his right to act by God and thus make a prophetic claim for his actions. So, these questions were aimed at incriminating Jesus regarding the nature of his right to do what he had done.

CHAPTER 12

The religious establishment continues to confront and harass Jesus. He is a threat to their status quo. They try to trap him into publicly taking a position on a variety of hot topics which would disappoint, frustrate or alienate some of those that were following him.

Jesus engages their questions about politics, sex, money and power with grace and tact, seeking their flourishing and the flourishing of others. He shows his disciples that even when they experience conflict, they are to strive to **compassionately serve** and **build relationships** as they **reach out** and **disciple others**.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. Consider the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12). How is the murder of the vineyard owner's son used by Jesus against the religious leaders?
2. Multiple times, opponents of Jesus try to trap him. What are the questions they ask? Why are these power-players attempting to discredit Jesus?
3. Contrast the Scribe in Mark 12:28-34 with the rest of the characters in the chapter. What do you notice about him?
4. Why did Jesus criticize the scribes in Mark 12:38-40?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 12:1-12

Prayer

Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, may I recognize you have plans for my life this very day. May I be open and available to serve you in each situation you have specifically orchestrated for my life throughout morning, noon and night. Convict me of any plan I might come up with to usurp your rule throughout today. This must include my thoughts, my feelings, my reactions, my attitudes and my desires. May they all be controlled by you until I rest my head in bed tonight. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Which character do you most relate to in this parable?
2. In what ways have your actions reflected the attitudes of the evil tenants?
3. Are you receptive to God speaking into your life?

Commentary

In today's text, the setting is extremely important. Here we find an allegory in which key features are as follows:

- the vineyard is Israel
- the owner is God the Father
- the tenants are the Jewish leadership
- the servants are the many prophets consistently sent by God to Israel
- the only son and heir is Jesus

These blatant antagonists represent the chief priests, teachers of the law and Israel's elders; as referenced back in Mark 11:27. The wall, the pit, the press and the tower are all components of a first century Galilee vineyard.

It is likely that Jesus was close to an existing vineyard which would add to the point of his teaching. Back then, after a vineyard was completely prepared, its owner often rented it to tenants before going off on a journey. Many of the vineyards in Galilee had absentee landowners who contracted with tenants on a crop-sharing basis.

What transpires next is an attempt by the owner to procure his part of a harvest. And so, at reaping time, this owner sends three individual servants in succession to return with his portion of the grapes. The tenants repudiate the agreement they signed. They beat up the first two servants and murder the third. Verse 5 adds to the facts that these devious tenants are also visited by "many others". As a last resort, the owner sends his only son whom he mistakenly expects will be respected. There is no question in the minds of Jesus' hearers that he, himself, is the son in this parable; as the narrative makes clear in verse 12.

Mark 12:13-27

Prayer

Lord, today I come to you as the master of my life. My heart's desire is to continuously discover truths from your word which deal with my life. Help me to grow as your disciple, and give me wisdom to live righteously in this age. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What did the Herodians and Pharisees hope to accomplish with their questioning of Jesus?
2. What does it mean to give to God the things that are God's?
3. How does this text shape your view of being a disciple of Jesus?

Commentary

In this section, Jesus faces direct challenges by Israel's leadership about two hot topics: politics and the afterlife.

They probe his view on the political power overseeing Israel, the Roman government. On the heels of such an encounter, a group of Jewish leaders, called Sadducees, who do not believe in life after death pose a hypothetical question to Him.

These hypocritical leaders pander to Jesus' popular reputation. Listen to the words they say to him, "We know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others. You pay no attention to who they are. You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." They are so malicious that Jesus shows them he sees right through their impure motives. He asks, "Why are you trying to trap me?" And Mark adds, "Jesus knew their hypocrisy," verse 15.

They pose a question of whether Jews should pay Roman taxes. Jesus asks for a Roman coin. On it is the imprint of Caesar. Jesus responds "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's".

The Sadducees now pose another hypothetical question based on their belief there is no afterlife. They think they've reasoned Jesus into a corner. Jesus' answer signals that these religious figures do not understand the teachings of God.

Note his answer regarding angels and marriage likely shows that marriage is not to be found in the age to come.

Mark 12:28-34

Prayer

Jesus, I come to you today with a desire to understand the scope and implications of keeping the greatest commandment of all. I long to please you by exhibiting true biblical love within my world. Guide me through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit to fashion each facet of life around love! Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus tells the scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” What does this reveal about the kingdom of God?
2. As you have engaged in the teachings of Jesus, how have you grown in your understanding of and relationship with Jesus?
3. What would it mean for you to live as a citizen of the kingdom that Jesus talks about?

Commentary

In today's section we find a scribe, a teacher of the scriptures, who approaches Jesus. He is impressed with how Jesus answers his theological questions. He engages Jesus honestly, unlike the Sadducees, who were not there to learn, but simply to question.

Jesus immediately gives his answer by quoting text frequently used to inaugurate a Sabbath service. This confession of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, declares two truths: the unity of God and his covenant relationship with his people.

Jesus takes this teachable moment to intertwine a second command to the first one which is found in Leviticus 19:18. By combining these two teachings, he shows that if one loves God, they are also to love others as God does. He states in Mark 12:31, "There is no other command (singular) than these (plural)!"

As is often the case, this scribe is surprised at Jesus' wisdom and knowledge. Jesus responds with 'you are not far from the kingdom of God'.

Mark 12:35-37

Prayer

Father, give to me a greater vision of how you have been working throughout history. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why does the statement about King David delight the crowd?
2. In light of this text, how do you think Jesus viewed himself?

Commentary

The teachers of the law represent teaching authority in Israel. Jesus admits they have correct theological answers, but their views always need amending. For instance, they taught that Elijah must come first and Jesus concurs (Mark 9:11), but they were unable to recognize Elijah when he came.

A teacher knows the two greatest commands are greater than all burnt offerings and sacrifices, but he remains outside the kingdom of heaven as long as he fails to submit to Jesus' authority (Mark 12:28-34).

Now we learn that the Jewish leaders teach that the Messiah is the son of David. The issue about the son of David harks back to Bartimaeus' hailing Jesus as the son of David (Mark 10:47-48) and to the cries of adulation when Jesus entered the city in Mark 11:10, "the coming kingdom of our father David". It also recalls the tenants in the parable, who recognized the son as the heir, and it points forward to the crucial question raised at Jesus' trial by the high priest, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Mark 14:61. Jesus cites Psalm 110:1 to point out a conundrum. If the Messiah is the son of David, why does David address him as Lord?

It is hardly customary for fathers to address their sons in this way. One expects quite the reverse. How then can the Messiah be David's son? Jesus leaves it to his audience to figure out the answer.

The reader also must infer that David was referring to someone other than his descendants who built the dynasty after him. He must be referring to someone greater than him and to a regime greater than his. Mark frequently challenges his readers to understand more of Jesus' full identity by posing questions (Mark 4:41, 8:29, 11:28).

The old "imperial vision" shouted by the crowds needs correcting. Jesus does not wield the political and military authority of David, yet he is greater than the great king of Israel. The kingdom that he brings is greater than that of "our father David"; it is the kingdom of God.

Mark 12:38-40

Prayer

Jesus, may today be another day in which your word will impact my life. I am discovering in this study I still have much to learn about representing you, by surrendering my attitudes, my assumptions, my health, my actions and my daily practices to your control. And thank you for blessing me with the Holy Spirit who knows every part of who I am! I am open to guidance this entire day. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you describe the severity of Jesus' complaint and anger against these scribes?
2. What would it be like to live under the guidance of these scribes?
3. What specifically does Jesus accuse the scribes of?
4. What are some modern parallels to the 1st century scribes?

Commentary

This text encompasses the most scathing profile of a group of religious teachers. Though they are scribes, they have completely misunderstood scripture. Their job was to copy the scriptures so that, after learning its message, they could educate others on how to live for and trust in God.

Though they were familiar enough with scripture to have much of it memorized, yet they never learned how to apply it to life

While some of them, like Nicodemus, and the scribe we saw in Mark 12:28, strive to truly understand God's word, the vast majority are described by the Jesus as hypocritical, mistaken and foolish.

They were supposed to help people learn about God but instead they connived ways to get special honors and status for themselves

Jesus indicts these leaders for their flagrant duplicity. From their attire to their scandalous actions, they were often detested. They looked down on the common people. In fact, Jesus speaks about this reality in his parable of the Pharisee and Publican in the temple in Luke 18:9-14.

Mark 12:41-44

Prayer

Jesus, allow me to use the example of this widow's faith to fashion my style of living to please you and bring you delight. Purge me from the lure of my sinful nature and replace it with an aim to be humble, obedient and joyful. May I be so faithful to you, that others see and come to know you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What does this passage teach you about true generosity?
2. How would you have felt if you were the widow, walking up among so much wealth, to give your sparse gift?
3. How would you feel hearing the Jesus' words?

Commentary

Within the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem, referred to as the “Court of the Women”, God decreed 13 metal boxes were to be located. These boxes were constructed of pure bronze, each shaped like a ram’s horn.

At the end of each bronze neck was a pure silver bowl-shaped receptacle where the coinage ended up. The bronze funnels were to be polished every week so they would be dazzlingly visible enough to represent the majestic glory of God, while their shine would focus attention on the first activity in Jewish worship: the giving of monetary gifts to God.

Notice what we are told by Mark in verse 41, “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money in the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.” The funnels were often referred to by the Jewish populace as “the trumpets”. It’s Passover weekend and worshippers are throwing metal coinage into the trumpets making quite a racket. The Lord is sitting on a bench across from these containers and observing people.

Notice what Mark tells us in verse 42, “But a poor widow came and put in two very small coins, worth only a few cents.” What a stunning, contrasting activity takes place. With the clamoring racket made by many well-to-do folk depositing their heavy coinage, Jesus perceives a great offering is taking place. A widow deposits her humble financial gift to God.

The placement of this story may be meant to contrast the greed of the teachers of the law with the unrestricted generosity of this widow.

The disciples are not sitting by Jesus so he calls them to him. The lesson he wants them to learn is so significant he demands their presence to see and hear for themselves. Jesus purports to his followers what seems to be more is actually less, while what appears to be less actually turns out to be more!



CHAPTER 13

In one of the most difficult portions of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus teaches his disciples that following him is not about avoiding pain or evading chaos. Jesus often calls his disciples to enter into the chaos and pain, clinging to him and **reaching out** to others who desperately need to know him. Even if the world collapses, he reminds his disciples that he remains faithful and true.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. In this chapter, Jesus gives signs of the 'end of the age'. What are some of the dangers we face when studying or discussing 'the end'.
2. Consider Mark 13:8. Is anything like this going on today? How does Jesus' teaching shape my response to events like these?
3. How does Jesus' teaching in 13:10 shape my understanding of how I am to reach out with the message of the gospel?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 13:1-8

Prayer

Jesus, we watch the news and it looks as if you were speaking to our time when you spoke privately to the disciples on the Mount of Olives. You caution us not to be lead astray. I am trying to keep my eyes fixed on you. I have listened for your word. May my resolve be strong to do your will and follow your path. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think the disciples were so impressed with the temple ?
2. From what Jesus tells his disciples, do you think he wants them to see his return as coming soon or a long way off?
3. Can you give some examples of the 'signs' we may see in our own times?

Commentary

Here we find the longest discourse by Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and, while it is apocalyptic in style, it has more immediate practical and ethical value than most apocalyptic literature. The purpose is not to provide details about the future, but to provide assurance of Jesus' return. It warns against hyper-skepticism as well as fanaticism. The discourse encourages balance and perspective.

We see two major concerns of Jesus explained here. He stresses to his disciples that they are to watch for his return and to avoid being deceived by upsetting events or persons in the meantime

In these opening verses, Jesus' speech is sparked by a disciple's admiration for Herod's temple. We know that some of the stones were more than thirty-eight feet long, twelve feet high and eighteen feet deep.

Jesus' prophecy in verse 2 was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the temple while squashing a rebellion that began in A.D. 66.

The disciples' question dealt primarily with the end of the temple. Jesus' answer went far beyond that.

He mentions signs they will see such as wars and rumors of war, but indicates they are not necessarily signs of the end. His answer applied first to events in the near future, especially the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70, and second to the end of the world and his own return.

In 13:5-13, we find false signs of the end of the age. Four things are set forth that some claimed were signs of the nearness of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world: false messiahs, wars, natural disasters and persecution. Jesus said these were not signs of the end, but rather events that occur as part of the a broken world.

Mark 13:9-13

Prayer

Father, As I look forward to the day of Jesus' return, help me to walk in all your ways, according to your will. Give me an ongoing awareness that this world and the things of this world will not endure forever, but there will come a last day. Help me to see the natural disasters and political turmoil as signs of the end so that day will not catch me unaware. Protect me and your church from false teachers and grant me the courage to bear witness to your son Jesus Christ and the redemption we have in him. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. If God loves us, why does he ask us to endure persecution, betrayal, and hatred for his sake?
2. What are the persecutions disciples of Jesus may expect as on-going preliminary signs?
3. How did Jesus describe the hatred of his disciples?

Commentary

It didn't take long for these predictions in 13:9 to come true. We read from Paul in 2 Corinthians, "Five times I received from the Jew thirty-nine lashes" (2 Corinthians 11:24).

The word "must" in verse 10 is the equivalent of "divine necessity". This statement can be looked upon as a legitimate sign of the end, but we still have uncertainty about the extent to which the gospel must be preached to all nations. Many interpreters have had many different views and questions regarding this verse:

- Had the condition been met by the time Paul was martyred in the early or mid 60 A.D.?
- Has it been met today?
- Was the return of Jesus really imminent during the first decade or two of the church's existence before there was a world mission?

In 13:11-13, Mark returns to the subject of persecution. On the one hand, his readers needed to know that it was not a sign of the end of the age; on the other, they needed to know how to conduct themselves in it.

- They were to continue to give testimony despite persecution (13:9)
- to depend on the Holy Spirit to help them know what to say (13:11)
- and to stand firm to the end (13:13).

James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Mark 13:14-23

Prayer

Father, though the world is often gripped by trouble, you have given us a vision of a day beyond the terror. A day when the heavens and earth will be new, a day when the sound of weeping will give way to delight, a time when all creation will live in peace and people will long enjoy the fruits of their labor. Help us to hold to that vision when our world is shaken. Strengthen us to speak what is truth and to keep to your path, that we might not weary in doing what is right. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What evidence is there of God's grace and love in the midst of this judgement?
2. How does Jesus refer to the powerful spiritual deception that will occur?
3. What form of spiritual deception is our society most vulnerable too?

Commentary

This passage undoubtedly looks ahead to the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. The question is whether there is a double reference, whether the paragraph also looks ahead to another “abomination that causes desolation” (verse 14) and to another period of “distress” (verse 19, 24) at the end of the age long after the fall of Jerusalem. If this interpretation is correct, the siege of Jerusalem was just another false sign of the end of the world, and verse 14-23 ought to be included in the previous section. There is much to be said for this position. No doubt many Jews and Jewish Christians thought the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple would be the end of the world. It was not, and one can see why Jesus warned his disciples not to think it was and admonished them not to lament the fate of the city but to get on with their mission to the gentiles.

The statements in verse 19-20, however, appear to deal with a far greater distress than Jerusalem experienced in 70 A.D. There is no reason to think that it was the worst distress there ever had been or ever would be. Verses 19-20 refer to a climactic distress at the end of the age which leads to the end of the world. Furthermore, verse 24-27 indicates the return of Jesus will take place soon after the distress described in verse 14-23. Jesus did not return after the fall of Jerusalem and dissolution of the Jewish nation in 70 A.D. In fact, he still has not returned over nineteen hundred years later. One should conclude that here, as elsewhere in the discourse, there is a double reference to things in the near future and things in the far future. The destruction of Jerusalem was not a sign of the end of the world; the period of great distress in the future is.

Verse 21-22 seems similar to verse 5-6 which are a warning against being deceived into thinking that Jesus had returned. These verses are warning against delaying your escape because someone claims to be the Messiah.

Mark 13:24-27

Prayer

Father, it is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise for even when heaven and earth pass away, your words will never pass away. To your people who wait for you, you are the light, revealing our salvation. As we await the day when Jesus comes on the clouds in glory and gathers his faithful ones from the ends of the earth; please help us do right and remember you in all our ways. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect on the text. Does anything cause you fear or anxiety?
2. How does Jesus describe himself in this text?
3. How do the promises in this text bring us peace?

Commentary

Here, Jesus gives reason for hope. At this point, the dual reference of this discourse becomes undeniable. Virtually the entire section consists of allusions to various Old Testament tests. One must conclude that the return of Jesus fulfills many of the promises originally given to Israel.

This section begins with the word “but” (verse 24). It contrasts what follows with what precedes and suggest that the return of Jesus is an altogether different event from the fall of Jerusalem and other sufferings of the present age.

Mark’s imagery of the sun being darkened likely indicates a cosmic anomaly of some sort will be a sign of the Son of Man’s coming. This is a common occurrence in many of the Old Testament prophets.

Mark 13:28-31

Prayer

God, our rock and our salvation, so much of faith is waiting. Like a pregnant woman waiting in hope, like a people under siege, holding out till relief comes, like the soul lost in the darkness unable to see even a glimmer of light, yet stumbling through the night because somewhere out ahead, day will surely break. God be with us in our waiting. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How do you feel as you read Jesus' words in this section?
2. Jesus says that his words will never pass away? How does this impact your trust in him?

Commentary

Jesus again uses the fig tree as an example of judgment (Mark 11:12-14, 20-25). The point of this parable is that the presence of leaves clearly indicates the changing season, just as the cosmological signs indicate the changing eras.

The parable in verse 28-29 compares the coming of Jesus to the coming of summer. "These things" and "all these things" must refer to the events of verse 5-23 and especially those of verse 14-23, such as the sufferings associated with the fall of Jerusalem.

The fruitless fig tree in Mark 11:14 symbolizes Israel's corrupt religious leaders as the object of judgment; here, a fruitful fig tree, which may refer to positive work coming from God's people, is a sign of the imminent coming of the kingdom of God.

In verse 30-31, Jesus meant that some of the people of his generation, and more particularly some of his disciples, would not die until the things of verse 5-23 had happened, including the very significant destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.

Mark 13:32-37

Prayer

God, keep us awake in a faith that acts. When our faith grows weary, strengthen us. When our faith grows fearful, give us courage. When our faith grows despairing, give us witnesses. When the faith of others falters, may we be a light in their darkness. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do to be ready for Jesus' return?
2. Do you think Jesus' call for readiness is meant to cause his disciples fear and insecurity?
3. How can you, as a disciple of Jesus, remain alert?

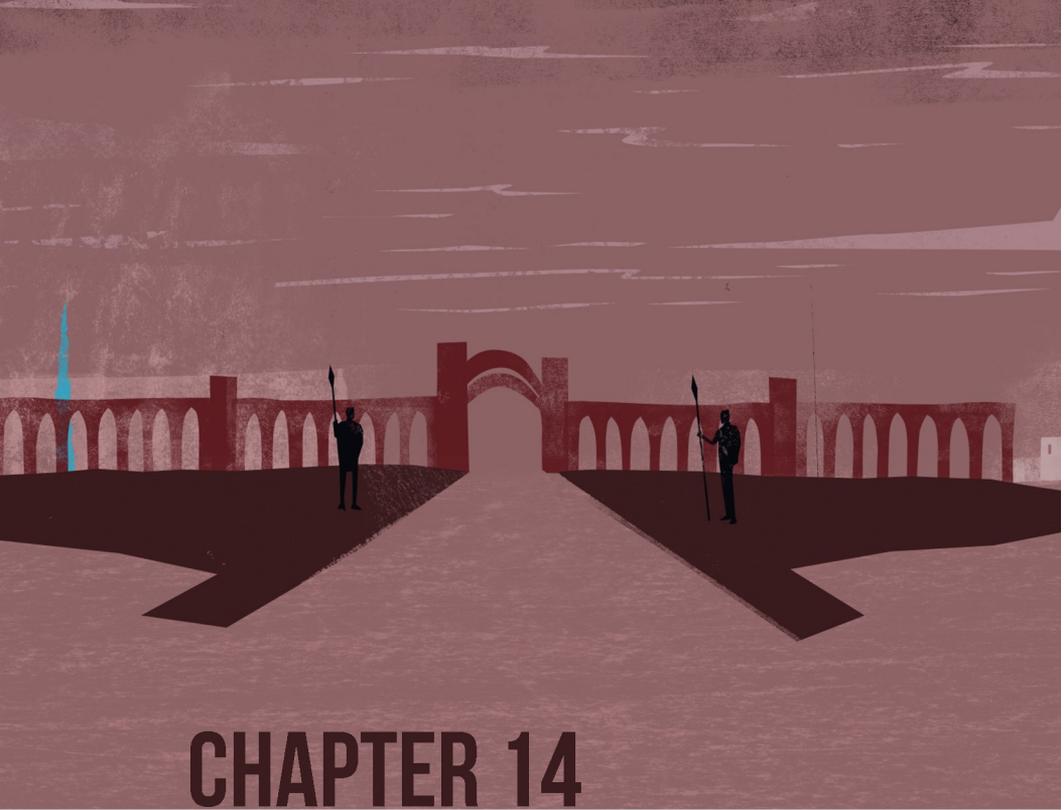
Commentary

As he concludes this teaching, Jesus focusses his disciples minds on a key truth, namely that this will all be done in God's timing, and he knows the details.

The way in which disciples are to be ready for the return of Jesus is not to watch for it or for signs of it, but to be busy with their assigned tasks (verse 34).

Mark's concerns throughout were to warn against deception in the claims that Jesus had already returned or that the end was about to take place, and to promote devotion to discipleship

And, not accidentally, he quoted Jesus as saying the command applies to all disciples and not just the four (verse 3) or the twelve original disciples. The discourse is not just for a past day or a future day but for all of his disciples at all times.



CHAPTER 14

As Jesus approaches the time of his crucifixion, he gathers his disciples, who had, over the last 3-years, **built relationships** with him and each other. As a community, they share a meal and Jesus **disciples them**, sharing that his body would be broken and blood shed for the forgiveness of sin.

After they eat, they **worship together** and then head to the garden. There, Jesus will agonize over the coming 'cup' that he must drink.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. How does Jesus show his power over the events leading up to his crucifixion?
2. What does Jesus say specifically about the bread and the cup?
3. What major event did the Passover holiday commemorate?
4. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. How does it shape your understanding of this chapter in Mark?
5. How does Jesus' meal with his disciples shape our understanding of the value of community?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 14:1-11

Prayer

Lord, I love you. Thank you for loving me. I pray that my actions, attitudes, words and thoughts would be pleasing to you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. How did the people in the room respond to the woman anointing Jesus? How did their response compare to the woman who anoints Jesus?
2. How do you think her actions made Jesus feel?
3. Imagine you were the woman. What would your heart feel as you poured out this expensive gift?

Commentary

We begin with a woman anointing Jesus with a very expensive ointment. The disciples and other dinner guests immediately view this extravagant gift to be a waste. Jesus corrects them, but in a very specific way. He does not emphasize his worth or suggest that his standing as God makes the gift appropriate—even though he could. Rather, he says the gift is appropriate because of its function. “She has anointed my body beforehand for burial,” Mark 14:8.

This woman’s gift of love toward Jesus is a preparation for how God will demonstrate his love for all humanity by sending Jesus to the cross. No one present seems to understand the importance of this gift and this event seems to precipitate a further wrong response to Jesus—Judas’ subsequent betrayal.

*Commentary by Discipleship Resources

Mark 14:12-21

Prayer

Lord, you gave yourself up as the lamb of God. Because of your death, I have life abundant. Thank you for taking on the death that was due me, and for giving me life. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. As you read through the text, how do you see Jesus show his power and sovereignty?
2. How do you think the disciples would have viewed the Passover holiday?
3. How do you feel after reading verse 20 & 21?

Commentary

Mark 14 bristles with connections to the Passover event that is recorded in the Book of Exodus. The Israelites celebrated Passover every year since their liberation from Egyptian captivity, a liberation that took place through the shed blood of a lamb. During the last of the ten plagues God sent on Egypt, in which God killed the firstborn of every Egyptian family, the angel of God “passed over” any Israelite houses that were marked with a lamb’s blood.

Picking up on this event, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples in anticipation of the greatest liberation, in which another lamb was slain to save those who take refuge under its blood (see also 1 Peter 1:19). Revelation picks up on this theme, exulting in those who have conquered “by the blood of the lamb” (Rev. 12:11; note also 5:6; 7:14; 13:8; 22:1-3).

*Commentary by Dane Ortlund

Mark 14:22-31

Prayer

Lord, because of your great sacrifice, grace and love, I am able to find union with you and union with others. Guide me as I strive to build and maintain unity and peace in my relationships with others as I deepen my relationship with you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What does the last supper mean to you?
2. Imagine you were in the room as Jesus ate this meal with his friends. What would be going through your mind? How would you feel?
3. Why do you think Jesus chose bread and wine as the key elements of this meal?

Commentary

Here, Jesus institutes the sacrament of communion, also known as the Lord's Table or Lord's Supper, a meal practiced by Christians around the world in obedience to Jesus' call to remember and reflect on his broken body and shed blood.

Communion shows our union with God and with one another. It is the way a local church regularly remembers and rejoices in Jesus' finished work on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

As Jesus breaks the bread he says, "this is my body", as a symbol of how his body will be broken. Later, he takes a cup of wine which corresponds to the 'new covenant', God's promise to humanity that he would make a way for sins to be atoned and for people to have a righteous relationship with him.

Jesus foretells of a day that he will drink again with his followers. Though he knows he will soon be crucified and buried in a grave, he knows that he will rise and once more feast with his friends in the future kingdom of God.

Note that as they finish their meal, they sing a hymn (Mark 14:26). It is likely that they sang the 'Egyptian Hallel' (Psalm 113-118). These songs were sung by Jews at Passover to remember how God delivered them from slavery out of Egypt, which was fitting, as Jesus was about to deliver his people from slavery of sin and death.

Mark 14:32-42

Prayer

Lord, there are times when I do not want to follow you because it is hard. The sacrifice you call me to make can sometimes seem unbearable. Give me the strength to entrust myself to you. Not my will, but yours, be done. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think Jesus brought Peter, James and John with him? What does that tell you about the nature of friendship?
2. Imagine you were one of the disciples that Jesus asked to stay awake to support him. How would you feel in this situation?
3. What does Jesus' prayer show you about his relationship with God?

Commentary

Jesus calls his disciples to wait while he goes by himself to pray. He is no doubt considering the betrayal, arrest, trial and crucifixion that he will soon experience. Moreover, he is also wrestling with the agony of taking on the sins of the world and the separation he will experience from God.

The cup he refers to is a metaphor for the cup of God's wrath, which is poured out in judgement against sin and evil. At the cross, Jesus will 'drink' the cup of God's wrath, taking on our sin and satisfying the righteous justice of God.

Though he is in deep agony, Jesus entrust himself entirely to the Father.

In the midst of this agony, Jesus finds that his friends, those who have been with him from the beginning of his ministry, have let him down. They fell asleep.

In his time of greatest need for community, he is alone.

In fact, it likely that Jesus' agony in the garden was not caused primarily by the impending physical pain. Many people have faced horrific executions with more stoicism and tact. No, Jesus is agonizing over the cup he must drink and the inherent abandonment he will feel.

On the cross, the crowd is against him, his friends have fled and, in the end, he will cry out from the cross, "my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Mark 14:43-52

Prayer

Lord, how many times have I, like Judas, betrayed you? Forgive me. Bring me closer to you. Give me strength to love you, live for you and abide in you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Jesus knows exactly what it is like to feel betrayed. When we pray to him, we pray to one with first hand experience of broken relationships. How does that impact your prayers to and trust in Jesus?
2. In 14:49, Jesus says, “the scriptures must be fulfilled.” What do you think he means?
3. Consider how Jesus responded when the armed guards showed up to take him away. How does that inform your behavior and attitude when you are wronged?

Commentary

A grim realism stamps Mark's account of Jesus' arrest. A misguided rabble, deputized by the temple officials, invades Gethsemane with swords and clubs (14:43). They come out armed to the teeth, as if Jesus were some terrorist bandit bent on revolutionary upheaval. To them, it might have seemed a wise precaution. To the reader, they only look foolish. Jesus is a nonviolent teacher with no weapons and nothing to hide. He has taught daily in the temple under their noses. Hardly the activity of someone bent on fomenting revolution. Justifiably, he condemns their violent ways (14:48). Ironically, Jesus castigated the temple for being a robber's den instead of a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17). Now temple goons arrest him in the middle of his prayer, as if he is a robber.

The sad performance of Jesus' disciples in this crucial moment dominates the scene. First, Judas leads the posse to Jesus' secluded place of prayer where the temple representatives can arrest him with the least amount of commotion. Judas has given the armed band an agreed-upon sign, "The one I kiss is the man, arrest him and lead him away under guard." Judas wants them to make sure they place Jesus under tight restraint. Did he so misunderstand Jesus to think that his former mentor would try to escape? Jesus' willing submission shows all human devices and intrigues to be ridiculous.

The sign of the kiss reflects the normal greeting one gave a respected teacher. One kissed the hand out of deference or the cheek if one considered oneself an equal (see Luke 7:45, "You did not give me a kiss"). Judas addresses Jesus with the honorific title of Rabbi, and kisses him.

Judas gives Jesus no sign their fellowship has been broken. He wants everything to appear normal up to the last second, when the guards rush to capture him. Judas turns Jesus over to certain death with a warm gesture of love and the customary greeting of respect, turning a sign of intimacy and goodwill into a sign of infamy and death.

*Commentary by NIV Application Commentary

Mark 14:53-72

Prayer

Lord, you have suffered great injustice. I desire to cling to you as I experience injustice. I rely on you for the wisdom and strength to live a righteous, just, loving life. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What did the religious leaders accuse Jesus of?
2. Why does Jesus' response in 14:62 anger the religious leaders?
3. How do you think Jesus felt as he was subjected to these trials?

Commentary

Mark's trial scene pins the primary responsibility and initiative for Jesus' death on the high priest and his Sanhedrin. Though Mark tells us that "all" the Sanhedrin has gathered (14:53), we should not assume that it consisted of the seventy-one members dictated by the later rabbinic tractate on the Sanhedrin. In the first century, it was not "a fixed body regularly in session." Presumably, the high priest convenes a council of whatever members he can gather at this late hour of the night.

A hearing in the middle of the night suggests the injustice of a lynch mob dressed in hooded sheets, but it also shows these leaders are under time constraints. These proceedings form a preparatory investigation before the Sanhedrin delivers Jesus to the Roman governor for final deliberation. A debate continues among scholars but the evidence strongly suggests that the Jewish leaders did not have the power of capital punishment (John 18:31). Apparently, it is not enough to arrest and flog Jesus, which was in their power; the ruling priests want him dead and disgraced before the crowds. They presume his guilt, because he is a threat. The hearing will serve to convince anyone with misgivings that he is worthy of death and will fix the charge they will present to the Roman governor.

The high priest labels his response "blasphemy" and tears his garment to underscore his judgment. This gesture was an ancient way of expressing distress, mourning or outrage (see Joshua 7:6; 2 Samuel 1:11) and is a fitting response to perceived blasphemy, but it also may be a grandstanding display to get others to see things his way. To the high priest, the evidence is conclusive: Jesus has incriminated himself and the council unanimously condemns him. They judge him to be worthy of death

*Commentary by NIV Application Commentary



CHAPTER 15

Jesus is isolated, separated from his disciples. He is mocked, beaten and sentenced to death by crucifixion. As he hangs on the cross, Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

This horrifying question speaks to the depths of the gospel. Jesus not only suffered the physical pain and agony of the cross, he experienced the abandonment of God the Father. Some consider this to be the very definition of hell. Dying in our place, he took on hell so that we can be brought in and called sons and daughters of God.

Jesus calls all who believe this to **get baptized**. Baptism is a way to express faith in Jesus. Going into the water, a disciple of Jesus associates with Jesus’ death and burial. Coming out of the water, they associate with his resurrection.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. What did Jesus mean when he asked, “Why have you forsaken me?”
2. How does Mark describe Jesus’ death in 15:37-39?
3. What does it mean that the veil of the temple was torn in two?
4. According to Mark 15:39, who was the first to proclaim the truth of Jesus after his death? Why is this significant?
5. Why did Jesus choose to die? What makes it difficult to cling to that truth in our day-to-day life?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus’ life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 15:1-15

Prayer

Thank you Jesus, for enduring the shame of the cross so that I may know the Father and be with him forever. Thank you for having me in mind when you paid such a high price, willing to humble yourself within the confines of a human body and to suffer what you did. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why was the religious establishment so hostile toward Jesus? What lessons can be learned from this?
2. When was the last time you made a decision to “go along” with the crowd, even when you knew it was not what Jesus wanted from you?
3. How does this text shape your concept of the kingdom of God?

Commentary

Under the Roman occupation, the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council) could not sentence anyone to death. Therefore, when the chief priests took Jesus to Pilate, they accused him of committing crimes against the Roman state to arouse Pilate's indignation, knowing his chief concern as governor was maintaining order. The last thing Pilate wanted were reports of rebellion and unrest to trickle back to his political masters in Rome. As the chief priests and scribes lob false accusations, Pilate interrogates Jesus and to his surprise, Jesus gives no answer.

Hundreds of years earlier, Isaiah prophesied this exact moment. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent," Isaiah 53:7.

Mark 15:16-32

Prayer

Lord, deepen my understanding of the cross so that my gratitude and love will abound for what you did for me. Please help me carry the cross of my life so I may lay my burdens and ambitions at your feet, and live wholly devoted to you as a disciple. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the ironies you find in this text?
2. What does the crucifixion of Jesus mean to you?
3. Why do you think people don't receive the gospel message? Reflect on how the gospel has impacted your life.
4. What does Jesus mean when he says that as disciples, we must "carry our cross daily"?

Commentary

Crucifixion was the Roman form of capital punishment reserved for non-citizens. The condemned were forced to carry their own cross, and should the condemned be in too weakened a condition, the Romans could force anyone to help – as they had Simon do for Jesus. The fact that the sons of Simon, Alexander and Rufus, were named is likely due to the fact that Mark was writing to an audience who knew them.

According to custom, those who would be executed by crucifixion were to be taken outside of the city. Jesus is taken to a place called Golgotha, which means ‘place of the skull’. The soldiers casting lots fulfills the prophecy in Psalm 22:18.

Crucifixion is a means of execution in which a person is fastened by ropes or nails to a crossbeam that was raised and attached to a vertical beam, forming a cross. The process was designed to maximize pain and humiliation and to serve as a deterrent for other potential offenders.

Mark 15:33-41

Prayer

Lord, thank you for accepting the punishment that was due to me. Thank you for clothing me in your righteousness and for the gift of salvation. Whenever I think that I am not loved, remind me that you had me in mind when you willingly offered up yourself on my behalf. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. Why do you think God is so committed to judging sin?
2. What does the tearing of the curtain to the most holy place mean? How is God's heart towards us revealed in this event?
3. Why is Jesus referred to as the "Lamb of God"?
4. Consider the question asked in Mark 15:34. Why did Jesus ask this question?

Commentary

God is totally loving, righteous and just. Because of his justice, he does not ignore the evil in the world, or in us.

In the book of Leviticus, God gives detailed instructions concerning the sacrifice of animals for sin; the life of the animal was a substitute for the life of the sinner. It was required that all the animals offered were free of defect or blemish. The temple system of offerings was in place for many centuries and was a shadow of a promised final sacrifice that would one day come.

Within the temple stood a curtain that guarded the way into the most holy place. This curtain was a tangible representation of the separation between a holy God and fallen man. Only the high priest could enter this area on the Day of Atonement once a year, to make atonement for Israel's sins. The first century historian Josephus records that this curtain was 40 cubits high (about 60 feet tall) and 4 inches thick. A rope with a bell was tied around the ankle of the high priest when he entered – just in case he violated any of the ceremonial cleansing ordinances and was struck down (the bell stopped ringing), so they could remove his body.

In God's love for us (John 3:16), he yearned to tear his barrier down. So at the proper time, God provided the final sacrifice to be done once, for all time.

Jesus, the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, in essence went behind the curtain into the most holy place to offer himself as sacrifice for us, and that satisfied God's justice against the sin of the world. That done, the curtain was shredded; now the righteousness of Jesus – righteousness that enables the fellowship with God that we were created and designed for – is imbued to everyone who puts faith in him. And all of it is God's doing.

Mark 15:42-47

Prayer

Lord, thank you for loving me. Help me live a life fully devoted to you .
Help me to love and regard everyone as you do. Amen.

Notes

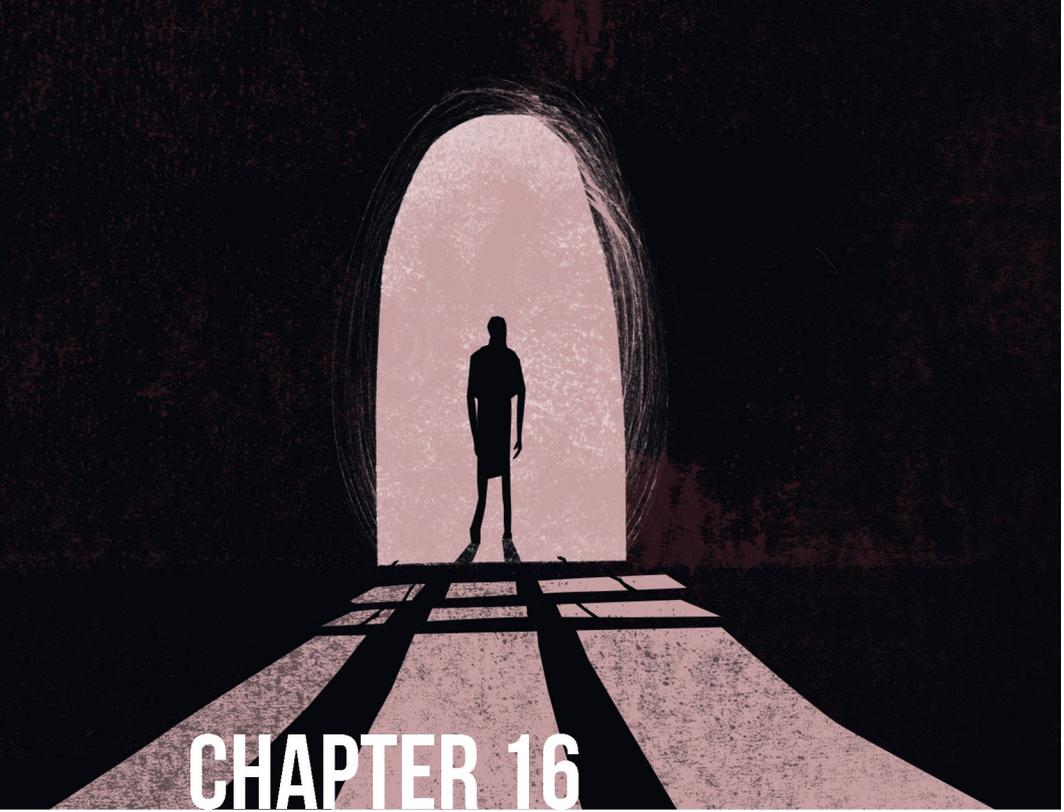
Questions for Reflection

1. Imagine you were Joseph of Arimathea. What would be going through your mind as these events take place?
2. How do you think the disciples felt as Jesus was placed in the tomb?
3. Reread this chapter. How do these events show Jesus' love for you?

Commentary

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple of Jesus. Having his own tomb, he must have been a wealthy man. By having the confidence to request Jesus' body from the governor, it demonstrates that he was also a man of stature.

While some in the Sanhedrin (a council of the religious leaders) had plotted against Jesus, obviously there were others who did believe in Jesus. It is true that Jesus saved his harshest criticism for the religious elite, but clearly some were humble enough to acknowledge their need for a savior.



CHAPTER 16

Jesus, God in the flesh, came from heaven to earth, **reaching out** to a broken world, **building relationships** with his people, **compassionately serving** those in need, **worshipping together** with his followers and **living generously** by giving all he had as he was crucified, died and was buried.

But three days later he rose from the grave, conquering Satan, sin and death. Those who believe this are called, as Mary was, to go and **disciple others** with this good news. To help them grow in their understanding of and relationship with Jesus.

Jesus calls all of his disciples to **disciple others**, to help them to **discover him** and **be baptized**.



Group Discussion Questions

Discover

1. What stood out or surprised you about this chapter?
2. Was there anything that seemed weird or out of place?

Dive

1. Jesus made his entire ministry totally dependent on his resurrection. If the physical resurrection of Jesus had not occurred, what would we lose (see I Corinthians 15:12-22)?
2. Who was first to witness the resurrection?
3. Who was the first to be commanded by God to share the good news of Jesus' rising?

Disciple

1. What does this text reveal about Jesus' life, nature or values?
2. How does this text shape who you are as a disciple of Jesus?

Mark 16:1-8

Prayer

Thank you Jesus for overcoming the grave and for your victory over sin and death. When I feel burdened by the trials of life, may I look to your resurrection to inspire me that one day you will also raise me up to be in the presence of your love forever. Thank you for the hope I have in you. Amen.

Notes

Questions for Reflection

1. What is surprising and unexpected about Mark's account of the resurrection?
2. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus? Why is it essential to understanding Christianity?
3. How would you answer someone who says that Jesus was a good teacher, but denies the resurrection?
4. How does this text shape your relationship with Jesus?
5. How does the resurrection shape your view of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus?

Commentary

Three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James and Salome were the first to discover that Jesus had risen. They had come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices and were startled to discover what they perceived to be a young man (likely an angel).

They were directed to tell the disciples of the resurrection of Jesus. Since women's testimony was not always treated credibly, this would have been a courageous thing to do.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, we have seen that Jesus frequently predicted his death, burial and resurrection. Now, it has come to pass. The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied").

The resurrection is proof of Jesus' victory over sin and death; his victory is our victory, and just as he rose, we will one day rise to be with him forever.

This is good news.

Mark's Abrupt Ending

(by Mark Strauss at The Bible Project)

On the third day after Jesus' death and burial, Mark describes how a group of women come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. They are shocked to discover that the stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. An angel announces that Jesus has risen from the dead! Yet the women are bewildered and leave the tomb in fear and silence (Mark 16:1–8).

Surprisingly, this is where Mark's Gospel ends in our earliest manuscripts. There are no resurrection appearances described. Later copyists were clearly disturbed by this ending and added a longer one, which summarizes a series of resurrection appearances. This longer ending appears in our Bibles today, though most versions mark it off with footnotes stating that it is not in our earliest and best manuscripts.

So what happened to Mark's ending? Before attempting to answer this question, several clarifications are in order. First, it is not true that there is no resurrection in Mark. Jesus has repeatedly predicted the resurrection (Mark 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:34; 14:28) and told his disciples that they would see him again in Galilee (Mark 14:28). Jesus is always a reliable character in Mark's Gospel and so, from Mark's perspective, Jesus rose from the dead, and his disciples saw him alive in Galilee. The angel, who is also an absolutely reliable character, also announces the resurrection and the resurrection appearance in Galilee (Mark 16:6, 7 Mark 16:6, Mark 7). So for Mark, the resurrection and resurrection appearances are facts of history.

So why doesn't Mark describe these resurrection appearances? Some scholars think that Mark did describe them, but that the last page of his Gospel was lost. While this is possible, it seems more likely that Mark intended to end his Gospel this way. In many respects, the whole Gospel is a call to faith in the face of trials and suffering. Mark's readers, who were likely suffering for their faith, have heard the announcement of the resurrection, but they do not see Jesus physically with them. In this way, they are in the same position as the women. Will they respond with faith or with fear? Mark's whole Gospel, including the empty tomb story, is a call for faith instead of fear in the face of an uncertain future.



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