

Mark

The gospel of

Participants Guide

*For even the Son of Man did not
come to be served, but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

Mark 10:45

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The Gospel of Mark is generally believed to be the first of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). It is considered the model and often the source for the other gospels.

What the Gospels were not

They were not basically instruction. Although the gospels contain dialogues and teaching (like Plato's philosophies) they were basically focused on the historical events surrounding one historical figure — Jesus. Yet, they were also not really biographies, because they show little interest in most of Jesus' life. What kind of biography ignores all but the last three years of a man's life, and then spends one-half of its length on his very last week? However, though they are historical, they are not really histories. When we compare the four gospels, we learn that they do not necessarily give accounts of Jesus' life in the same order in which they occurred. Not only that, they say very little about outside events. There is little effort to put Jesus' life into the broader context of the history of the day. The writer ignores events that the writer of a normal history would include. Finally, the gospels are not legends or myths. Many people have believed they are myths since they contain miraculous elements.

What the Gospels were

What then is a gospel? The word **gospel** (Mark 1:1) does not mean either "teaching" or "record," but "news." An **angel** was a herald or messenger that brought news of some historical event that had already happened. The most common examples in Greek literature are "evangel" about a victory in war or the ascension of a new king. We have found an inscription of a royal proclamation that begins: "*The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus*". Emperors who had ascended to power or who put down a threat would send out heralds announcing the good news about the strength or inauguration of the kingdom. That messenger would always be proclaiming some historical event (e.g. a coronation, a great victory in battle) which would introduce a radical new state of affairs, a new situation for the people, for they now had to relate to him as king.

Why is this important to grasp? When Christians chose *evangelion* to express the essence of their faith, they passed over words that Hellenistic religions used, such as *illumination* (photismos) and *knowledge* (gnosis) or that Judaism used such as *instruction* or *teaching* (didache) or *wisdom* (sophia). Of course, all of these words were used to describe Christianity, but none achieved the centrality of *gospel*. This means that the word *gospel* was chosen to communicate:

First, that the gospel is news about what God has already been done for you, rather than instruction and advice about what you are to do for God. The primacy of his work, not our work, is therefore the very essence of Christian faith. In other religions, God reveals to us how we can find or achieve salvation.

In Christianity, God achieves salvation for us. The gospel brings news primarily, rather than instruction.

Second, that the gospel is all about historic events, and thus it has a public character.

“It identifies Christian faith as news that has significance for all people, indeed for the whole world, not merely as esoteric understanding or insight.” (William Brownson).

In other religions, the stories of miracles and other special events in the lives of the founder are not essential. Whether or not Buddha did Miracle X, does not affect whether the 8-Fold path to enlightenment works or not. But if Jesus is not risen from the dead, Christianity does not “work”. The gospel is that Jesus died and rose for us. If the historic events of his life did not happen, then Christianity does not “work,” for the *good news* is that God has entered the human “now” (history) with the life of the world to come. But if Jesus came historically, then all people should acknowledge and believe in them.

DATE

Most scholars believe that Mark was the earliest of the four gospels. (Careful study shows that Matthew and Luke followed Mark at many places rather than the other way around). Also, there is no clear reference at all to the momentous event of 70 A.D. — the fall of Jerusalem to Roman forces after a Jewish rebellion and the complete destruction of the Temple. It is difficult to believe anyone writing after 70 A.D. could have left such an event out (or even have left it implicit). There is, therefore, no good reason to date Mark any later than 65 A.D. This means that Mark was writing about events just 25-30 years before.

That is very important to recognize. It means that there were thousands of eye-witnesses to all these events still alive when this document was written. That has two implications. **First**, it means that the author had abundant sources for producing an accurate account. He did not have to rely on legends that had been handed down and that could not be verified. **Second**, it means that there is a control making it very difficult for an author to fabricate accounts. For example, it would be nearly impossible to successfully publish a (false) story in the year 2000 that a meteor crashed in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1970 killing dozens of people. There are too many people still alive who lived in Bethlehem at the time. Better to make up a story about the meteor crashing in Bethlehem in 1770. Then your story will be harder to disprove. Thus the dating of Mark before 70 A.D. encourages us to trust his reporting.

AUTHOR

The author never names himself (though cf. Mark 14:51-52), but the unanimous testimony of early church fathers (who knew the apostles and their disciples) was that the author was John Mark, a friend of the apostle Peter. Mark's home was a frequent meeting place of the apostles in the very earliest days of the church (Acts 12:12). He was a cousin to Barnabas, Paul's companion, and was on several journeys with Paul. Later, he worked with the St. Peter, and was with him in Rome when he died under Nero's persecution in the mid-60's A.D. In 140 A.D. Papias, wrote:

"Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he remembered of the things said and done by our Lord, but not, however, in order."

This is, therefore, "The Gospel according to Peter". Unlike Matthew, Luke, and John, it begins where Peter comes into Jesus' life. Peter is usually present, as if the stories are from his perspective. Vivid details are present when Peter is there, but are often missing when he is not. It even leaves out words of praise for Peter (e.g. Matthew 16:17) included in the other gospels.

FORM

Mark was a brand new genre (or type) of literature. There has never been anything like the four gospels. Reynolds Price calls it a "new thing entirely". It is almost as if a whole new literary form had to be invented to bring a whole new, unique message. (New wineskins for new wine!)



Mark

Your Gospel is too small

Study 1 | Mark 1:1-15

Mark's Gospel is about "the gospel of the kingdom" which consists of these principles:

The healing, all-renewing presence of the kingdom of God that has come back into the world and history because Christ is that true King. However, this King comes in a way that reverses the values of the world — in weakness and service, not strength and force — to die as a ransom for us. Therefore we enter this kingdom through the "upside-down" pattern of the King who went to the cross.

We are accepted not because of our ability or merit, but through sheer grace and repentance. We "live out" this kingdom by following the "upside-down" pattern of the King who went to the cross. We live lives of sacrifice and service.

- 1. Read Isaiah 40:3-5 and then cf. with Mark 1:1-4. What is Mark telling us about the identity of Jesus?**
- 2. How, specifically, does John 'pave the way' for the Lord? i.e. What do verses 4-8 tell us about how the Messiah, the king, is to be received?**
- 3. What do verses 9-13 tell us about what 'the baptism of the Spirit' means and brings to us?**

Baptism: During John's time, the Jews often administered baptism as a rite of purification for Gentiles who were converting to Judaism. John went one step further, preaching that Jews as well as Gentiles needed to be baptized as a sign of turning from sin.

Time: The Greek word here refers not so much to a date on the calendar as it does to a decisive time when God acts in a special way. Jesus says the time has come, indicating a crisis point has arrived.

Prayer requests

4. **What do verses 14-15 tell us about the essential message of the King? a) What is explained? b) What is left “mysterious” and unexplained in Jesus proclamation?**

5. **Everyone notices the abruptness and breathless speed of Mark’s narrative style. Everything happens so quickly, all the statements and descriptions are extremely terse and direct. What do you think Mark is trying to get across?**

6. **What was the most helpful or impressive thing that you learned today personally? What practical application can you make from today’s lesson?**

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: He’s the Christ (1:1 and 8:29). He’s the “good news” that God promised would come. He’s the “good news” of victory (1 Samuel 31:9). Mark’s Gospel is about Jesus.

Why Jesus came: To solve the problem of sin introduced by the Fall (1:4, 1:13, 1:15, 15:38).

How should I respond? Not by opposition (1:14, 3:6), but by repentance and faith (1:15, 2:5 etc.). Mark’s book will demand commitment and change.

The Kingdom of God

OPTIONAL STUDY

This section has been summarized from How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, (Zondervan, pp. 131-134).

In understanding Jesus' teaching and ministry, it is important to understand the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus. The Jews of Jesus' day thought they were on the very brink of time, when God would step into history and bring an end to this age and usher in the age to come. The Greek word for the end they were looking for is 'eschaton.' Thus to be eschatological in one's thinking meant to be looking for the end. The earliest Christians well understood this eschatological way of looking at life. For them, the events of Jesus' coming, his death and resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit were all related in their expectations about the 'coming of the end.'

The coming of the end also meant a new beginning — the beginning of God's new age — the messianic age. The new age was also referred to as the kingdom of God, which meant "the time of God's rule." This new age would be a time of righteousness (Isaiah 11:4-5), and people would live in peace (Isaiah 2:2-4). It would be a time of the fullness of the Spirit (Joel 2:28-30) when the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah would be realized (Jeremiah 31: 31-34, 32:38-40). Sin and sickness would be done away with (Zechariah 13:1). Even the material creation would feel the joyful effects of this new age (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Jesus came and announced that the coming kingdom was at hand with his ministry (Mark 1:14-15). He cast out demons, worked miracles, and freely accepted the outcasts and sinners — all signs that the end had begun (Luke 11:20; Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 14:21; 15:1-2). Everyone kept watching him to see if he really was the coming one. Would he really bring in the messianic age with all of its' splendor? Then suddenly he was crucified — and the lights went out.

But no! There was a glorious sequel. On the third day he was raised from the dead and he appeared to many of his followers. Surely now he would "restore the kingdom of Israel" (Acts 1:6). But instead he returned to the Father and poured out the promised Spirit. Very early, beginning with Peter's sermon in Acts 3, the early Christians came to realize that Jesus had not come to usher in the final end, but the "beginning" of the end, as it were. Thus they came to see that with Jesus' death and resurrection, and with the coming of the Spirit, the blessings and benefits of the future had already come. In a sense, therefore, the end had already come. But in another sense, the end had not yet come. Thus it was "already," but "not yet."

The early believers, therefore, learned to be truly eschatological people. They lived between the times — that is, between the beginning of the end and the consummation of the end. Because the kingdom, the time of God's rule, has been inaugurated with Jesus' own coming, we are called to life in the kingdom, which means life under his lordship, freely accepted and forgiven. But also committed to Jesus' Kingdom priorities of the new age and to seeing them worked out in our own lives and the world in this present age.

The Meaning of “The Kingdom” – Biblical Texts and Implications

1. **“Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.”**

Psalm 96:11-12.

Implications: God created the world to be under his rule — all things were made to be managed by him. Things blossom and find fulfillment only under his rule.

2. **“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you...”** *Genesis 3:17-18; cf. Romans 8:18ff.*

Implications: All areas of life are subject to disintegration and alienation when they are not under the Kingship of Christ: our relationship with God (spiritual), with ourselves (psychological), with other persons (social) and with nature itself (physical).

3. **“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ... to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.”**

Ephesians 1:9-10; cf. vv.19-23

Implications: The plan of God is to unite the disintegrating life of the world with the life of heaven by bringing all things under the Kingship of Christ. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

4. **“The time has come — the kingdom of God is near...”** *Mark 1:15.* **“The kingdom of God is in you.”** *Luke 17:21* **“When you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.”** *Luke 21:31* **“If I drive these demons out by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”** *Matthew 12:28.*

Implications: The kingdom is here now (Luke 17 and texts) but not fully (Matthew 6:10 and texts). Like a seed, the kingdom’s presence is nearly hidden, but revolutionary, and finally it grows into fullness, to overcome all resistance to God’s rule (Matthew 13:31-32).

5. **“Pray... thy kingdom come!”** *Matthew 6:10* **“Then the King will say to those on his right — come, take your inheritance, the kingdom.”** *Matthew 25:34* **“The seed... is the message of the kingdom...”** *Matthew 13:18-19.*

Implications: The kingdom is entered by the repentance and the new birth (John 3) and the healing of every area of life and relationship begins (Romans 14).

6. “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit...” *John 3:3, 5*

Implications: The kingdom advances in the world and in our lives through the “weapons” of the kingdom — the word (the King’s will) and the Spirit (the King’s power) (2 Corinthians 10). Because the kingdom is “already” but “not yet”, we feel ourselves caught in the tension of living in both realms (Romans 12:2; 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8). We are already saved, yet shall be saved (Romans 8:24, 5:9-11), we are already redeemed yet will be redeemed (Colossians 1:14 and Ephesians 4:30), we are already adopted yet we will be adopted (Romans 8:15,23), we are already reigning in heaven as kings (Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 1:8), yet we do not see ourselves reigning yet (Hebrews 2:8). Paul sorts this out by saying, we are legally righteous (justified – Romans 5:1-5; 8:1) yet we are not yet actually righteous (Romans 8:2-4).

7. “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.” *Romans 14:17-18*

Implications: Christians are a model of the kingdom, a counter-culture, a royal colony of heaven here to display how human society can be under the Kingship of Christ (2 Peter 2). We are also agents of the kingdom, spreading its healing both in word (Acts 8) and through deed ministry (1 John 3:17-18), spiritually, psychologically, socially, physically. Our spiritual gifts are kingdom powers which heal people as they bring people under the Kingship of Christ.

8. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds... every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to Christ.” *2 Corinthians 10:4-5*

Implications: cf. Matthew 10:37 with Luke 14:26. It shows that “hate” means “loved less.” Also, the two men in Luke 9 were perhaps being tested as the rich young ruler with an absolute demand, to indicate whether they would give Christ pre-eminence. To enter the kingdom takes absolute commitment to the King! Yet, to think you can enter the kingdom through the merits of your obedience is to rely on yourself as your own savior and to keep control of your life. You can only enter the kingdom through relinquishing your own good deeds

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

and asking for his mercy alone (John 1:12). To imagine that you can enter because of your obedience is to stay in charge of your own life! You enter by submitting to him, but only because he died for you.

9. **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**

1 Peter 2:9

“They believed Phillip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God.”

Acts 8:12

“But to each one of us grace (gifts) has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, ‘When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men’” *Ephesians 4:7-8*

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” *Luke 14:26-27* He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” *Luke 9:59-62*

Summary: the kingdom of God is the renewal of the whole world through the entrance of supernatural forces — the Word, the Spirit, the church (where the Word and Spirit dwell).

“The Kingdom in Your Life” – Biblical Texts and Implications

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might have the pre-eminence. For God, was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” *Colossians 1:15-20*

IMPLICATIONS:

1. **“All things were created by him and for him.” a) BY:** Jesus alone has built all things. Thus he alone understands how any person or relationship should function. His Word is the “manufacturer’s manual”. **b) FOR:** All people were built for a purpose — to belong to Christ. This means that only Christ has rights of ownership (and a creator has absolute rights.)
2. **“In him all things hold together.”** Since we were built for him, we experience disintegration when we are not under His Kingship. To the extent that we submit to His Lordship, wholeness flows into our lives. “God is reconciling all things to himself... through the cross.” It is by Christ’s death for sins that God is reuniting all things to himself. When we trust in Jesus’ death for our sins, we are reconciled to God, enter the kingdom, and the wholeness spreads in through our life.
3. **“In everything he might be pre-eminent.”** A believer must look at every area of his or her life and ask: “Is Christ pre-eminent here?”

“What does it mean, then, to allow Jesus to be Lord of our lives?... Just this: whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life. If Jesus is our Lord, then he is the one who controls, he has the ultimate power. There are no bargains. We cannot manipulate him by playing ‘let’s make a deal’. If he is Lord, the only option open to us is to do his will, to let him have control. [Of course] Jesus remains Lord whether we accept him or not. His lordship, his essence, is not affected by what we choose. But our lives are drastically changed by our choice.”
–Rebecca M. Pippert

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PRACTICAL STEPS – To treat Jesus as a King means:

- A. **Obeying.** (Not like Jonah. He thought that if he did what God had said that it would ruin things.) The evaluation question: “Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area?” Symptom: guilt and “covering up”.
- B. **Accepting.** (Not like Job. He thought God was unfair, and that he knew how to run history better.) The evaluation question: “Am I willing to thank God for whatever happens in this area?” Symptom: worry, self-pity, or bitterness.
- C. **Relying.** (Not like Abraham. He made Isaac an idol, something he had to have along with God to be happy.) The evaluation question: “Is there something instead of God I am relying on for self-worth?” Symptom: insecurity (people-approval as an idol), “drivenness” (success or achievement as an idol), self-indulgence (comfort as an idol).
- D. **Expecting.** (Not like Moses. When called to do a great deed, he was sure he was not competent.) The evaluation question: “Are there problems or limitations in my life I think are too big for God to remove?” Symptom: boredom and discouragement.

A fifth, overall evaluation question:

If you ever say, “I’ll obey Christ if...” then you are still on the throne of your life, determining when and whether you will take a course of action. Are there any if’s in your life?

Life Evaluation:

- 1. On the basis of the evaluation questions, choose one or two areas of your life that you most need to acknowledge Christ’s Lordship more deeply. (Make a list of “life areas” and ask the five questions to yourself. **OR**, look for the presence of “symptoms” and track down sins (disobedience), worry/bitterness (dis-acceptance), idols (lack of reliance), or discouragements (lack of expectance).
- 2. What can you do to give Christ the Lordship in these areas?

Make a brief plan for each which may consist of the following elements:

1) Repentance, **2)** Prayer program, **3)** Attitude/thought change, **4)** Behavior change, **5)** Accountability

Mark

The meaning of the Kingdom

Study 2 | Mark 1:16-34

Jesus (verses 14-15) has just announced that “the kingdom was near.” We said last week that this statement leaves a couple of things very mysterious. First there is the mystery of “who is this king?” There can be no kingdom without a king. To say that the “kingdom of God is coming” is to say that the divine God-King is coming. But who is he and where is he? The writer, St. Mark, approaches this mystery rather like the writer of a *Columbo* episode. In a *Columbo* mystery, we, the audience, are given the answer to the “whodunnit” at the beginning, and then we watch Columbo discover the solution in stages. In the same way, we, the readers, are introduced to the identity of the divine king immediately, in Mark 1:1-4, where Jesus is identified as the Divine King. Then we watch as Jesus reveals himself slowly to the people around him. As he does so, we get to know Jesus personally and learn much of his unique self-understanding.

The second mystery, however, is the nature of this kingdom itself. If Jesus is the King, why is the kingdom only “near” (v. 15)? Why doesn’t he say, “I am here — so the kingdom of God is here?” Evidently, something must happen for it to be “set up.” What is that? What is the nature of it — will it mean a military victory for God’s people? If not, what kind of kingdom is it? How do we “enter” it? This second mystery is a mystery for the readers as well! Immediately after the announcement of verse 15, we see Mark beginning to reveal to us what the kingdom of God is all about.

1. In verses 16-20, what do we learn about the kingdom?

2. What do verses 21-22 teach about the kingdom of God?

3. **What do verses 23-28 teach us about the kingdom of God? Despite modern prejudices against the idea of demon-possession, how does the existence of evil spirits help us explain what goes on in the world?**

4. **Over what area of life do verses 29-34 show his authority? What do we learn about the kingdom here?**

5. **People today struggle with the idea that we must absolutely submit all of our thinking and practice to the Lordship of Christ. How can we answer a person who struggles like that?**

Prayer requests

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: He is the King, Christ and the Son of God. He is as powerful as John the Baptist said that He would be (1:7). He has supernatural authority.

Why Jesus came: Jesus came to establish a new kingdom. He holds power over the spiritual and physical world.

How should I respond? Man's response was apathy, everyone who meets Jesus was "amazed" and the evil spirits were violently opposed to him.

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The meaning of free grace

Study 3 | Mark 1:35-2:17

Jesus was a man of authority. His words were commanding and his commands were irresistible. Jesus has authority to heal and forgive — something to be understood to be the prerogative of God alone. We also see Jesus' authority to sit down and eat with sinners — something which, the teachers of the law believed, was forbidden. In contrast to the Scribes, Jesus needed no authority other than His own person.

- 1. In verses 1:35-39, what about Jesus' reaction to his new popularity seems surprising? What do we learn here about Jesus' personal priorities?**
- 2. In verses 1:40-45, what is surprising about how Jesus heals the leper? What do we learn from his method?**
- 3. In verses 2:1-5, how is Jesus' treatment of the paralytic surprising? What is Jesus teaching us?**

4. In verses 2:6-12, why do both Jesus (v. 10) and the teachers (v. 7) say it takes authority to forgive sins?
5. In verses 2:9, what is the answer to Jesus' question? What is his point in asking it?
6. In verses 2:13-17, what do the terms "sinners" and "righteous" mean as used in these verses? How is this unexpected and surprising? What is Jesus teaching here?
7. In verses 2:13-17, how does Levi and his calling differ from the earlier disciples and their callings (see 1:16-17)? What similarity is there? What does that teach us about Jesus? About us?

8. What is the theme that binds 1:35-2:1-17 together? Also, make a list of what surprising things we learn about Jesus himself.
9. What were the implications for Mark's first readers? What does this passage imply about how we should live and think now?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: He is the Christ, the King and the Son of God. He has authority to heal sickness, forgive sin.

Why Jesus came: He preached and in doing so, called sinners to repentance.

How should I respond? Jesus' hearers experience amazement. They can't keep quiet about him (1:45) and have never seen anything like his miracles before (2:12). Jesus also provoked a following. Jesus can call anyone, however bad (2:12-17). We also know that repentance (1:15) and faith (1:15; 2:5) are involved. We begin to see that this involves admitting that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. The emphasis here is on what Jesus does, not on what we do.

Prayer requests

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The offense of Jesus

Mark 2:13-3:6

OPTIONAL STUDY

In 2:15-17, we see that the religious and moral type persons are not attracted to Jesus as are the non-religious and the moral *outsiders*. Jesus says: "I came not to call the *righteous*, but *sinners*." He uses both terms ironically. He is saying that the word "righteous" here means self-righteous, and the word "sinners" here means people who know they are sinful and in need of a Savior. Jesus is turning normal religion on its head. He does not congratulate those who have attained a high degree of theological precision and moral discipline. Instead he warns them that they might be the farthest from him. In the next few incidents, Jesus challenges all sorts of expectations and practices of the religious and moral establishment.

- 1. Read 2:18-19. a) Why do people fast? (What does it accomplish?) b) Why do you think John's disciples fasted so much? (read 1:4-5) c) Why do you think the Pharisees' disciples fasted so much?**
- 2. Look at 2:18b. What does the complaint against Jesus and his followers tell us about their attitude and conduct?**
- 3. Read 2:19-20. a) Does Jesus forbid fasting here or anywhere? b) Who is the "bridegroom" of Israel? (cf. Isaiah 54:4-6; 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2-3, 32; Ezekiel 16:1-8). What is Jesus claiming here? c) How does the image of "wedding guests" indicate how his coming changes the way we use spiritual disciplines?**

THE OFFENSE OF JESUS

4. Look at 2:20-21. Jesus continues to speak here about how his coming changes traditional religious practices. What is he saying?

5. Read the following background note about the meaning of *Sabbath Rest* in the Bible.

Background note:

- a)** In the Old Testament, when the Creator finished creating, he “rested” from his work. But that did not mean God was tired — it meant he stopped creating the world and started ruling world. Thus *Sabbath* in Bible means the peace and “rest” and blessing all creation experiences under God’s rule. Isaiah 66:1, “Heaven is my throne, earth my footstool — why build me a house for my place of rest?” So rest equals rule of God.
- b)** When we rebelled from God’s rule, we lost the Sabbath rest. If we are not under his Lordship, we become ‘restless’ and miserable in our sin (Isaiah 57:20-21).
- c)** God gives Israel some foretastes of “rest” when they obey him — but it is only the foretaste of something much greater to come. (Joshua 14:15; I Kings 8:56; Hebrews 4:1-10). He commands the Sabbath day to be observed once a week, to represent the rest and peace and restoration of what God’s salvation brings. (The English word “restore” retains something of the original meaning of rest as “healing that which is broken.”)

Read 2:23-3:6. a) What is Jesus saying about himself when he says I am “Lord of the Sabbath?” b) How does Jesus show that they are missing the “point” of the Sabbath — and what is that “point”?

6. Summarize and reflect on what we've learned. What are some of the practical differences there should be between a religious person who is trying to be good and a Christian who understands the gospel?
7. How can you spot the hallmarks of a modern "evangelical Pharisee"?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus claims to be the Bridegroom, the Son of Man and the Lord of the Sabbath. These are open and provocative claims.

Why Jesus came: He came to deal with the sin problem. His presence makes fasting inappropriate. He came to bring a completely new order of priorities. The opposition, which led to his death, was part of his deliberate plan.

How should I respond? The passage gives us our clearest picture yet of man's opposition which led to the cross. Man-made religion does not respond rightly to Jesus. Human religion rejects God's sovereignty and grace.

Mark

The community of the King

Study 4 | Mark 3:7-45

Each section of Mark contains a series of incidents in the life of Jesus. Each one shows us something about who Jesus is — his power, his purpose, and his self-understanding. It is as if the gospel writer is pulling a cover off of Jesus inch by inch. Each story reveals a little more of who he is.

Now we seem to enter a new series of stories. Some have called Chapter 1 “Authority Stories” because they show his authority. Some have called Chapter 2 “Conflict Stories” because they show the wisdom of his grace over against the world’s thinking and mindset. Beginning in Chapter 3, we see Jesus beginning the creation of a new community, a new people of God who will embody the kingdom of God. He builds this community through serving people, through teaching, preaching, training, counseling, healing, and liberating.

Since we continually will be watching him minister to others, we can always read with two practical questions in mind. **1)** How can Jesus carry out this ministry in my life? **2)** How can I carry out this ministry in the lives of others?

- 1. Why do you think this passage (3:7-35) follows Mark 3:6?**
- 2. How do verses 3:7-12, in particular, contrast with 3:6? What is Mark teaching us?**
- 3. Why does Jesus call twelve disciples? Why do you think that number “twelve” is mentioned (twice) as if it is very significant?**

- ## Prayer requests

How should I respond? The right response is to follow him, to listen to his teaching and to obey the will of God (v. 34). Verses 13 and 27 warn us against thinking we can do this for ourselves. The illogical response is to reject forgiveness and say that Jesus was mad or bad.

Mark

The Word of the King

Study 5 | Mark 4:1-34

This is the first place in the book of Mark where we meet Jesus' teaching method of using "parables." Unlike the other gospels, Mark does not include long passages of Christ's teaching. Thus there are relatively few parables in Mark. The Greek word translated "parable" meant literally "to set one thing beside another"—to draw a comparison between two things and show an analogy. Thus parables begin, "this is like that." The parables of Jesus seek to teach us about the kingdom of God by comparing it with vivid and concrete situations in our world. Parables teach nearly endless new insights. If Jesus asks: "how is the church like a 'city on a hill'?" (*Matthew 5:14*) The answers are endless. Parables invite deep meditation and reflection.

It's helpful to again remind ourselves what Jesus means by "the kingdom of God." Many people think of a "kingdom" as the physical place which is ruled—for example when we hear of the "Kingdom of Gondor" we usually have to think of a definite geographical "realm." The Greek word *basilea* (kingdom) that Jesus uses refers more to the "ruling power" of the sovereign than to the "realm."

- 1. Read 4:3-9 and 14-20. a) What is the main point of this parable? b) What else does it tell us about the kingdom of God? c) What does it tell us about the Christian life?**
- 2. What are the various ways Jesus shows us by which we can mis-hear the word of the kingdom?**
- 3. Which of the four soils do you identify with now? Why? Which of the four soils have you identified more with in the past? Why?**

4. In verses 10-12, who are the two groups of people Jesus is talking about? What characterizes each group? What is the "secret of the kingdom?"

5. Read 4:21-23. What does this parable teach us?

6. Read 4:24-25. What does this parable teach us?

7. Read 4:26-32. What do the last two parables teach us?

8. How can your life more accurately reflect the priorities of Jesus' Kingdom?**Remembering the big picture**

Who Jesus is: He is the King who has ushered in a new Kingdom.

Why Jesus came: He came to establish a kingdom. His kingdom advances through love, service and truth, not force.

How should I respond? (verses 3,9,13,23-24) "Listen!" In the parable of the soils, Jesus describes three categories of wrong responses and one right response. Hearing the Word must be of great importance. We must hear with a new set of ears!

Prayer requests

Mark

Faith in the King

Mark 4:35-5:20

OPTIONAL STUDY

In three of the four stories we are about to study, Jesus directly refers to the subject of “faith”, and in the other story, faith is still a main issue. So the question is — “what does it mean to have faith in Jesus, the bringer of the kingdom?”

Answer: Martin Luther said that faith consists of three parts — notitia (evidence or knowledge), assensus (inclination or attraction), and fiducia (fidelity or commitment). Let’s look for these elements (and others) in the text.

- 1. Read 4:35-41. Notice the level of detail in this story. What sense do they convey to the reader? (After discussing briefly, read and discuss Excursus 1.)**

EXCURSUS 1: Did all this really happen?

If we are to learn faith and trust in Jesus from these stories, we have to notice the evidence that these stories really happened. The accounts are characterized by numerous small details, like the time of day (“evening”; 4:35), the cushion in the boat (4:38), the exact location of Jesus’ nap (“in the stern”; 4:38), the fact that there were other boats floating beside his boat (4:36), the girl’s age in the story of the raising of Jairus’s daughter (5:42), and the exact Aramaic words Jesus used – “Talitha koum” (5:41). These details are extremely interesting, for two reasons:

First, they are accurate. Experts in ancient history and culture tell us that in that time there was usually a cushion provided in fishing boats, kept under the coxswain’s seat for those who were not involved in either the actual sailing or fishing (Lane, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 176). If someone were making up legends about Jesus many years later, it would be unlikely for them to have such accurate information about the practices and culture of Jesus’ time and place.

Second, they are unnecessary. They do not contribute to either the plot or to character development. In summary, there would be no reason for an ancient writer to record these details unless the story-source, the eyewitness(es), remembered them.

The first readers of the Gospels instantly knew that the writers were not presenting them as fables or epics or fiction of any kind. Thus these stories are either extremely deliberate and highly sophisticated lies, or they are historical accounts, but they cannot be “myths” (such as the Greek or Roman or German deity-myths), as some critical scholars have proposed.

Another important observation is how unflattering a picture of the 12 apostles is drawn (4:38, 40; 5:31). Many critical scholars have asserted that these gospel stories did not really occur, but rather were constructed by the early church to answer questions, to settle disputes, and to secure compliance and submission to the authority of the church.

In other words, if there was a controversy about demons in the church, the leaders would write a story about Jesus casting out demons or about his teaching on demons. This way they could deal with problems in their midst. But why, if the early church was producing these stories, would it depict the apostles as so weak and so constantly mistaken. What would the motive be for doing so? We know that the early church had lots of doctrinal conflicts and needed to appeal to apostolic teaching and authority to keep its unity and consensus. So why were these things recorded? A logical answer is — they were recorded simply because they happened. In summary, the details of the Gospel accounts are strong evidence that these are accounts of real historical events. If we are going to believe in Christ, we need to know that.

**2. Read 4:35-41. What does this account tell us a) about the person of Christ?
b) about trusting in Christ?**

**3. Read 5:1-20. What are some of the marks of “demonization” in this man?
(After discussing briefly, read and discuss Excursus 2: The complexity of evil)**

EXCURSUS 2: The complexity of evil

Our contemporary culture is still rather skeptical of the existence of demons. If a person is an atheist, it is consistent for them to deny the existence of evil spirits. But it is not consistent to believe in God and in a good personal supernatural being and then refuse to believe that there are evil personal super-natural beings. But if we believe in the existence of demonic forces, it does shed light on several things we know about the world and life.

First, demonic forces explain the complexity of psychological problems. The older “physicians of the soul” understood that depression, fear, anger, or inner numbness

may be so profound and difficult to deal with because of the multiplicity and inter-relatedness of the many different roots and causes. There are possible physiological, psychological, moral and demonic sources for our problems. In the Bible, demons can accuse and tempt and stir up and aggravate all the other factors, making our emotional dungeons very deep and double locked.

Second, demonic forces can explain systemic social evil. Evil unjust social systems can reign in a culture and have enormously evil and devastating effects, yet no single individual member of the oppressive system seems to be “all that bad.” Think of the average white person in apartheid kinds of societies. Very, very few are actively full of hate or are personally wicked individuals, and yet they participate in a system that is much more wicked as a whole than the sum of its parts. In Rwanda, many Christians got sucked up into genocidal rage in which whole tribes massacred other whole tribes. How do we explain this? There are indications in the Scripture that demons can stand behind human institutions such as governments or nations and can produce evil effects through those systems and institutions.

In summary, it is not possible to explain all the misery and evil in the world as simply the product of individual sinful choices. Evil spirits greatly magnify, aggravate, and complicate the sin in our hearts that we commit toward God, one another, and against our own selves. People get sucked into deep psychological and social abysses of wickedness and brokenness that the Bible says are the result of demonic activity. But Jesus shows his authority can heal the darkest troubles in the deepest recesses of the human soul — individually and corporately. He can handle the forces that enslave us. This enables us to see in Jesus’ ministry of exorcism a paradigm for how the kingdom works. Here we begin to see of how Jesus’ kingdom is more than simply my individual obedience to his will. Jesus comes into my life not simply as a rule-giver, but also as a liberator and a healer. He doesn’t bring simply rules, but a new “realm” of his kingly, healing power. Why? For the first time, we come to see that the alternative to having Jesus as a master is to have some other false and enslaving power as a master. Not everyone is personally possessed by a demon like this man (verses 23-24) who has lost complete psychological control of himself. But Paul speaks in Ephesians 6 and elsewhere that in another sense we are fighting demonic “principalities” all the time. Anything we make into an ultimate value (for example, like our career) becomes a “master” and begins to exercise enslaving power over us. In the case of career-idolatry, it begins to drive us to overwork, deceives our minds into denying how much we are working, begins to erode the strength of our family, etc. When Jesus comes into our lives, and becomes the supreme Lord, his “kingdom” begins to heal us of the denial, begins to heal our family life, begins to liberate us from the anxiety we feel over money and work. He becomes the ultimate Savior and therefore the ultimate Lord (King). The more the gospel of sheer grace dominates our thinking, the more his Kingdom spreads through my life and liberates me from the power of false masters and saviors. This is the work of the “gospel of the kingdom.” As I submit to his Lordship, he surrounds me and brings me into his kingdom, and I become new.

4. Read 5:1-20. What does this account tell us a) about the person of Christ?
b) about trusting in Christ?

5. What is an area of your life where you can trust Christ more?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: He is all-powerful over hordes of demons and all-powerful in defeating illness and death. He is also all-powerful in hopeless situations, in spite of being asleep. Even when Jesus is enormously opposed, he prevails.

Why Jesus came: Jesus came to bind the “strong man” Satan and rescue people from his destructive work. Jesus came to go to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

How should I respond? Man’s response in this passage is that of fear as opposed to mere amazement, and faith (verses 6:6, 9:23, 10:52, 11:22). Fear is generally opposed to faith: if the disciples had had faith, they would not have feared the storm. The demons feared Jesus and the Gerasene people wrongly feared Jesus’ presence. Yet the disciples were not wrong to tremble at the power of Jesus’ Word. He is revealing himself as Christ and God. The faith he demands is a faith that acknowledges and relies on his power, even during terrible the circumstances. In view of His power, our faith also carries with it a sense of awe.

Mark

Faith and power

Study 6 | Mark 5:21-43

This passage interweaves two accounts or stories from Jesus' life. The second story, that of a woman with a hemorrhage (verses 25-34) is sandwiched between the two parts of the first story, that of the raising of Jarius' daughter (verses 21-25). Whenever two stories are juxtaposed in this way, it is safe to assume that the author wants us to make comparisons and draw contrasts as a way to learn from the two incidents.

- 1. What common theme(s) do you see running through these two incidents and the two previous incidents (the storm and the healing of the demoniac)?**
- 2. In verses 25-26, what are the causes of the woman's suffering? What does this teach us about coming to Christ by faith?**
- 3. Read verses 24, 30-32. If a large crowd "pressed" around him, why didn't anyone else but the woman get Jesus' power?**

- 7. In verses 32-34, why do you think Jesus encourages her to 'go public'?**

8. Read verses 21-25; 35-43. a) How does Jairus evidence faith in Jesus? (cf. John 3:1-2). b) What does the interruption (of ministry to Jairus by the ministry to the woman) teach us?
9. Read verses 39-43. a) Why do you think he says, "she is not dead, but asleep"? b) What does Jesus method in this miracle show us?
10. How might the disciples lives have been changed after witnessing these events? How can our lives change as a result of believing the truth found in this passage?

Prayer requests

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is powerful in humanly impossible circumstances: calming a storm, casting out the Legion, healing the leper, raising Jarius' daughter from the dead, and touching the unclean and making clean.

Why Jesus came: He came to make the unclean clean, restore the outcast and even to conquer death. He accepts those that the world rejects.

How should I respond? Man's response is that of uncompromising faith. All other resources are useless and inadequate.

The rejection of the King/ the shepherd King

Mark 6:1-56

OPTIONAL STUDY

The theme of these incidents all have to do with rejection of the Word of God. Even in Jesus' commission to the disciples he assumes a lot of refusal and resistance to the message of the gospel (6:11). Another theme of the section is "who is this?" Each section shows people's varied responses to Jesus, all falling short of the truth. This theme will climax in 8:27-30.

- 1. In verses 2-3, why were the hometown people "offended" (verse 3) at Jesus? Why did they find it so hard to believe in him?**
- 2. How is Christ and his message still offensive in this way today? What are some ways in which people still do this today?**
- 3. In verses 5-6, why does Mark say he "could not do any miracles" (and yet tells us that he healed some people of sickness)?**

THE REJECTION OF THE KING/ THE SHEPHERD KING

Jewish travelers

commonly would “shake the dust off their feet” when leaving foreign lands. It was a symbolic way of dissociating themselves from moral pollution of pagan lands.

- 4. What does this teach us about how Christ’s power can work in our lives today?**

- 5. What is Jesus preparing his followers for in verses 7-13? Are there principles behind these measures that can help us today?**

- 6. Mark’s account of John’s death is the longest of any gospel. It also seems to be a digression. What might be some of the reasons for its prominence? What is Mark getting across?**

- 7. In verse 34, Jesus sees us as sheep and sees himself as a Shepherd. a) What does it tell us about ourselves that he sees us as sheep? b) What does it tell us about Him that he sees himself as a shepherd?**

THE REJECTION OF THE KING/ THE SHEPHERD KING

12. Read verses 51-52. What common character quality prevented the disciples from understanding the meaning of both the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus' walking on water? How can we avoid that?

13. If we really believed and practiced the teaching that Jesus is our Shepherd, in what practical ways would our lives be different?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: In Chapters 1-5, we learned that Jesus has staggering divine authority to conquer Satan, forgive sinners and overcome death itself. Here, we begin to learn that Jesus is the promised Redeemer Messiah of Israel, a Redeemer who is also God himself.

Why Jesus Came: Jesus shows that he has come to redeem by performing miracles reminiscent of the exodus from Egypt. In this section we see Jesus:

- as the Good Shepherd teaching and leading his people.
- giving miraculous bread as in the time of Moses.
- crossing the divided sea as in the time of Moses.
- "passing by" in glory, implying that he is Yahweh the Redeemer.

But again he prays apparently in connection with turning away from the temptations of popularity even in a preaching ministry.

How should I respond? Earlier chapters have encouraged repentance, faith and listening. Here the emphasis is on recognizing Jesus as Redeemer. The disciples fail to recognize Jesus because they are "hard-hearted," fundamentally in the same state as Jesus' enemies.

Mark

Religion vs. the Gospel: I

Study 7 | Mark 7:1-23

The Mosaic law listed a number of physical conditions that disqualified someone from worship:

- contact with a dead body (*Numbers 19:11-22*);
- infectious skin diseases such as boils or sores or rashes (*Leviticus 13:1-46*);
- mildew in clothing, article, or home (*Leviticus 13:47-14:57*);
- any bodily discharges, either natural (as semen, menstruation, fluids from childbirth) or unnatural (diarrhea, yeast, hemorrhages of blood or puss) (see *Leviticus 12 and 15*);
- and eating any food in the lists of those items called unclean (*Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14*).

If a person became defiled through any of these things (or through contact with someone who was defiled), he or she could not come into the sanctuary of God for a period, and then had to wash with water for purification (*Leviticus 15:8-10*). The Bible only required washings of the priests at the temple (*Exodus 30:19 and 40:13*), not of all people. But the elders developed a “fence” (called “Halakah”) of more specific and strict rules than those of the Bible. They demanded that everyone wash their hands in order to be pure. Jesus, however, refused to have his disciples bound by such traditions.

1. The Old Testament “clean laws” use dirt to symbolize sin. Why is this a good metaphor? (In what ways does sin do to the soul what filth does to a body?)

2. Read verses 1-5. a) The religious leaders drew up specific moral guidelines for their faith community that went beyond those laid down in the Scripture. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing this? b) On balance, is this a good idea or a bad one, and why? c) What are some ways Christians ‘add’ to the law today?

A person who designated money as “**Corban**” did not have to give it to God during his lifetime — a fact that led to the type of abuse of which Jesus speaks.

3. Read verses 6-13. a) How does Jesus answer the Pharisees' question (about why he ignores the elders' tradition) in these verses? b) What is his illustration and how can we do this today?
4. Read verses 6-7. How do you think someone can "worship" God and "honor" God and yet have hearts "far from him?"
5. Read verses 14-23. What does Jesus tell us in these verses is REAL uncleanness?
6. List everything we learn about the Christian doctrine of sin from verses 13-23.

7. Refer to verse 19. How can Jesus just “declare all foods clean”? Is he just writing off a big chunk of the Scripture? cf. Matthew 5:17-18.

8. What are some of the main points from today’s study? For each point, list some possible applications for today.

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: The whole of 6:31-10:45 reveals Jesus as Redeemer. This section explains what all people need to be redeemed from.

Why Jesus came: Jesus judges the man-made religion of the Old Testament. He hints that he will redeem from sin, by showing that separation from God is really a “sin problem.” Jesus declares the Mosaic Law, which set the Jew apart from the Gentile, obsolete. Under the new covenant, anyone can be saved, not just Jews.

How should I respond? Man-made religion gets the diagnosis wrong and has nothing to do with the cure. The source of evil is our sinful hearts. Man desires to follow rules in order to be righteous before God, yet Jesus presents Himself as the only way to be righteous before God.

Prayer requests

Mark

Religion vs. the Gospel: II

Mark 7:24-37

OPTIONAL STUDY

Tyre was a city outside of the geography of Israel. Jesus' trip to Tyre was the only recorded occasion he left Israel. His visit to Tyre was entering 'unclean' Gentile turf.

We must see the first of these incidents — at least — as having a very direct connection to the teaching of Jesus about the nature of sin in Mark 7:1-23. The Mosaic law required that worshippers be 'ritually clean,' physically healthy, have no contact with dead animals or people, abstain from a list of prohibited foods, and so on. The purpose of these rules were to act as a 'visual aid' to show us that we needed to be holy before God. Disease, decay, and dirt symbolize sin. The religious leaders, however, saw ritual purity not as a symbolizing holiness, but as constituting holiness. As a result, they added even more rules and regulations, the 'tradition of the elders,' on top of the Biblical laws. They believed that you could make yourself acceptable to God by scrupulously staying separate from profane and unclean people, places, and practices. Jesus says that they completely missed the point of the Old Testament regulations. Sin is first of all internal, a matter of the heart. Sin can't be dealt with by external washing but only through internal spiritual intervention.

- 1. Read verses 24-26. Why did Jesus go to "the vicinity of Tyre"? Was it to get some time for himself? Or to perform a mission? Why is this trip significant, coming after 7:1-23?**
- 2. Consider verses 24-26. Think of all the ways in which Mark is pointing out what an 'unclean' situation Jesus now involves himself in.**
- 3. In verses 26-27, what is so unusual and striking a) about the woman's request, and, b) about Jesus' response to her?**

4. In verses 28-30, how does she react? What does this teach us about how to meet Christ by faith?
5. Read verses 31-37. a) What is unique about the healing here in comparison with the past healings? Why does Jesus do these things? b) Why do you think Mark continues to give accounts of Jesus' healing?
6. Look back over these two incidents and draw out the practical lessons we learn.

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is Redeemer not only of Israel but of the whole world. He redeems the world because he is compassionate. He is able to because he has divine authority.

Why Jesus Came: Jesus came to deliver from evil those who admit their need, to open the ears of the spiritually deaf and to redeem all nations. Note that these stories are pictures of redemption, not redemption itself, and pictures which show that it will happen rather than how. The 'how' is taught in the second half of Mark and the actual event happens on the cross.

How should I respond? The woman sets us an example of humble dependence, the antithesis of the Pharisees' proud self-righteousness. We will follow her example as we see ourselves as 'Gentile sinners' who have been radically accepted by Christ.

Mark

Who is this King?

Study 8 | Mark 8:1-30

We now reach the middle of the gospel. Until now the author Mark has been seeking to answer one question: "WHO IS THIS?"

Everything we see Jesus doing and saying has been to help readers gradually see who he is. The gospel now approaches its first of two climactic spots — one in its middle and one at its end. In both spots, a significant person "gets it," and confesses openly that Jesus has "the name which is above every other name." Here in 8:29, Peter says, "You are the Christ", namely, the promised Messiah Prince who would bring God's kingdom to earth and heal all ills." Then, at the end of the gospel, in 15:29, a centurion at the cross says, "Surely this man was the Son of God." First one of his own disciples understands who he is, and finally the whole world will see who he is. But up until this spot in 8:29, the disciples have responded to all the evidence with an amazing lack of comprehension. They still don't "get it," they don't see the obvious.

- 1. In verses 1-10, what differences are there between this feeding miracle and the one in 6:30 ff? What might be Mark's purpose in including this one?**
- 2. In verse 11, why do the Pharisees ask for a sign? Why won't Jesus give them one? What does this teach us about the nature of faith in Jesus?**
- 3. What is Jesus trying to get across to his disciples in verses 14-21? What does their failure to understand teach us about ourselves?**

4. **Read verses 22-26. Why does Mark put this healing account here between the rebuke of the Pharisees and disciples, and the story of Peter's confession?**

5. **Read verses 27-30. a) What does Jesus' question tell us about Jesus? b) What does Peter's answer tell us about Jesus?**

6. **Read verse 30. Why would Jesus tell Peter to be quiet about his identity? Should we be quiet? Why or why not?**

Prayer requests

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer King! That is what the feeding miracles were pointing to.

Why Jesus came: He came to redeem those who *hear, see* and *understand* who he is.

How should I respond? There is plenty of evidence about who Jesus is. His ministry as recounted in the first half of Mark means that we cannot plead ignorance. We are answerable for our response to him and those who remain unbelieving will be justly judged. Nobody, however, will understand unless Jesus opens their eyes. The only way out of judgment is by God's gracious intervention.

Mark

Following the King: I

Study 9 | Mark 8:31-9:1

The book of Mark divides into two sections of roughly 8 chapters each. The first half begins with a summary of Jesus' "first half" message — "The kingdom of God is near!" (*Mark 1:14-15*.) This leads up to Peter's confession in 8:29 "You are the Christ." Now the second half begins with a summary statement of Jesus' "second half" message in Mark 8:31-38. And it will climax with the centurion's confession at the cross in 15:29 — "Surely this man was the Son of God."

Now that Jesus is revealing more explicit details about his mission, he also reveals more explicit details about what it means to follow him. In the first half, he told people to follow him (1:17-18, 20; 2:14-15), but now he begins to explain what that following entails. As Jesus takes up a cross, we must also. As the cross and glory are linked in Jesus' life, so the cross and glory will be linked in our lives. That is the surprising theme that is introduced to us in the second half of Mark, beginning here.

- 1. Read verses 31-32. In light of the teaching of entire first half of the gospel of Mark, how are these verses completely unexpected, even (apparently) contradictory to it?**
- 2. In verse 31, the word *must* modifies and controls the entire sentence. What does it tell us about Jesus' purpose and what he came to do?**
- 3. Read verses 32-33. Why is Peter rebuked, and how is Peter a warning for us today?**

4. In verse 35, what does the first “save his life” mean (35a)? What does the first “lose his life” mean (35b)? What does the second “lose his life” mean (35a)? What does the second “save his life” mean (35b)?
5. How do verses 34 and 36 shed light on what verse 35 means?
6. Read verse 9:1. In what way might some of those present see the kingdom of God come with power before they die?
7. There is a strange mixture of strength and weakness in Christianity. How does Jesus show this strange mixture in his mission? How do we see this strange mixture in Peter in verses 32-33? How do we see this strange mixture in the life Jesus calls us to in verses 34-37?

8. How can we follow Jesus' example of weakness?**Remembering the big picture**

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant.

Why Jesus came: He will reign in power, but he must suffer and die.

How should I respond? To follow Jesus means to follow the Suffering Servant. To truly follow, we must openly acknowledging him and all his words. Inseparable from following Jesus is the cost of the cross. There is no other example He gives.

Prayer requests

Jesus on the mount; Jesus off the mount

Mark 9:2-29

OPTIONAL STUDY

We saw that the very minute Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah (8:29), Jesus immediately began to teach, "Yes, but I am the Messiah who has come to be murdered." Peter rebukes him (8:31-32), so it is clear that only relentless teaching on Jesus' part is going to make any "dent" in the prejudices of the disciples. Now we are in the second half of Mark, and the contrast with the first half is already evident. Jesus now constantly speaks of his death and suffering, and he does it in ways that the disciples find extremely hard to swallow. This passage begins to answer the questions about the nature of Christ's life and the reasons that the Messiah has to die.

Jesus was transfigured "before them" (verse 2) meaning that the "Transfiguration" was for his disciples' benefit, designed to teach them about his person and work. Therefore, we have to ask "what does the *transfiguration* teach us?"

- 1. Read verses 2-8. What does the supernatural brightness of Jesus (verses 3-4) and the descent of a cloud (verse 7) tell us about Jesus' person and work? (Remember the cloud and bright light in the book of Exodus.)**
- 2. Refer to verses 4-12. What does the presence of Moses and Elijah and the voice from the cloud tell us about Jesus' person and work?**
- 3. Refer to verses 2-8. Why does the voice from the cloud add "Listen to Him!"? What do we learn from this?**

8. What do we learn about faith from this passage? About prayer?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the Son of Man referred to in Daniel 7. He is the Ancient of Days, the Son of God, whom God the Father loves. He is the Messiah, who must be preceded by Elijah (Malachi 4) and to whom the Old Testament points.

Why Jesus Came: We already know, from 8:31, that he says he “must die.” Why must he die? Mark 9:2-13 answers in terms of God’s will. It is God the Father’s plan to reconcile sinners to himself. Mark 9:9-29 gives the beginning of an answer in terms of man’s need. No mere human can break Satan’s power to deafen, dehumanize and ultimately kill mankind.

How should I respond? We should listen to the apostolic teaching of the cross. We cannot “listen to Jesus” in the sense that the disciples did. But we can “listen” with confidence to Scripture, which is the written account of what Jesus said.

Mark

Following the King: II

Study 10 | Mark 9:30-50

Jesus has begun to tell the disciples that he is the Messiah, but he has come to be rejected and die. He repeats this here in 9:31. The first reaction of his followers is they simply did not understand what he meant (verse 32a). It didn't fit their categories, so it did not "register." Imagine that you are on a campaign team trying to get a man elected president. One day he says, "Listen, here's how the campaign will end. Not only will I lose the election, but the opposition is going to assassinate me." Surely his followers would think he was being sarcastic or trying to motivate them to work harder. We can imagine, then, why they were so confused! But we see another reaction as well. Fear. They don't want to admit how confused they are (verse 32b – *"they were afraid to ask him about it."*) They were afraid that he might be serious. Their fear and pride kept them from admitting how confused and scared the teaching made them feel.

As a result, in the last part of the book of Mark we see Jesus spending a lot more time with disciples, in order to enlighten them. (Verse 30 – *"Jesus didn't want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples."*) He enters a phase in which he puts much more into the intensive training of his disciples in the meaning of his death and resurrection (i.e. the gospel).

Jesus frequently used the title

"Son of Man" when referring to Himself. In Jesus' day, it was also recognized as a Messianic title. Daniel 7:13-14 refers to the Son of Man descending down from Heaven to establish an everlasting kingdom of righteousness on earth.

- 1. What is the effect of continually using the term "Son of Man" each time Jesus teaches about his death (8:31; 9:12; 9:31)? (Read Daniel 7:9-15 and ask what kind of figure this is.) What is Jesus trying to get across?**
- 2. How does the disciples' argument on the road (verses 33-34) show why they could not grasp the teaching of Jesus' impending death?**

- 3. In verses 36-37, Jesus likens true discipleship to child-nurture. What is he teaching us about himself and us from this metaphor?**
- 4. What is Jesus telling us about the kind of people we should minister to by this metaphor of child-nurture?**
- 5. Now look more carefully at the phrase “welcome in my name.” What does this phrase show us about how we are to serve one another?**
- 6. What do we learn about the disciples from what John did to the man in verse 38?**

Mark

Meeting the King

Mark 10:1-31

OPTIONAL STUDY

In the first half of the book of Mark, the emphasis is on **who** Jesus is and on his public ministry. In the second half of the book, the emphasis is on **what** Jesus came to do and on his private instruction of his disciples. At first glance, it seems that some of the incidents in this chapter deviate from that scheme, but we must look more closely. The controversy with the Pharisees ends with Jesus' personal focus on the Twelve (verses 10-12). The interchange with the rich young man results in an extensive dialogue with the disciples (verses 22-31). The over-arching concern of Jesus is (still) to teach the meaning of the pattern of his death.

- 1. Refer to verses 1-12. Why do you think the Pharisees would want to consult with Jesus about divorce?**
- 2. Does Jesus take a "liberal" or "conservative" view of marriage and divorce?**
- 3. Read verses 10-12. a) Is Jesus over-ruling Moses and now changing the Old Testament allowance for divorce? b) How do we then understand his seemingly categorical statement against divorce?**

MEETING THE KING

4. Read verses 13-16. What do you think it means to receive the kingdom of God as a little child?
5. Read verses 17-31. a) Why is Jesus' first answer to the rich young man so unexpected, in light of verses 13-16 and the rest of the gospel? What is he getting at? b) Why is his second answer so unexpected? What is he getting at?
6. In verse 21, why would Jesus "send away sad" someone who filled him with love?
7. What does Jesus teach about wealth and riches in verses 23-31? Why do you think riches are such a spiritual snare? What is Jesus promising in verses 29-31 and how can we "lose" and "gain" some of these things today?

8. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9. You know something the rich young man did not. How can this make Jesus' call to us a joy?
9. Is there a theme running through all three passages? What do all these passages tell us about entering the kingdom of God?
10. Is there an application you can make as a result of today's new found truth?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Again we see Jesus the authoritative King, who expounds the real meaning of Scripture and states who will and who won't get to heaven. He also is a Servant, welcoming little children.

Why Jesus came:

To judge: In Chapter 2, Jesus said he came to call sinners. In Chapter 7, he taught that man's basic problem was sin. Now he convicts all of deadly sin, the Pharisees, the rich and the Twelve.

To save: But he also says that those who come to him admitting they are unable to help themselves will be "blessed," "saved," "inherit eternal life," and "enter the kingdom of God." This is the language of the true return from exile and of the promises to Abraham. His purpose in the first coming is to rescue men from the final judgment of the second.

How should I respond? Giving up everything to follow Jesus reflects a surrendered heart, but it is not a "work" we accomplish to earn God's favor. We must admit we cannot earn our way to heaven and instead trust God to do the humanly impossible.

The meaning of His death

Study 11 | Mark 10:32-52

We have seen that as soon as Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah the book of Mark shifts its focus from the person of Christ to the work of Christ. Now that we know who he is — what did he come to do? In the passage before us we have Jesus' third attempt to teach his disciples the meaning of his death. (The first two were in 8:31-32 and 9:31-32.) This time, Jesus gives us more details about his death than previously. But the major advance for the reader is that, for the first time, we are told not just that he will die but why he will do so. Here he begins to explain the meaning and purpose of his death. Many believe that 10:45 is the key verse of the entire gospel, summarizing and combining all the Mark themes about who Jesus is and what he came to do.

1. Compare 10:32 to 9:31 and 8:31. What new details and concepts does Jesus add to this teaching about his death?
2. a) How does the question (v.35) and the request (v.37) of James and John show that they still don't understand the meaning of the cross, of "glory" and of "greatness"? b) What does James and John's request — and Jesus' response — teach us about prayer?
3. a) What are the "cup" and the "baptism"? Read Is.41:17-23. b) To what degree do we do we share in them with Jesus?

4. **Read v.45. What is Jesus saying about his death (especially when he calls it a “ransom”) that he has not told us before?**
5. **Read Isaiah 53:2-12. If, as is likely, Jesus had this prophecy in mind, what else did he believe about his impending death?**
6. **What is Jesus saying about us when he says he dies to ransom us? (Follow-up question: in what ways are we “in bondage”?)**
7. **Read v.45. Despite the theological depth of Jesus’ statement, his use of it is extremely practical. How is he using the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement in the lives of his disciples?**

8. This is Jesus' last healing miracle. Why do you think Mark places it here? How is Bartimaeus a good example for us?
9. What was the most helpful or impressive thing that you learned today personally? What practical difference can it make in your life?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is Redeemer King, son of Man and Son of David. Unlike the Gentile 'kings' Jesus really is Lord and has all authority. But his Kingship is demonstrated in 'littleness'; he is also the Suffering Servant (Is 52-53) and the substitutionary sacrifice (Ex 12 and Lev 16), the Ransom by which we are redeemed.

Why Jesus came: God says Jesus must die for our sins. Our sin is serious; we cannot save ourselves. Now we learn that Jesus came not only to preach and call sinners, but to die for our death, the price of rescue from hell.

Man's response? Since Mark 8:32, the twelve have consistently failed to accept the necessity of the cross and have failed to accept the truth about themselves. In this passage, they at last come empty-handed, but do not see that even this is not enough. We can do nothing but God must do something. Sin is so serious that the divine Son of Man came to die in our place to save us. When we grasp that, our ideas of greatness will be turned on their heads.

Prayer requests

Mark

The final temple

Mark 11:1-12:17

OPTIONAL STUDY

Biblical-theological background for Mark 11-15

If we are to appreciate the meaning of the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple (in Mark 11), and indeed, the whole of Mark 11-15 (which takes place in and around the temple) we need to have a deep grasp of the rich Old Testament background.

1. In the beginning, God gave us a “sanctuary,” a place where we could live in the presence of God and meet him face to face. That sanctuary was the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-9; Genesis 3:8-9). It was a place of total fulfillment and fellowship with God. It was the place of shalom, perfect peace and harmony.
2. But because of sin, we were banished from the sanctuary of God’s presence — a flaming sword was put at the entrance of the Garden (Genesis 3:24). This was a representation that the penalty for sin is death. The way back into the presence of God is blocked by justice. There is no way back into the presence of God without going under the sword.
3. In the wilderness, God created a moveable sanctuary — the tabernacle where people could draw near to meet him (Exodus 25:22). The actual throne room of the sanctuary was the Holy of Holies, separated by a thick curtain/barrier, which had pictures of the Garden on it, motifs of cherubim and palm trees (Exodus 26). But only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year. He had to go “under the sword” with a blood sacrifice, symbolically atoning for sin, paying the penalty in order to go in to God’s presence. At the conclusion of the tabernacle service, God blessed the people with his shalom or peace (Numbers 6:24-27). The shekinah glory of God’s holiness dwells behind the veil in the sanctuary and no sinner can enter there.
4. Though God allows Solomon to build a permanent physical sanctuary (I Kings 8:41-43), yet he alludes to a Son of David building a truly permanent “house” for God and us (2 Samuel 5:6-10; 7:1-16). Since Solomon is not this true Son, his temple is destroyed (I Kings 11:11-13; 2 Kings 25:8-11). During the exile, Ezekiel prophesies a new temple and a new David to build it (Ezekiel 37:24-28; 40-43). It will be much grander than Solomon’s temple. The Lord’s glory will fill it (Ezekiel 48:35), and it will become so large that all the nations of the earth will come to it and into it (Ezekiel 37:28).
5. The temple built after the exiles returned to Israel from Babylon did not fulfill this grand vision of the prophets. When the new foundation was laid, the older people wept because it was far less splendid than Solomon’s, not more (Ezra 3:12). It was this post-exilic temple that existed in Jesus’ day.

THE FINAL TEMPLE

So this temple was not the one that was prophesied (Haggai 2:1-8). That one would only be built when the Messiah, the new “David” came.

6. Zechariah 9-14 is critical for understanding Mark 11. Zechariah 9:9-12 tells of the Messiah, the king coming back “gentle and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The prophecy ends in a stunning way. “On that day **HOLY TO THE LORD** will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty... And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 14:20-21). Here we are told that the returning king will turn the entire city — even the entire world — into a giant holy of holies. It is a breath-taking and overwhelming vision. Even cooking pots will be as holy as those before God’s throne. The Holy of Holies will extend to include the whole world, so that even the Canaanites will be holy and living in the house of the Lord (Zechariah 14:21). This means that the Messiah will not simply build a building, but will mediate the very presence of God back to earth. He will **BE** the door to God, the final temple.
7. Mark 11 is essentially showing how Jesus fulfills this prophecy of Zechariah, and thus all the prophecies of the Old Testament that linked the Messiah to the temple. John is more explicit than Mark. He says, *“the word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory”* (1:14). He tells us how, after Jesus cleansed the temple, he refers to his body as the temple (2:19-21). John records Jesus saying *“I am the Way, the Truth, the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me”* (John 14:6). Jesus is the final temple. In Mark 15:38, we are told how this could be —the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Jesus went under the sword (Genesis 3:24). He took the sword into himself. He was the High Priest opening the way into the Holy of Holies, but he made himself the sacrifice. He paid the price to open the door.
8. In Mark and the other gospels, Jesus is depicted as “the final temple”. He thus brings us a salvation of unfathomable wisdom and richness. The ripping of the veil signifies the “outbreaking” of God’s royal, healing presence into the world — this is the coming of the kingdom. What does it all mean?
 - a. It means that Christ is not primarily a teacher, but a Savior. This is why Mark concentrates not so much on his moral advice, but on who he is and what he did. He comes to open the way into God for us.
 - b. It means that being a Christian is not primarily being a nice person who subscribes to certain beliefs and codes. It is a radical

regeneration of the heart and reorientation of the life. We are regenerated when we believe (John 3:3), because now the same raw presence that once shook mountains, terrified people, killed living things on contact now can live in us. For we who believe in Jesus are now temples in which the Holy Spirit of God dwells (I Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

- c. It means that being a Christian gives us access to the presence of God through prayer now, and access to the bosom of God in the future. Moses' unrealizable yearning to see the light of God's glory and face (Exodus 33:18) is now our privilege (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 4:6).
- d. It means that being a Christian makes us partners and participants with Christ in his work of spreading the healing and energizing kingdom-power through the world. Because Jesus is the temple, we too are the final temple, "living stones" in it (I Peter 2:4-10). Because Jesus is the High Priest, we are "priests" who can both draw near to God (Hebrews 4:14-16) and bring others to God (Hebrews 13). Because Jesus is a gate to heaven (John 1:51; John 14:6) we are linked to heaven (Colossians 2:20; Philippians 3:20). Because Jesus is an anointed one (Luke 4:18), as was the temple, so we are anointed (I John 2:20). All the lines and themes of the temple converge on Jesus — he is the Sacrifice, the Priest, the Altar, the Light, the Bread, the blood of purification. For all the promises of God become "Yes" in Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Chapter 11 really begins the last chapter of Jesus' life. We notice that in chapter 10:46-52) he allows people (like blind Bartimaeus) to call him the Messiah openly. This can mean only one thing — nothing else needs to happen before he is crucified! He knows that an open declaration of his identity will lead to execution, so the countdown begins. Chapters 11 through 15 cover only a week of his life, but it consumes nearly a third of Mark's gospel. The disproportionate length shows that the gospels are not a biography. These chapters are the climax and fulfillment of Jesus' ministry, not simply the end of it.

- 1. Read verses 1-6. A full six verses are devoted to finding a colt for Jesus to ride. Read Zechariah 9:9. What does it teach us that Jesus has this so well planned out? What are some practical, personal applications for us?**

- 2. In verse 2, Jesus makes it clear that this is a colt "which no one has ever ridden." Why would that be of significance? What does it symbolize?**

- 3. Read Verses 8-10. What do we learn from the response and cries of the crowd?**

In the Old Testament, the fig tree was sometimes used to represent Israel (Hosea 9:10, Nahum 3:12).

THE JUDGMENT OF THE KING

- 8. In verse 11 Jesus does not simply ride in to Jerusalem. This verse shows his triumphal entry was actually to the Temple. Share from your reading: a) one insight that helps you most in understanding Jesus' mission, and b) one insight that helps you most in understanding the Christian life.**

This passage shows us Jesus repeating himself. The repetition of themes in Mark is not a lack of imagination on the author's part. Rather, it conveys a very important lesson for us. Jesus has only a few very basic things to say, but they are very difficult to learn. Discerning Christians sometimes realize their entire lives have been one long process of learning one or two gospel lessons.

Instead of Jesus instructing his disciples in the meaning of his death, we see him again confronting religious leaders and the crowds through the next couple of chapters. We are brought back to the theme of the first half of Mark — "Who is this?" Jesus' triumphal entry to public acclaim has virtually forced the hand of the "chief priests, teachers of law, and the elders" (Mark 11:27). They can ignore him no longer — they must discredit him or destroy him. His entry was virtually an invitation from Jesus to "crown me or kill me." There is never any doubt which option they will choose.

1. Read verses 11:27-33. a) What are they asking Jesus? b) Why would this group be so concerned about it? c) Why is Jesus' answer so effective?

2. What practical implications does this interchange have for us?

3. Read 12:1-12. Why is this parable spoken to religious leaders, and how does it follow from the previous discussion?

THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING

4. Read 12:1-12. a) What remarkable claims is Jesus making for himself in the parable of the vineyard? b) Read I Peter 2:4-8. In verse 10 Jesus changes the metaphor from a vineyard to a building. What is he teaching us with it?
5. What practical implications does this parable have for us?
6. Read 12:13-17. What does this question have in common with the other accounts we've seen today? How does it follow from them?
7. What is Jesus' answer and what are the implications for believers today?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Once again Jesus' supreme authority is evident, not only in his claim to be Son of God and the Messiah to whom John pointed, but also in his complete control over the supposed "authorities" of Israel.

Why Jesus Came: The parable of the vineyard puts Jesus' coming in the context of Israel's whole discreditable history. He has come, like the prophets before him, to demand from Israel God's due. But when rebellious Israel kills the messenger, he will rise from the dead, and they will have the care of God's people taken from them, to the marvel of believers.

How should I respond? The unbelievers' problem here is rebellion, not ignorance (12:12a). They should have admitted who Jesus was (11:27-33), respected him (12:6) and given God his due (12:17). Instead, they desire an inheritance only for themselves (12:7), are only in awe of men (11:32; 12:12b), ignore dire warnings (12:9-12) and lay deadly traps for Jesus (12:17).

Mark

The teaching of the King

Study 12 | Mark 12:18-44

This passage continues the series of “hot questions” served up to trap Jesus. He deftly fields these questions like a good infielder handles ground balls — he calmly picks each one up and throws it back! In one instance, he throws it back very hard, and goes on the offensive, totally defeating them. Jesus never dodged the hard questions. Sometimes people in the church brush off difficult inquiries with the response “don’t question, just believe.” Jesus doesn’t do that. It is interesting to notice that Jesus doesn’t simply set up a lecture series and give people information. Rather, his teaching is usually a response to concrete situations and questions.

On the other hand, we learn here that asking Jesus a question is very dangerous! He never lets the question remain at the abstract or intellectual level, but gets personal and makes you examine where you stand and to what you are committed.

- 1. Read verses 18-27. Jesus uses several different arguments to show the Sadducees their errors. What are they?**
- 2. What can we learn and infer about life after death, according to Jesus?**
- 3. Read verses 28-30. Why is Jesus’ response to the teacher of the law so amazing to them? (verse 34b, “no one dared ask him any more questions.”) What does it teach us about ourselves? How does it tell us more about the law?**

- 7. Read verses 41-44. Why does Mark put the story of the widow here?**

8. Read verses 12:18-44. What aspect of Jesus' teaching is most challenging to you? How can you more fully follow "the teaching of the King?"

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the Messiah and, according to the OT, this means that he is incomparably greater than David, descended from David but also the Son of God. As such, he has authority to interpret Scripture and to judge who is near and who is far from kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, God's reign, has itself come "near" in Jesus' presence on earth (cf. 1:14-15).

Why Jesus came: As the Messiah, He is due our own whole allegiance. Instead of living for self, we can now live for God.

How should I respond? The passage contains two negative examples and two positives.

We must beware – of denying (either in theory like the Sadducees or in practice like the Pharisees) that there will be a resurrection, and therefore that there will be judgement and salvation. Such denial ignores what Scripture teaches about God's power.

We must beware – of religion like that of the scribes in general which courts homage from others, idolizing self. Such religion may look very holy, but fails in what is due to God and our neighbor.

We must emulate – the wise scribe's understanding of God's demands. Jesus commends him not because he has kept the two great commandments but because he knows they are the standard by which he will be judged, and that religion cannot make up for not keeping them.

We must emulate – the poor widow's total commitment, not just financially but personally. What she gives is, literally "her whole life" (cf. 8:34-37).

Prayer requests

Mark

This world won't last forever

Mark 13:1-47

OPTIONAL STUDY

Introduction to Eschatology

There is little consensus among Christians with regard to the details of what the Bible teaches about the “end times.” (The theological term for this area of inquiry is *eschatology*.) On the one hand, we must remember that the basic teaching of the New Testament on this could not be clearer: Jesus Christ will return visibly and personally at the end of time to judge and renew the whole world. There is very little disagreement about this fact among those who accept the basic trustworthiness of the Bible. Some estimate that almost one quarter of the New Testament is devoted to proclaiming this fact. If you reject the concept of the Second Coming of Christ, you essentially have to reject the reliability of the entire New Testament. Jesus is coming back.

But on the other hand, beyond this essential teaching, Christians with very similar commitments and beliefs have not been able to agree on most of the details regarding the Lord's return. One reason for this is because much Biblical prophecy comes in a literary genre often called “*Apocalyptic*.” Every literary genre comes with its own set of interpretive rules. We do not interpret poetry the same way we interpret history. But what are the “rules” for interpreting prophecy? “Apocalyptic” looks seductively like simple historical narrative, only written “ahead of time.” But it is also much like poetry in its images and ambiguities. In short, it is very difficult to understand Biblical prophecy. (When we see how New Testament writers interpreted Old Testament prophecies about the birth of Christ, we see just how tricky such interpretation is. For example, see Matthew 2:14 citing Hosea 11:1 as a prediction that Jesus would go to Egypt. Would you have ever interpreted Hosea 11:1 as a Messianic prophecy if Matthew hadn't explained it?)

What does this mean? First, it means we must hold any of our convictions about eschatology with a certain amount of tentativeness and humility. If we hold our views of prophecy and end-times with the same assurance and conviction with which we hold our views of Christ and the Gospel, we are simply giving ourselves too much credit. What makes us think that we are so much wiser than most of the rest of the Christian church? (*Any* particular view of the end is virtually a minority position — that is how fractured the church is over the interpretation of details!)

Second, however, we should not simply avoid any discussion of details. Our views here *do* have some impact on how we live our lives in the world. Our “eschatology” (as we shall see) can make us either very optimistic or very pessimistic about life in this world, and that affects how we spend our money and our time.

Therefore, we should study this subject with humility, but we *should* study it.

THIS WORLD WON'T LAST FOREVER

The occasion for Jesus' discourse is his prediction that the temple will be destroyed. The temple was an impressive building. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us each stone was approximately 37 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet long. Therefore, when Jesus says "*not one stone will be standing upon another*," he is predicting an extremely violent event, and a tremendous disaster. We know that this prophecy came true. In 70 A.D. the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem. He raised the Temple to the ground, as a "lesson" and warning to all rebels. This is quite important background knowledge for any readers of this passage.

1. Since the disaster Jesus is predicting in verse 2 is so mammoth, what point in history do the disciples probably think Jesus is describing? (i.e. What are the "these things" that the disciples are asking about in verse 4?)

2. Read through verses 5-13 and verses 14-23. After reading each, circle which question you think Jesus is addressing in that particular section.

A-1 "when will the temple end?"

A-2 "what will be the signs leading up to that?"

B-1 "when will the world end?"

B-2 "what will be the signs leading up to that?"

verses 5-13:

A-1

A-2

B-1

B-2

verses 14-23:

A-1

A-2

B-1

B-2

3. Why do you think the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem was so significant for Christians?

4. Read through verses 24-27, 28-31, and 32-37. After reading each, circle which question you think Jesus is addressing in that particular section.

A-1 "when will the temple end?"

A-2 "what will be the signs leading up to that?"

B-1 "when will the world end?"

B-2 "what will be the signs leading up to that?"

verses 24-27:	A-1	A-2	B-1	B-2
verses 28-31:	A-1	A-2	B-1	B-2
verses 32-37:	A-1	A-2	B-1	B-2

5. Make a list of all the insights you can glean from verses 5-37 about the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth.

6. Read verses 32-37. We know that Jesus is returning but not when He is returning. What is the practical impact of this balance of 'knowing and not knowing'?

7. **Reflect for a minute on how your behavior and life would change if you took seriously what you have learned here about 'The Return of the King'.**

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the true Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God. He is absent now, (verses 5-23) but he will return (verses 24-37). When he comes in glory, all will know who he is.

Why Jesus Came: He came to bring judgement, but not yet judgement on the world. He came to send the gospel out to the elect a New Israel of all nations. When he returns in final judgement, his people will be gathered.

How should I respond? Reject false "messiahs" and false "prophets," however spectacular, and all claims to know the date of Jesus' return. We need to spread the gospel, in light of Jesus' return. The last judgement could come at any time.

Mark

The King is prepared

Study 13 | Mark 14:1-26

This chapter begins the actual “Passion Narrative” of Mark — the actual account of Christ’s death. The foreshadowing and explanations are over. Now we watch it happen. *“The account of Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, condemnation, and execution furnishes a climax to the Gospel and brings together the motifs and themes developed throughout the account.”* (Lane; The Gospel According to Mark, p. 485).

- 1. Read verses 3-9. Why is the woman criticized for her action (verses 4-5)? Why does Jesus call her act “beautiful”?**
- 2. In what specific ways should we be like her?**
- 3. Read verses 10-12, 20-21. Judas is a chilling example. Here is a man who looked like a believer in every way, but was not. a) In what ways are we all like Judas? b) In what ways is a genuine Christian unlike Judas?**

4. Read verses 18-20. Why does Jesus stress the fact that his betrayer is one of the Twelve? What do they reveal about themselves by their response? How are they different than the woman who broke the jar?
5. Read verses 12-26; Exodus 12:1-20. When Jesus presides over the Passover meal and says, "this is my body and blood," he is drawing parallels between the Passover event and his own mission. What are these parallels and what do we learn from them?
6. Make a list of everything we learn specifically about the meaning of Christ's death from this teaching that He is our Passover Lamb.

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Just as physical Israel was saved from death in Egypt by death of lambs (Exodus 12), so Jesus is the true Passover Lamb whose death saves the true Israel from death. He is the Suffering Servant who dies for many (Isaiah 53:12). He is totally in control; He is King.

Why Jesus came: Jesus came to die not for the worthy but for the unworthy, and to give his body and blood to atone for the sins of people of all nations. This makes his death amazingly good news.

How should I respond? Although it looks increasingly as if everyone will deny the crucified Christ, the story is not yet over. In thankful devotion, we can give praise for the death of the "Passover Lamb."

Prayer requests

Suffering at the hands of His friends

Mark 14:27-52

OPTIONAL STUDY

The next three sections of Mark look at how Jesus suffered at the hands of his friends, enemies, and Father. These titles are taken from the passage titles of the “Read, Mark, Learn” curriculum used for many years at St. Helen’s Bishops Gate Church in London. The titles show us that the suffering of Christ was multi-dimensional — physical, mental, and spiritual. It is necessary to understand the depths of what he endured for us if we are to appreciate the riches of what he procured for us. Secondly it shows us how to face trials in our own life.

Note: We will only touch today on verses 27-31 with little comment. It will be better to consider these predictions of Peter’s denial along with the later account of what and how he did it.

- 1. Notice in verses 27 and 49 how Jesus continually refers to prophecy throughout his trial. a) What does this tell us about Jesus’ death? b) How does the cross help us to face suffering and injustice in our own lives?**
- 2. Contrast Jesus’ reaction to death (read verses 33-34, 36) to the deaths of so many Christian martyrs in history (read below). Why the difference?**
- 3. a) What does “the cup” tell us about Jesus’ sufferings? (Recall Mark 10:38.) b) Many people reject the very idea of hell or the wrath of God. What impact does such a rejection have on one’s appreciation of the love of Christ?**

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is fully man; his suffering is real and he dreads the cross. But he is the obedient Son of God, willing to die, thereby fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy (verses 27, 49).

Why Jesus Came: He came to drink the “cup” of God’s wrath, bearing the penalty of man’s sin on man’s behalf. No one else could do this; he was left utterly alone. And there was no other way. Only God Himself could pay the penalty of man’s sin by dying in man’s place.

How should I respond? We will be ashamed of Jesus and his words unless we both understand the cross and, “watching,” pray for God’s help. We shall do neither unless we understand ourselves and that we are all prayless, sleepy, self-reliant failures.

Suffering at the hands of His enemies

Study 14 | Mark 14:53-15:15

There are three incidents related here: a) Jesus' interrogation before the Sanhedrin (verses 55-65); b) Peter's denial of Jesus (verses 53-54; 66-72); c) Jesus' trial before Pilate (15:1-15).

The Sanhedrin, before and after the time of Christ, was the highest tribunal of the Jews under Roman occupation. It consisted basically of three groups: the priestly families (mainly Sadducean "liberal" in beliefs), the scribes, and the elders (the latter groups were made up of many Pharisees). Its jurisdiction was fairly wide in Christ's time. It not only had authority over Jewish religious ceremonial practice, but it had some power with regard to criminal law. It could order arrests. It was empowered to judge cases that did not involve capital punishment, but capital cases needed the confirmation of the Roman procurator.

- 1. Read 14:53-72. Is Jesus getting a fair hearing — is he getting justice here? Why or why not?**
- 2. Read 14:58. First, Jesus is accused of saying that he will destroy the temple and replace it in three days. In what way is this charge false? Yet in what way is this charge true?**
- 3. Read 14:61-62. Secondly, Jesus is accused of blasphemy. Is he innocent or guilty of this charge?**

4. **Read 14:66-72 (also refer to 14:27-31). In what ways are Peter and Jesus going through the same experience during this time? But how does Peter's response contrast with Jesus'?**
5. **How can we avoid doing what Peter did?**
6. **Read 15:15. Why did Mark include the interesting note that Barabbas was released instead of Jesus? *i.e.* What does the release of Barabbas teach us about Jesus' work on the cross?**
7. **Who, in the account of Mark, can be "blamed" for Jesus' death, if anyone? Think of the entire account of all the events leading up to his execution.**

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus' claims are made public for the first time. He is the Messiah/King of Israel, the Son of God as well as Son of Man, the one who will sit at God's right hand and come in glory to judge. He is shown to be innocent by the very people who most want to prove him guilty. As Suffering Servant, he responds to their taunts with silence.

Why Jesus came: He did not come to be the kind of King we think we want, and which they falsely accused him of being in order to kill him. He came to be the kind of King we really need, who will die not only at the hands of, but also die in the place of, such murderous rebels as we are.

How should I respond? The Sanhedrin hated Jesus at once; Peter and the crowd denied when persecution came; Pilate was "choked" by the cares of the world (cf. 4:15-19). The contrast between Christ and all who reject him is not there to encourage us to follow his example better in the future but to show us our helpless need of salvation. He did not come to call the righteous but sinners (2:17).

Prayer requests

Suffering at the hands of His Father

Study 15 | Mark 15:16-39

We must remember that Mark always has two reasons for including small details in his narrative. First, anything he writes is included because it happened. Mark is not making this up. (See below, question #2.) Second, however, anything he writes is included in order to teach us about Jesus. Mark is not 'preachy' — he does not do much direct explanation or exposition or moralizing. Rather, he selects facts and events in such a way as to drive home the meaning of the work of Christ. So we should constantly ask: "Why did Mark include that? What is he trying to tell us here?"

- 1. Look at the "mocking" of Christ. Read verses 17-20, 29-32, and also 14:65.**
a) For what particular things is Jesus mocked? b) What do you think Mark is showing us in the account of the mocking?
- 2. Read verse 21. What does this interesting little note about 'Alexander and Rufus' tell us about a) Mark's readers, and b) the trustworthiness of the account?**
- 3. What is Mark trying to get across about human nature in these descriptions of the mocking, spitting, beating?**

4. **Read Romans 8:7. a) Do you think that Paul exaggerates here when he says we are all naturally hostile to God? b) How have you seen this natural human enmity to God in normal human behavior? In yourself?**

5. **Some have called verse 34 “the most important and terrible question ever asked.” a) What does the question tell us about what Jesus is doing? b) What does it tell us about what the Father was doing? c) What is the answer to Jesus’ question?**

6. **How can this cry help you when you feel alone and forsaken (even by God)?**

7. **What is the meaning of the tearing of the veil (verse 38)?**

8. Read verse 39. In many ways, the confession of the centurion is the climax of the crucifixion and even of the gospel of Mark. Contrast him to everyone else around the cross. What is the connection between verses 38 and 39? What do you think Mark is trying to get his readers (us) to do here? How can we do it?

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: Jesus is the Christ and Redeemer King, the Son of God. Jesus suffers as the Passover Lamb not only at the hands of men but at the hands of God.

Why Jesus came: Jesus came so that we would believe in this Messiah, the one who “must” die. Jesus bore God’s wrath and died in our place, He was banished by his Father so that we might be welcomed.

How should I respond? Believe in this Messiah, the one who must die (8:31).

Prayer requests

The King is dead: Long live the King!

Study 16 | Mark 15:40-16:8

The brevity of Mark's account of the resurrection is notable and has aroused a great deal of discussion. And yet for all its brevity, Mark's treatment lays out some of the most compelling evidence for the historicity of the resurrection.

- 1. What are we to learn from the fact that the witnesses and people showing faithfulness here to Jesus are Joseph, a Pharisee (15:40-47), women (16:1-8), and a Roman centurion (see 15:39, 44)?**
- 2. List all the possible alternative explanations for the resurrection (other than that it happened!) Now consider all the ways that Mark's information and accounts undermines these explanations.**
- 3. Read 16:7. What is the significance of the angel's assignment to "go, tell his disciples and Peter?"**

4. **Why does Mark take such care to show that the resurrection was a historical event? Why does that matter?**
5. **Most of the reliable manuscripts we have indicate Mark's gospel ending abruptly at 16:8. If (as it seems) he ended it that way, why did he do so, do you think?**

Prayer requests

Remembering the big picture

Who Jesus is: He is the Suffering Servant, Ransom, Passover Lamb, Son of Man, Son of God who is innocent, authoritative, loved by his Father.

Why Jesus came:

- To judge all men for fruitlessness, man-centered religion, and rebellion/blasphemy.
- To save both Jew and Gentile, including blasphemers/rebels/his killers from hell for eternal life.
- To serve by dying as ransom. He is the Lamb who accepted God's wrath and takes away the sin of the world.

How should I respond?

- Be unashamed of Jesus. (Examples: Take up cross! Deny self!; Be little/welcome little; Serve! Witness! Watch!; Have faith in God! Give All!)
- Be ashamed of ourselves. (Examples: we reject word about cross; we reject word about us; we give man God's due; we deny/kill our Savior.)
- Pray for forgiveness/mercy.



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