

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

The Gospel According to

MARK

THE SERVANT WHO
CAME TO SAVE

JOHN T. STEVENSON

Redeemer Publishing

© John Stevenson, 2009
All rights reserved

Redeemer Publishing
Hollywood, FL
www.RedeemerPublishing.com

Unless otherwise noted,
Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973,
1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Other books by John Stevenson:

Doctrines of the Bible: *Outlines in Systematic Theology*

Facing the Flames: *A Fire Fighter's Meditations on the
Spiritual Life*

First Corinthians: *Striving for Unity*

Galatians: *Our Freedom in Christ*

Hebrews: *The Supremacy of the Savior*

Joshua, Judges, and Ruth: *Victory, Defeat, and Hope in an
Age of Heroes*

Luke: *In the Footsteps of the Savior*

Preaching from the Minor Prophets

Romans: *The Radical Righteousness of God*

A Survey of the Old Testament: *The Bible Jesus Used*

To my grandchildren
Andrew and Elijah

A special thanks to
Phyllis Miller
for her careful proof reading
and thoughtful suggestions

CONTENTS

The Beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1:1)	1
Jesus & John (Mark 1:2-13)	6
Fishers of Men (Mark 1:14-20)	15
A Day in the Life of Jesus (Mark 1:21-39)	22
The Willing Healer (Mark 1:40-45)	30
Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12)	36
In the Company of Sinners (Mark 2:13-17)	43
Legal Liabilities (Mark 2:18-22)	50
Sabbath Controversies (Mark 2:23 - 3:6)	56
A Strategy for Missions (Mark 3:7-19)	65
Are You Family? (Mark 3:20-35)	74
Stories to Live By (Mark 4:1-34)	81
Stilling a Storm (Mark 4:35-41)	94
Demons and Deliverance (Mark 5:1-20)	100
Deliverance from Disease and Death (Mark 5:21-43)	110
Jesus the Prophet (Mark 6:1-6)	122
Sending forth the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13)	126
The Death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29)	132
Feeding Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44)	140
A Savior in the Storm (Mark 6:45-52)	146
Jesus and Tradition (Mark 7:1-23)	151
A Gentile for Jesus (Mark 7:24-30)	161
Communicating Love to Deaf-Mute (Mark 7:31-37)	165
Feeding the Four Thousand (Mark 8:1-10)	170
Blinded Eye (Mark 8:11-26)	175
Confessing Christ (Mark 8:27-38)	180
The Transfiguration (Mark 9:1-13)	188
Faith for the Faithless (Mark 9:14-29)	197
Greatness in the Kingdom (Mark 9:33-50)	205
Jesus on Divorce (Mark 10:1-12)	212
Entering the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:13-31)	220
Servanthood (Mark 10:32-45)	229
Restoring Blinded Eyes (Mark 10:46-52)	236
The Triumphant Entry (Mark 11:1-11)	243

A Barren Fig Tree and a Dirty Temple (Mark 11:12-19)	250
The Withered Fig Tree (Mark 11:20-26)	261
A Question of Authority (Mark 11:27 - 12:37)	266
The Condemned and the Commended (Mark 12:38-44)	290
Signs of the End (Mark 13:1-31)	296
Love and Betrayal (Mark 14:1-11)	317
The Last Supper (Mark 14:12-26)	324
The Gethsemane Incident (Mark 14:27-42)	331
Betrayal and Arrest (Mark 14:43-52)	339
The Jewish Trial (Mark 14:53-72)	345
The Roman Trial (Mark 15:1-15)	355
The Cross (Mark 15:16-47)	361
The Empty Tomb (Mark 16:1-8)	375
The Final Verses of Mark (Mark 16:9-20)	380
Bibliography	387

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL **MARK 1:1**

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

It is a short beginning to a short book. Of all four of the gospel accounts, Mark is the shortest. You would think that it is therefore the edited version, what we used to call in the old days “the Readers’ Digest” version. That isn’t so. The specific narratives found in Mark are generally longer and more descriptive than those found in the corresponding parallel passages in Matthew or Luke. On the other hand, Mark bypasses the longer sermons and the longer parables that are found in Matthew and in Luke. Mark wants to focus on the action.

I have a confession to make. I like action movies. Perhaps it is due to the 29 years I worked in Fire-Rescue. Or perhaps it is an overdose of testosterone that I have not yet outgrown. For whatever reason, I like action and I like action movies. Maybe that is one of the things I find appealing about the Gospel of Mark. It is action-oriented. The introduction is found in the first verse and, after this, there will not be a slow spot in the action until we are finishing the book.

The title in most Greek texts is *Kata Markon*, “According to Mark.” While the book itself makes no mention of its author, the overwhelming testimony of the church fathers was that Mark wrote this account. However, the first verse of the book could easily serve as a title to the entire book.

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

This is a book about the Gospel. The word “gospel” (literally, “good news”) has religious connotations in today’s English language, but those connotations were absent in the first century. N. T. Wright points out that this term was used in secular writings to refer to the birth or accession of an

emperor (1997:1). We commonly think of the message of Mark as the portrayal of Jesus as a servant and Mark does give that portrayal. But before he presents Jesus as a servant, he first presents Jesus as the King of Heaven and the Son of God. It is going to be important that we see Jesus as a servant who came to save, but we will miss the impact of His servanthood unless we realize that He is first and foremost the King of the Universe and the Son of God who willingly left heaven's glory to come and take up the role of a servant. Mark underscores this by the use of two royal titles:

1. Christ.

The is the Greek rendition of the Hebrew term "Messiah." It literally means "anointed one." That is significant because kings were anointed. You will remember the times when Saul and then David were each anointed. The anointing pointed to an ordained kingship. The Old Testament promise of a coming Messiah described one who would have an anointing, not merely at the hands of a prophet, but with the very Spirit of God. Isaiah 61:1 gives a cryptic prophecy of one who was to be anointed by the Spirit of God.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And freedom to prisoners (Isaiah 61:1).*

Luke's account tells us how Jesus entered a synagogue in Capernaum and read these words from the scroll of Isaiah and then proclaimed that they were fulfilled in His day. He is the one who is greater than David because He has a greater anointing than David ever had. Mark Horne correctly reflects, "If you want to explain what the term 'Jesus Christ' means, perhaps a good paraphrase would be 'King Jesus'" (2003:12).

2. Son of God.

The term "son of God" have both Jewish as well as Roman connotations. In the Roman Empire, Octavius Augustus had led the way to eventual emperor worship by having his uncle, Julius Caesar, accorded the title *Divi filius*, "son of God." But hundreds of year earlier, the Lord had promised David that he would have a son for

whom would be established an eternal kingdom. God said of this promised Son, *“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me”* (2 Samuel 7:14). The immediate application of this prophecy pointed to Solomon, the son of David. But Mark lets us know here that it is ultimately a reference also to David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ.

MARK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Bible has four separate books which detail the life and ministry of Jesus. We customarily refer to these as the “Four Gospels.” Mark is one of those four gospels. It is the shortest of the four. It is also a part of the Synoptic Gospels.

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Eye-witness	Associated with Peter and Paul	Associated with Paul	Eye-witness
Written to Jews	Written to the Romans	Dedicated to a Greek official	Written to the World
Jesus is King	Jesus is Servant	Jesus is a great Teacher	Jesus is the Son of God
Sermons	Miracles	Parables	Doctrines
Synoptic Gospels			4 th Gospel

There are very few incidents which are recorded in Mark which are not also found in either Matthew or Luke. On the other hand, Mark often adds details that are absent from the other accounts.

THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The Gospel of Mark contains none of the birth narratives. It is concerned only with the ministry of Jesus. It pictures Jesus as the servant of God. You don’t spend much time talking about how or where a servant was born. You do not record the genealogy of a servant. That is not important. The important thing about a servant is what he does.

1. Mark presents the most human picture of Jesus. His focus is often upon the emotions of Jesus. For example, it is only in Mark that we learn that Jesus loved the rich young ruler.
2. Mark gives attention to short, vivid details. At the feeding of the 5000, Mark tells us that the people sat down in groups of 100's and 50's.
3. Mark tells his story with an earthy simplicity. He adds very little commentary. He generally gives the facts of the historical narrative and leaves the reader to ponder their significance.
4. Mark is notable for his use of the term “immediately.” We feel as though we are rushing through the ministry of Jesus at breakneck speed. He is particularly fond of using the historic present (noted in the NAS by the use of an asterisk). He joins his sentences with the word “and.”
5. Mark often gives us the Aramaic words which were spoken by Jesus (Mark 5:41; 7:11; 7:34; 14:36; 15:34). However, when he does so, he always includes a translation. He also transliterates a number of Latin words into Greek. The other gospel writers do this, too, but Mark does it more often. Indeed, there are two occasions where Mark explains a vague Greek term by giving its Latin equivalent (Mark 12:42; 15:16). This suggests that, though he is writing in Greek, he is writing his book to a Latin audience.
6. We have very few of the long discourses of Jesus. There are really only two large sermons given in Mark.
 - The parables of the kingdom (Mark 4:3-32).
 - The Olivet Discourse (Mark 13).

The primary stress of Mark is not so much on the teachings of Jesus as it is upon what He did.

7. Mark does not presuppose that his readers are familiar with the Old Testament. Indeed, he only quotes from the Old Testament once, though he often indicates that Jesus quoted from it regularly.

When Mark describes the instructions given to the twelve as they are sent out, he makes no mention of the prohibition against preaching to

the Samaritans or to the Gentiles.

The following outline of the Gospel of Mark shows the center point and main idea of the book. Our attention is directed to the identity of Jesus.

1:1	1:14	7:24	8:27	8:31	11:1	14:1
Prologue	Public Ministry		“Who do men say that I am?”	Private Ministry	Public Ministry	Death & Rising
Baptism & Temptation	Galilee	Gentile Regions		Road to Jerusalem	Jerusalem	
Service of the Servant				Suffering of the Servant		

AUTHOR

Aside from the title, there is nothing in the book to allude to Mark as the author. However, early church tradition is universal in ascribing the authorship to Mark.

Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord or a follower of his. He followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instruction to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically." (Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, as quoted in Eusebius).

Marcus is a Latin name. Acts 12:12 tells us that he also had a Hebrew name, John. Mark was the nephew of Barnabas. Mark had begun his career in ministry accompanying Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. But Mark had abandoned the team upon facing hardship. This led to Paul's rejecting him for a second missionary trip. But Mark ultimately redeemed himself, for Paul speaks highly of him in later years (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11).

JESUS & JOHN

Mark 1:1-13

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

We have already noted that Mark is going to give us a portrait of Jesus as the servant who came to give His life a ransom for many. As such, we will see a very human picture of Jesus. We will see him loving. And we will see Him angry. And tired. And hungry. We will see Him marveling at unbelief and sighing at opposition. Perhaps for this reason, Mark begins by emphasizing, not the humanity, but the deity of Jesus. He is the holder of two titles.

- The Christ - the Messiah - the One who was anointed by God.
- The Son of God.

Mark's introductory statement is somewhat reminiscent of both Genesis 1:1 as well as John 1:1. It turns our attention to the subject of beginnings. And it reminds us that the gospel started long before Jesus was born.

THE PROMISE OF ISAIAH

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way; ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" (Mark 1:2-3).

The quote is taken from Malachi 3:1, the very last book of the Bible. Malachi was writing to the sinful generation in which he lived. He was warning them of their need to repent and to straighten out their manner of living. The reason that they needed to repent

The phrase "it is written" is in the perfect tense, indicating a continuing result.

was because the Lord (*Yahweh*) was going to come. John is plainly the promised forerunner. The Lord who he announces is Jesus. Thus, the Old Testament passage which promises the coming of Yahweh is fulfilled in Jesus.

Mark says that this is “written in Isaiah, the prophet” (1:2). Actually, the quote is taken from two separate passages of the Old Testament.

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me,,,” (Malachi 3:1a).

A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3).

Why is only Isaiah mentioned by Mark? Perhaps it is because Mark did not expect his Roman readers to be familiar with the tiny book of Malachi.

Or perhaps it is because Isaiah, being the first book of the prophets, was sometimes used as the title for the entire collection of the books of the prophets.

Mark personalizes the words of the prophet so that the Father is described as saying to the Son, “I send My messenger before Your face...”

The juxtaposition of the concept of “the beginning of the gospel” with these prophetic words is no accident. It points to the fact that the gospel did not start with the birth of Christ. It had its beginnings a lot earlier. The prophets preached the gospel and told of the One who would come to redeem the world.

THE PREACHING OF JOHN

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4).

These prophetic words were fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. He was the messenger who was sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. He was the one whose realm of ministry was the wilderness.

What was not mentioned in the Old Testament was his ministry of baptism. John’s ministry of baptism was not explicitly foretold in the Old Testament. Neither did baptism take place under the Old Testament

economy. And yet, the term “baptism” and its corresponding concept was not an invention by John the Baptist.

1. The Greek word βαπτίζω (*baptizo*) is an old word, going all the way back to the days of Homer who used it of a sinking ship.
2. The Greeks came to use βαπτίζω of ritual washings. Thus, it could sometimes refer to a washing of purification. However, the most common ritual usage came to be that of identification. For example, the Greek general Xenophon described soldiers baptizing a sword and a spear in blood before entering into a military alliance (*The Persian Expedition* 2:2).
3. This concept of identification is found in every usage of βαπτίζω in the New Testament.

Usage	Significance of Baptism	Passage
John’s Baptism	Identified people as repentant	Mark 1:4
Baptism of Jesus	Identified Jesus with preaching of John and Kingdom of God	Mark 1:9
Baptism of Believers	Identifies us with Father, Son and Holy Spirit	Acts 2:39-41
Spirit Baptism	Identifies us with Christ	1 Cor 12:12-13
Baptism of Moses	Identified Israelites as people of God apart from Egypt	1 Cor 10:1-2

John’s baptism included this concept of identification. Those whom he baptized were identifying themselves with the coming King. But it was also a rite of purification. The water symbolized a cleansing washing of repentance. This was not a new concept. It had been promised in the Old Testament.

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

“And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Although John had a ministry with water, it merely foreshadowed and prepared the way for Jesus who had the ability to bring a new heart and a new spirit.

THE RESPONSE TO JOHN’S PREACHING

And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. (Mark 1:5).

The ministry of John spread like wildfire. All of the people of Jerusalem were a lot of people. Added to all of the people of Jerusalem was all the province of Judea. What is more, they had a considerable distance to travel to hear John. It was a twenty mile hike from Jerusalem to the Jordan River.

Think of this! People walking twenty miles and more to hear a man preach! And it was not a one-time event. The use of the imperfect tense indicates that they were continually going down to hear John and to be baptized.

This doesn’t coincide with most modern church-growth experts. You don’t begin a ministry out in the wilderness if you expect it to grow. You go where people are. You say and do things that will attract them to your ministry. You have a “seeker’s service” with contemporary music. And you advertise on the Internet and on the radio. You form a welcoming committee and you follow up with a mailing list.

John did none of this. And yet, he met with great success. The reason is because the Spirit of God was moving. In our quest for growth and for significance in God’s kingdom, we need to determine which way the Spirit of God is moving and go in that direction.

THE CLOTHING AND THE DIET OF JOHN

John was clothed with camel’s hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. (Mark 1:7).

Why are we given this description of John? What is its significance? Let me suggest that, in a book as short as the Gospel of Mark, nothing is written here merely by happenstance. This description is significant. It is significant because it takes us back to one of the prophets of the Old Testament.

That prophet is Elijah. John was wearing the same kind of clothes that Elijah had worn (2 Kings 1:8). He was preaching a similar message to the one which Elijah had preached. He was ready to denounce Herod Antipas and Herodias in the same way in which Elijah had denounced Ahab and Jezebel.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. His message was from the Old Testament. His clothes were from the Old Testament. His food is that which was associated with the Old Testament.

Jesus would later be asked about the teaching of the scribes that said Elijah must come prior to the coming of the Lord. Jesus would refer to John and he would reply, "*Elijah has indeed come*" (Mark 9:13). It is not that John was a reincarnation of Elijah, but rather that he was following in the same tradition as Elijah.

THE PROPHECY OF THE COMING ONE

And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals.

"I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8).

John's ministry was not centered around himself. He was a forerunner, announcing the coming of One to follow. John was not the main attraction of his ministry. He understood that his purpose was to point to another. When we become the main attraction to our ministry, then we have lost sight of what ministry is all about.

There was an old rabbinic exhortation that says, "Every duty that a slave performs for his master, a disciple shall do for his teacher, except for the removing of his sandals." This was a duty that only a slave would perform. This was the most lowly duty of all. John says that he is not worthy to perform this lowliest of duties for the One who is coming. Here is the principle. You cannot comprehend the grace of God until you first come face to face with your own unworthiness.

I baptized you
with water

(But)

He shall baptize you
with the Holy Spirit

It is one thing to be baptized in water. It is a much greater thing to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit means that the Spirit of God has come upon us and has identified us with the person and with the ministry of Jesus.

We have been united with Christ. Because He has eternal life, we also possess eternal life. Because He is the Son of God, we are also children and sons of God. Because He is the heir to the kingdom of God, we are co-heirs with Him. Because He died, we are considered to be death to sin. Because He rose from the dead we will also rise - indeed, we are already risen to a new life.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

And it came about in those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came out of the heavens: "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." (Mark 1:9-11).

The advent of Jesus is described in very matter-of-fact terms. There were no trumpets or fanfare. One day, He simply arrived from his home in Nazareth and was baptized like anyone else

The Greek word which describes the heavens OPENING is the same word which is used in Mark 15:38 to describe the veil of the Temple being TORN.

who had come to be baptized. What made this baptism significant was what took place after the baptism. The Son rising. The Spirit descending. The Father Speaking. For 400 years there had been nothing but silence from heaven. Not only was there no word from heaven, but even the prophets stopped prophesying. But a silence of 400 years was now broken. What did God say? Was He angry? No. He was well-pleased. It wasn't that we had done anything to please Him. He was well-pleased with His Son.

The same is true today. Do you ever feel as though God had gone away on vacation? You wish that God were speaking today, but you also wonder if He would be angry. There is a message of comfort here. God is

still well-pleased. He is well-pleased with His Son. If you have been united through faith with His Son, then He is well-pleased with you, too. Indeed, when we come to Him in faith...

The Father declares us to be righteous in His eyes.
The Spirit descends and indwells and seals.
And heaven is made open for us.

This brings up a question. Why was it important for the Spirit to descend upon Jesus? Why is this an emphasis, not only in Mark, but in all of the gospel accounts?

1. As an affirmation. Isaiah words hearken to us from the Old Testament: *Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1)*. The placing of the Holy Spirit on Jesus was God's stamp of approval upon Jesus as the promised Servant of the Lord.
2. Because Jesus, though being God, was also a true human being who required the ministry of the Spirit in order to be anointed with power. Peter describes how God anointed Jesus *with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38)*.

This tells me something about the baptism of Jesus. It was not a baptism for the forgiveness of sins. It was an identification. Jesus was identifying Himself with the preaching and the ministry of John the Baptist.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

And immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness.

And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him. (Mark 1:12-13).

In keeping with Mark's preference for brevity, the entire temptation incident is described in only two verses. The emphasis is not upon how Jesus managed to avoid temptation, but only that He did so.

1. The Impelling of the Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit which came down on Jesus like a dove in verse 10 now impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. In doing so, there is an interesting correlation that can be seen in the experiences of Jesus and the history of the nation of Israel.

Israel	Jesus
Came through the Red Sea	Baptized in the Jordan River
Wandered in the wilderness for 40 years	Impelled into the wilderness for 40 days
Failed the test	Passed his test

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 Paul describes Israel's passing through the Red Sea in terms of a baptism. In the same way that Israel passed through the Red Sea to go and to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, now Jesus as the Greater Israel passes through the Jordan River to be in the wilderness for 40 days.

The Greek phrase translated "impelled into the wilderness" is ἐκβαλλει εις την ερεμον. Εκβαλλει is a compound word.

- Εκ (*ek*) means "out of."
- βαλλω (*ballo*) is "to throw."

The expulsion of Jesus into the wilderness is described in forceful terms. It is the same term that is used throughout Mark to describe Jesus "casting out" demons (1:34, 39; 3:15, 22-23; 6:13; 7:26; 16:9, 17). Though God is not doing the actual temptation, He is nonetheless sovereign over it, for it is the Spirit which drives Jesus into the wilderness so that this temptation might take place.

2. The Wilderness.

The Judean Wilderness was that area between the central mountain range and the Dead Sea. It remains today a dry, windswept land where only the Bedouin and the wild animal live. John's ministry was located on the northern border of this wilderness, being along the Jordan River.

Mark says that Jesus was *with the wild beasts*. He says this

to underscore the severity of the temptation. On the one hand, there are wild beasts; on the other hand there are angels ministering to Him. These two are to be seen in contrast to one another. They picture the earthiness of the Savior who came to earth and they also picture the heavenly origins of that same Savior. Jesus is seen here as the God-man who is with both beasts and angels.

3. Tempted by Satan.

The details of the temptation are recorded elsewhere, but they are not significant to Mark's account. What he wishes to emphasize is that Jesus was tempted. He faced what we face. He was alone. He felt the same pangs which we feel. It is easy to be faithful in a crowd. True faithfulness is what takes place when no one is looking. That is the kind of faithfulness Jesus demonstrated.

<p>The Greek text says that Jesus was tempted by του σατανα - "the Satan." This is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for "adversary."</p>
--

The temptation of Jesus was accomplished on our behalf. He was tempted and successfully overcame that temptation so He could be our righteous Savior. We can come to the One who was tempted and who resisted that temptation and find the forgiveness He provides.

FISHERS OF MEN

Mark 1:14-20

God never created man to “do his own thing.” God has always had a purpose for His people. We are created so that we only find our ultimate fulfillment in doing that for which we were created. God has called you to a purpose. It is a purpose which is much bigger than yourself. It is this purpose which gives you significance. As we come to this passage, we see Jesus calling men with a purpose.

THE PREACHING OF JESUS

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15).

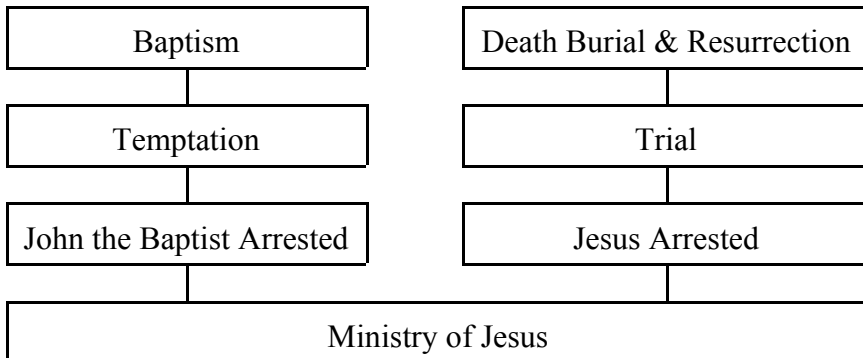
There is a considerable period of time which passed between the temptation of Jesus as recorded in verses 12-13 and the events now described. Mark shows that he is aware of this by giving the simple chronological marker that this was taking place “*after John had been taken into custody.*”

1. The Arrest of John the Baptist.

The details of John’s arrest will be given in Mark 6:17-29. That arrest is only mentioned in passing now, for the author wishes us to focus upon Jesus. John has been the forerunner of the Messiah. He was the one who came announcing the coming of another. He came pointing to another who would come after him. He was the forerunner. But once that forerunner has been removed, then Messiah Himself comes to the forefront.

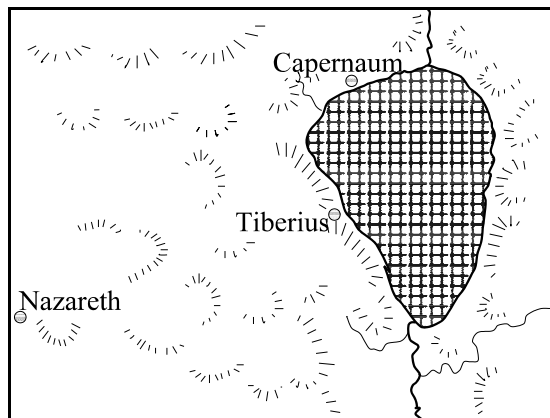
There is an interesting parallel to the life and ministry of Jesus. There is a movement from baptism to temptation to arrest as we approach the ministry of Jesus. At the close of His ministry we

shall see these same factors in reverse order.



2. Galilee.

This next section of Mark will take place in the area of Galilee. The name “Galilee” (literally, HaGalilee - הַגָּלִיל) means “the circle.” The name probably reflects the circular shape of the lake. Galilee was under the



oversight of the Tetrarch Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. Antipas served under the authority of Rome.

There was a saying among the Jews that went, “If you want to be spiritual, go to Jerusalem; if you want to be rich, go to Galilee.” This is because Galilee enjoyed a booming economy. Fishermen plied its lake. Farms lay scattered across its rolling hills and upon the fields of Jezreel. It was to this area that Jesus came to begin his ministry.

Why did Jesus begin His public ministry in Galilee? Perhaps it was because Galilee tended to be more receptive to new ideas. It was something of a proverb that Galilee was the birthplace of all sorts of seditions and revolutionary ideas.

3. The Kingdom of God.

The message of Jesus was that “*the kingdom of God is at*

hand.” The kingdom of God was a familiar theme to the Jews of that day. When God had called Israel out of Egypt, He has promised to make of them a “kingdom of priests, a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

One of the things that Messiah would do would be to establish the kingdom of David and uphold it with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:6-7). The kingdom presupposed three aspects:

- A ruler with authority to rule.
- Subjects of which the ruler could rule.
- The actual exercise of rulership.

The Jews has seen kingdoms come and they had seen kingdoms go. If there was one thing they had learned, it is that human kingdoms are temporary. But they were looking for an eternal kingdom.

*“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”
(Daniel 2:44).*

Now Jesus comes on the scene with a startling pronouncement. The kingdom of God is at hand. It is right around the corner. It has finally come. The use of the perfect tense indicates that the kingdom has come close with the result that it is here!

4. Repent and Believe.

The message that the kingdom of God is at hand demands a response on the part of those who hear this news. The response is two-fold: Repentance and faith. Genuine saving faith includes repentance. Repentance without faith leads to despair. Faith without repentance from sin becomes presumption.

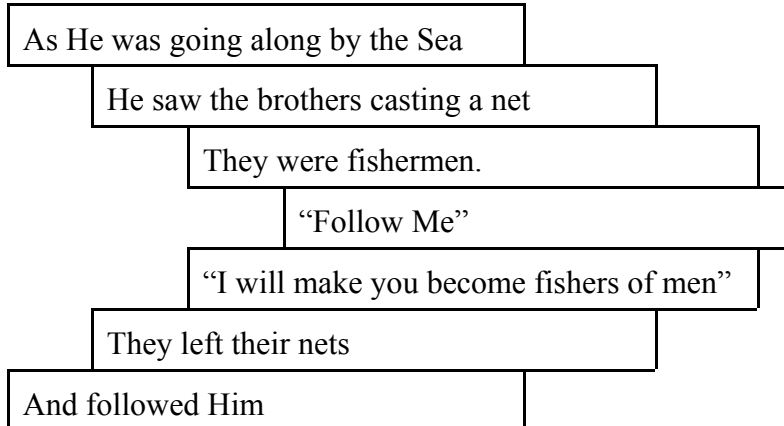
THE CALL OF SIMON & ANDREW

As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the

sea; for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. (Mark 1:16-18).

The passage is given with a rising and a falling action. The central part of the narration is the call of Jesus to follow.



Jesus began His public ministry by calling men who would be both His followers and His co-workers. There is a principle here. It is that men were His method. This should be our method, too.

The earthly ministry of Jesus would only last a few years. How would Jesus spend those few precious years? A great deal of it was spent in reproducing His own character in a few other men.

The first four followers mentioned by Mark are fishermen. The scene of their call is fitting - by the Sea of Galilee. Luke's account always calls this a lake - it is only the landlubbing Jews who referred to this as a "sea."

1. Simon.

No doubt, he was named after Simeon, one of the patriarchs of Israel. He would later be given the nickname "Peter" (Mark 3:16).

2. Andrew.

"Andrew" was a Greek name, meaning "man." Notice how Andrew is designated. He is called "*Andrew, the brother of Simon.*" That is because Peter was the natural leader of the two.

3. They were fishermen.

This was not a traditional occupation for Jews. The Jews were by and large a race of landlubbers. The only Jew in the Old Testament who is ever described as taking an ocean voyage is Jonah - and he was thrown overboard. However, the fishing industry had begun to flourish in first century Galilee. While Jews normally avoided sailing in the ocean, the large lake known as the Sea of Galilee was about their size.

4. The Manner of the Call.

a. This was a personal call.

Jesus could have called men from heaven. He could have spoken in a great booming voice from the sky. Or He could have written the message in the clouds. He could have issued a proclamation from Jerusalem. And He could have sent out a mass mailing. But He didn't. Instead, He went to where men were. He sought them out. He entered their world and walked their dirty streets.

b. This was a specific call.

There were a lot of fishermen on the Sea of Galilee that day. But Jesus only went to a select group of His own choosing.

c. It was a call to follow.

Jesus did not call these men to adopt a well-defined creed or to subscribe to a statement of faith. He simply called them to follow.

This presupposes that Jesus would lead. Jesus never asked us to go where He had not first gone Himself. He is the general who leads from the point. Jesus makes the same call today. It is a simple call - just follow.

5. Fishers of Men.

Jesus does not tell them to become fishers of men. He says that, if they follow Him, He will cause them to become fishers of

men. Instead of catching fish, they will catch men. Instead of imparting death, they will impart life. Their tools have been the net and the boat. Now they shall be the Word of God and the Holy Spirit.

6. Their response.

The first thing that I want you to notice is that there was a response. There is always a response. Jesus always forces people to respond. If you don't respond, then you have already responded.

a. It was immediate.

They didn't spend any time thinking it over. There was no debate. They were called and they simply obeyed.

b. They made it a priority.

They considered this call so important, that they were willing to leave everything behind to answer it. In leaving their nets, they were leaving the very means of their livelihood. They made the spreading of the Gospel a priority in their lives, not something that ranked second, third or fourth. Why is the Church so weak and ineffective in the world today? Because the Gospel is not a priority in the lives of its members. You haven't really answered the call of God until you are ready to commit everything to Him, to forsake everything for Him, and to make His business the priority of your life. What is standing in your way to total commitment to God?

THE CALL OF JAMES & JOHN

Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets.

Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him. (Mark 1:19-20).

The next two disciples whom Jesus calls are also a pair of brothers. I like this because it reminds me of how the Lord called both my older brother and myself into ministry.

Luke 5:7 indicates that Peter and Andrew were partners with James and John in the fishing business.

1. James and John.

These are both Hebrew names. The Greek text reads “Jacob” and “John” (*Iakobon and Iuennen*). They were both sons of Zebedee. They will also receive a nickname: “Sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17).

2. They left... and went away to follow Him.

There was a cost to following Jesus. They could not say, “I’ll catch men, but I don’t want it to upset my comfort zone.” They left their boats, their nets, their fish and their families to follow Jesus. This is the cost of discipleship. It is the cost of one who fishes for men.

3. They left their father Zebedee... with the hired servants.

They were not deserting their father in such a way as to leave him helpless. The fishing business was apparently doing well. It was doing so well that they were able to hire extra help.

Now I want you to notice something. These men were totally unqualified for the job to which they were called. They were fishermen by trade. And although there are some similarities between fishing for fish and fishing for men, the two professions are really very different. These men knew all about catching fish. They knew nothing about catching men. And they were totally unqualified for the job at hand.

This tells me something about the kind of man God delights in using. He uses unqualified men. And that means He can use me. And it means He can use you.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Mark 1:21-39

We have already commented as to the brevity of Mark's Gospel Account. But this brevity is not at the expense of a closeup look at the person and work of Jesus. Mark is not in too much of a hurry to pause and give us a glimpse of a day in the life of Jesus.

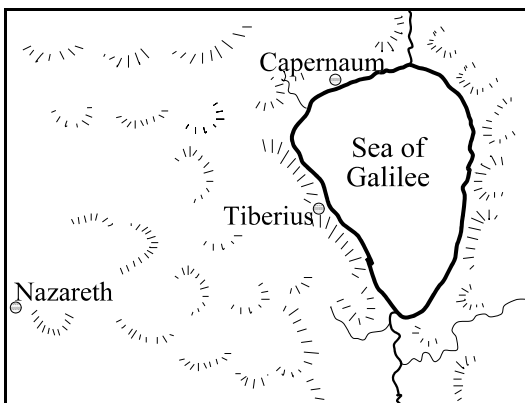
IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF CAPERNAUM

They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.

They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (Mark 1:21-22).

1. Capernaum.

The small fishing village of Capernaum was located on the northwestern shore of the Sea, just a mile or so from where the waters of the Upper Jordan flowed into the Sea of Galilee. The name "Capernaum" is from the Hebrew "*Kaphar Nacham*" (כפר נחום) and means "Village of Nahum" or "Village of Comfort."



2. On the Sabbath.

The Sabbath had become, not only a day of rest, but also a day of worship. The Sabbath would officially begin at sundown on Friday evening as the Jewish family sat down to the evening Sabbath meal. On the next morning, a trumpet would sound, calling all within hearing to worship in the synagogue.

3. He Entered the Synagogue and Began to Teach.

There was a synagogue located in every city in which there were ten Jewish males. They would come together weekly for prayers, for worship, for reading of the Scriptures, and for teaching. In the years prior to the birth of Christ, a program of public education had been instituted throughout Israel. Every freeborn male was taught to read and write. The center of this educational system was the synagogue. It was customary for a visiting Rabbi to be permitted to read and/or speak in the Synagogue Service. Jesus took advantage of this practice in order to preach the gospel.

4. They were Amazed at His Teaching.

The source of their amazement was not in the fact that Jesus was teaching or even in what it was He taught. It was that He taught with such authority. The Rabbis didn't teach that way. Their sermons consisted of dry commentaries on what other Rabbis before them had thought. These interpretations were collected and kept and handed down from generation to generation. We know them as the Mishnah and the Talmud. But Jesus didn't teach like the rabbis. He taught with authority.

We can teach with authority, too. When God says that salvation is a gift of His grace, we can speak forth that message with confidence and authority. When we witness concerning Jesus, we don't come sharing religious opinions. We have truth. And because we have truth, we are able to speak with authority.

TOSSING OUT A DIRTY DEMON

Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ²⁴ saying, "What business

do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!"

And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"

Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.

They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee. (Mark 1:23-28).

The synagogue that day was confronted with a terrible specter — a man who was possessed by an unclean spirit. Having recognized the authority of Jesus in teaching, we now see the authority of Jesus in His power over demons.

1:21-22	1:23-26	1:27
Crowd is amazed that Jesus teaches with authority	Jesus commands the demon and he releases the man	Crowd is amazed that Jesus casts out demons with authority

1. Demons are often described in the Bible, but they are not necessarily defined.
 - a. They are spiritual beings. That is why this particular demon is described as an unclean spirit (πνευματι ἀκαθάρτω).

When Jesus first appeared to His disciples following His resurrection, they thought they were seeing a spirit. To dispel this, He said to them, "*Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones and you see that I have*" (Luke 24:39). From this we may conclude that demons, being spirits, do not have flesh and bones. On the other hand, demons seem to have a strange passion for possessing living organisms, either people or animals. We see them at a later time pleading to be sent into a herd of pigs.

- b. They are personal beings.

They are described as having the power of thought, speech and action. They recognize Jesus and plead with Him.

- c. They are intelligent beings.

We see an indication of that in this passage when the demons recognize the true identity of Jesus.

- d. They are powerful beings.

You will remember the time certain Jewish exorcists attempted to use the name of Jesus as a magic amulet to cast out a demon. The demon-possessed man went berserk, attacking the exorcists and ripping their clothes off (Acts 19:16). However, as powerful as they are, there is One who is more powerful. He is seen in this chapter.

2. The Demon's Confession of Jesus.

The very first one in Mark's account to publicly pronounce Jesus as the Holy One of God is a demon. Not a rabbinical student. Not a priest. Not even one of the disciples. This should not surprise us too much. James 2:19 tells us that the demons believe that God exists. There are no atheists in hell.

3. The Rebuke of Jesus.

This demon had just testified as to the true identity of Jesus. But He would not accept praise from the demon and He orders the demon to be quiet - literally, to "be muzzled." When we come to verse 33, we will see that He was not permitting demons to speak *"because they knew who He was."*

There is a lesson here. It is that you need to be careful from whom you accept praise. Jesus would not allow this demon to praise Him. And when the world begins to praise us, we better look out.

4. The Reaction of the People.

The reaction of the people was multi-faceted. Two aspects of there reaction are listed here:

- Amazement.
- Debate among themselves.

But there is one thing that was forgotten in the amazement of the moment. Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath and no one challenged Him. When we come to chapter 3, we shall see Jewish leaders taking great offense at Jesus working miracles on the Sabbath. They will be nit-picking every time one of His disciples picks a handful of grain and they will be nit-picking over what day Jesus is performing His miracles. But such opposition had not yet begun because Jesus had only started His ministry.

When we were new Christian, we didn't nit-pick as much. All we knew was that we loved Jesus and we wanted other people to love Jesus, too. We didn't spend a lot of time arguing over doctrine. We weren't particularly concerned when the pastor's sermon went a little too long. We didn't care that the bulletin had been changed or that the carpet in the Fellowship Hall wasn't especially eye-catching. But somewhere along the line, those things began to become important to us. And before too long, we began to take on a Pharisaic attitude.

Have you gotten more critical? Are you bothered by the little things? Do you catch yourself nit-picking? Maybe it's time for a return to Capernaum.

HELPING A HEATED MOTHER-IN-LAW

And immediately after they came out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Jesus about her.

And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them. (Mark 1:29-31).

Following the service in the synagogue, Jesus goes with His disciples to the home of Peter and Andrew. Here they are confronted with a problem. Peter's mother-in-law is sick. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul alludes to the fact that Peter and the rest of the apostles were married men (1 Corinthians 9:5). The Jews considered it to be rather abnormal not to be

married. And so, Peter was married.

But now, as he returns home with Jesus and the other disciples, he finds that his wife's mother is sick. She has a fever. I suppose that some men might be rather glad to find that their mother-in-law was sick with a fever; but that is not the case with Peter.

If there is a principle here, it is that before you seek to minister to the world, minister first to your mother-in-law. You see, if your Christianity doesn't work in your home, then it doesn't work - don't export it.

Notice the nature of this healing. Her healing is immediate. It was so complete that she needed no recuperation, but was able to wait on them. Here is the principle. It is that we are healed in order to help. We are saved in order to serve.

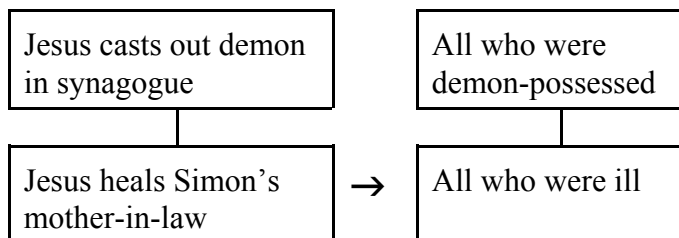
HEALING THE MULTITUDES

When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed.

And the whole city had gathered at the door.

And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. (Mark 1:32-34).

The setting of the sun marked the official end of the Sabbath. Now people began to descend upon the house of Simon where Jesus was staying. It did not stop until "*the whole city had gathered at the door*" (Verse 23). The two types of illnesses which are mentioned in verse 32 are the same two which Jesus had already healed on that day.



The ministry of Jesus was healing to the oppressed and it was oppressive to the oppressors. He healed those who were afflicted with various diseases and He did not give demons permission to speak. The point

is that Jesus shows His power over disease and over the spirit world. They all obey His commands.

The demons knew His true identity. They recognized in Jesus the One from heaven who had authority. He commanded and they were forced to obey.

RETREAT TO A QUIET PLACE

In this age of fast food, mega-speed computers, around the world information and rapid transit, it is difficult to slow down and spend time with the Lord. Jesus was also tempted to run life in the fast lane. After all, He was only going to be on earth for a limited amount of time. He had thirty three years in which to change the world and the first thirty were spent in a carpenter's shop. By every modern standard, He ought to have been rushing at breakneck speed. And yet, Jesus knew how to stop.

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.

Simon and his companions searched for Him; ³⁷ and they found Him, and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

He said to them, "Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for."

And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. (Mark 1:35-39).

Jesus was up the next morning before the crack of dawn. As the dark velvet of night begins to pale in the east and the twinkling stars wink out one by one, Jesus makes His solitary way out of Capernaum and up into the rolling hills of Galilee. He walks until he cannot see another town or a farmhouse or a living being. Then, He stops and waits in the silence. Quietly, He sits with His Father.

There is something special about a quiet time, about getting alone in a place where you can't see another soul and where you can be alone with the Lord. Our problem is that we are too busy. We have schedules to meet, places to go, and things to do. Even when we do try to get quiet, it isn't long before the outside world is hammering at our door.

In this instance, the hammering came from the disciples. As they come upon Jesus, they wonder what He is doing out here. After all, Jesus is on a roll. He has just started His ministry with a bang. There is work to be done in Capernaum. He has healed the sick, but there will eventually be others who will become sick. His ministry in Galilee is only now getting started. It is too early for Him to go on vacation and take a day off. But Jesus doesn't go back at this time. His plan is quite different.

“Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for.”

The Jews had a tendency to take the truth and sit on it. You remember the story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet. He was sent by God to preach to the city of Nineveh. Instead, he took a long cruise on a ship going in the other direction. After a short detour via submarine, he finally arrived in Nineveh. Even when he got there, his attitude was one of reluctance. He proclaimed to the people, “In forty days God is going to destroy your city.” And the Lord had to say, “Don't forget to add, ‘Unless you repent.’” Jonah's attitude was reflective of the Jewish people. They had been entrusted with the oracles of God. And they were determined to keep those oracles to themselves.

Before you start passing judgment upon them, take a look at your own life. When was the last time you shared the message of the gospel with someone? It has been said that, instead of being fishers of men, most of us have become keepers of the aquarium. Perhaps you need to ask the Lord to remove you from your comfort zone so that you might be used in introducing another to Jesus. When He does, you be faithful.

THE WILLING HEALER

Mark 1:40-45

There was no more feared disease in the ancient world than that of leprosy. Our word “leprosy” is taken from the Greek word λεπρος (*lepros*), which comes from a root describing a scale or an incrustation. The Hebrew word for leprosy (צִרְעָת - *Tsara'ath*) comes from the root word צָרַע (*tsara*) meaning “to scourge or strike.”

Most of the classical writers agreed that leprosy originated in Egypt. Perhaps the Israelites brought it with them when they came out of Egypt in the Exodus. Leprosy has been found in at least one mummy. It is a disease which attacks the nervous system. In its early stages, it produces a numbing of the fingers and the toes. Once you lose all sensation, you can rub your extremities right off without realizing it. In his fictional book “Lord Foul’s Bane”, Stephen Donaldson gives a graphic representation of a man in the advanced stages of leprosy.

“His hands were swollen stumps, fingerless stumps of pink, sick meat marked by cracks and ulcerations from which a yellow exudation oozed through the medication. They hung on thin, hooped arms like awkward sticks. And even though his legs were covered by his hospital pajamas, they looked like gnarled wood. Half of one foot was gone, gnawed away, and in the place of the other was nothing but an unhealable wound. His dull, cataractal eyes sat in his face as if they were the center of an eruption. The skin of his cheeks was as white-pink as an albino’s; it bulged and poured away from his eyes in waves, runnulets, as if it had been heated to the melting point; and these waves were edged with the tubercular nodules.” (Lord Foul’s Bane, Stephen Donaldson, 1977, Page 15).

I didn’t give you that quotation merely for its shock value. I had a very specific reason. I want you to see how God views sin. You see, leprosy was the most graphic illustration that there was of sin. Sin defiles the whole body. Sin is ugly and loathsome. It is incurable. It contaminates the entire

body. And it brings about eventual death.

There was a terrible stigma connected to leprosy. The leper was excluded from worship within the temple. He was shunned by his family and friends. When traveling down a road, he was required to call out, “Unclean! Unclean!”

A HUMBLE REQUEST

And a leper came to Jesus, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” (Mark 1:40).

Imagine the scene. Jesus has been going from city to city throughout Galilee, teaching crowds of people. Suddenly, from the back of one such crowd, there is a commotion. There are shouts of surprise and disgust as the people surge apart and give way before a hooded figure. Mutterings of “Dirty leper!” move through the crowd.

As the people move back, giving the afflicted figure a wide berth, Jesus stands His ground. Instead of hatred or fear, an expression of compassion crosses His features. The leper comes forward and makes his request.

1. Notice the Humility of the Request.

He did not demand a healing. Neither did he complain that it was unfair that he was afflicted in this way. He did not talk about his civil rights. He only stated a fact. He said that Jesus was able to heal him. This brings us to our second observation.

2. Notice the Faith of the Request.

This man came in faith. He seems fully convinced that Jesus was able to heal him. He was past the point of having anywhere else to turn. And so, he came to Jesus.

3. Notice the Lordship Reflected in the Request.

The leper came and fell upon his knees. He took a position of worship (Matthew’s account says that he worshiped Jesus). It is popular among certain Christian circles to teach that you need to

claim you healing and that, if you have enough faith, you will be healed. This man had faith. But his faith did not negate the Lordship of the healer. The issue to him was not whether Jesus could heal, but whether He would heal.

This man's leprosy gave him the gift of insight. He saw in a short time that which would take Peter several years to see. He saw that Jesus was the Christ. Abraham Lincoln told a story of how he was plowing a field when his brother happened by and noticed that there was a horsefly on the flank of the mule, biting him. The brother reached out and flicked off the horsefly. Lincoln asked, "What did you do that for? That horsefly was the only thing making this mule go." Sometimes it takes the bite of a horsefly to make a mule go. And sometimes it takes the bite of affliction to bring us to God.

My most intense prayers have been in the times of deepest need. It is when I have been knocked flat on my back that I begin to look up. The truth is that we just won't go to Jesus apart from the leprosy.

A COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE

Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed." 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. (Mark 1:41-42).

You have probably heard it said (with some truth) that the main reason Jesus performed miracles was to provide credentials for His ministry. These miracles were the calling card from God. They were the evidence that Jesus was really from heaven.

And yet, there was another, more compelling reason for this miracle. It was because Jesus was moved with compassion. He cared. And because He cared, He healed this man.

1. He healed through a touch.

Verse 41 says that He *stretched out His hand and touched him*. You cannot know the full impact of what this meant to a Jew without growing up in a Jewish culture. To touch a leper meant that you could no longer enter into the temple to worship.

Jesus touched him. He was probably the first non-leper to have touched him since he had contracted the disease.

What is more, Jesus didn't have to touch him. Jesus could have healed this man without touching him. Elsewhere in the New Testament, we read of Him healing a royal official's son from a distance of 18 miles. He could have simply said the words and this man's leprosy would have vanished. But instead, He reached out and He touched him.

That is what the incarnation is all about. It is the pure and holy God who reached down to touch our dirty world and to walk our dirty streets and to die on our dirty cross. It is about touching. If we are going to change our world for Christ, we need to be incarnational. We need to reach out and touch someone with the love of Jesus.

Jesus did not become unclean. Instead, the leper became clean. When we touch a disease, we become contaminated. When He touched a disease, the disease went away. This tells me something about Jesus. No matter how bad you are, you can't get Jesus dirty when you come to Him. You can't shock Jesus. He has seen it all. He knows the bad you really are. He knows all of those secret sins. And He is compassionate and able to make you clean.

2. He healed immediately.

Verse 42 says that *immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed*. This was not a gradual healing process in which there was a slow remission of the disease. It was immediate and sudden. One moment the man was full of leprosy and the next moment there was not a bit of the disease left.

A SOLEMN COMMAND

And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, ⁴⁴ and He said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Mark 1:43-44).

Now Jesus gives this man a command. The command is just the opposite of what we would have expected. We would have expected to hear Jesus say, "Now I want you to go out and tell everyone you see the good

news of the power of God. Bear witness of Me to all of the nations that you were a leper and the now you have been healed.” Instead, Jesus gives the man a very different command. Actually, there are two.

- He is to say nothing to anyone.
- As he continues to say nothing, he is to travel down to Jerusalem to the temple and show himself to the priest.

Why is he to go to the priest? Because this man is going to be a personal witness to the high priesthood in Jerusalem. There was a very specific ritual that was prescribed in the Old Testament Scriptures that dealt with what you do when a man is healed of leprosy.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² “This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest. ³ And the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, ⁴ then the priest shall give orders to take to live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed.” (Leviticus 14:1-4).

The passage goes on to relate very specific rituals through which a man was required to go in order to be brought back into the worship of the temple. This formula had not been utilized for over a thousand years. The last recorded instance of a Jewish person being healed of leprosy had been that of Miriam, sister to Moses. There were instances after this of people coming down with leprosy, but none in which people were healed.

Can you imagine the priests being confronted by this man? They have to go in and dust off the scroll of Leviticus which deals with the Law of the Leper. They remember studying this passage in rabbinical school, but they haven’t had any need to refer to it since graduation. And so, they must brush up on the prescribed rituals.

They will check him thoroughly and they will pronounce him clean of any infection. And then, their curiosity will get the better of them and they will ask him how he came to be cleansed of this dreaded disease. And they will learn that they have just confirmed the power of Jesus by their own testimony. Unfortunately, it isn’t going to happen that way. The reason is because of disobedience.

AN IMPULSIVE DISOBEDIENCE

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere. (Mark 1:45).

This man has a decision to make. Is he going to be obedient to Jesus and to the Mosaic Law? Or is he going to do what feels right? Moses commanded that if a leper were cleansed, he must go through this very specific ritual. Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but rather to fulfill it. Jesus commanded the man in accordance with the Mosaic Law.

The man responded in zeal and excitement and a willingness to spread the news of the work of God. Unfortunately, he also responded in disobedience. There is a lesson here. It is that zeal and excitement and enthusiasm are no substitute for obedience. When you do God's work, you need to do it in God's way. If you don't do God's work in God's way, then you are not doing God's work.

The result of this man's disobedience had an impact upon the ministry of Jesus. It meant that "*Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas.*" The synagogue ministry of Jesus was stopped for a time. We live in an age of situational ethics. You are often tempted to do a wrong thing in order to bring about a right result. But it is never right to do wrong. Christian ethics are hardly ever situational; and when they are, it is the situation which is wrong, not the ethics.

HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC

Mark 2:1-12

The clock in the back of the big church was well-known for its inability to keep time accurately. Sometimes it would go too fast, and other times it would go too slow. A number of attempts were made to fix the problem, but all to no avail. Finally the preacher placed a sign over the clock which read, “Don’t blame the hands, the trouble lies deeper.”

There are a lot of problems in the world today, but the real reason lies deeper than all of the outward circumstances. The problem with the world today can be summed up in one word — SIN. What is sin? The Bible defines sin as that which misses the mark of God’s perfection. The Westminster Catechism says that sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God. It is that which is contrary to the holiness and the justice of God.

One of the most distinctive things about Christianity is that it claims that sins can be forgiven. This is the life-blood of the Christian message. This is the message that was presented by Jesus. And this is the message set forth in this chapter.

SETTING FOR A MIRACLE

When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.

And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. (Mark 2:1-2).

The last chapter ended with Jesus having healed a leper. The news of that miracle had been spread abroad to the point that Jesus had been forced to leave the cities and retreat for a time to the country. Now, several days have passed. The initial excitement has died down a bit. And Jesus returns to the seaside town of Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea

of Galilee. The news quickly spreads that Jesus is back. Once again a great crowd gathers so that it is a packed house.

A SICK MAN AND STUBBORN SEEKERS

And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. 4 And being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. (Mark 2:3-4).

As Jesus is teaching within the house, there comes down the street four men. They are carrying a sturdy pallet on which they have secured a friend. He is referred to here as a “paralytic.” This is a transliteration of the Greek term παραλυτικον, a compound word made up of παρα (*para*, “along side of”) and λυω (*luo*, “to loose or destroy”). It was a general word describing one who had lost control of his body (see Hebrews 12:12 for a figurative use when describing “*the knees that are FEEBLE*”). This man could have been the victim of a stroke or some type of nerve disorder.

I cannot read this passage without thinking of my own father who suffered for years from a loss of bodily motor control. He could not walk. He could not dress himself. His disability reached the point prior to his death where he could not feed himself. He was totally dependent upon others to care for him. This man was in the same predicament. He could not even go to Jesus without help. And so, his friends had placed him upon this pallet and had bound him securely in place so that he would not fall off and hurt himself.

Their excitement mounts as they move through the city streets and approach the house where Jesus is. But their anticipation is dampened somewhat as they reach the house and find people already packed at the doorway, straining to hear the words of the Master within.

1. These men dared to do the difficult.

It was not easy to bring this man to the Lord. They had to carry him. And when they found the doorway blocked, they had to carry him up an outside stairway to the roof. I know what it is like to maneuver a litter up narrow stairs. It is a difficult task. Yet these men did not quit.

It isn't easy to bring someone to Jesus. In fact, it is often

difficult. But the rewards are worth the effort.

2. They dared to do the unorthodox.

It was not customary in that day to do what they did any more than it would be an acceptable action today. The acceptable thing would have been for them to wait outside until the crowd dispersed. The action they took was completely out of the ordinary.

The remarkable thing is that Jesus never rebuked them, either for their interruption of His teaching or for the damage to the roof. He seems to have approved of their unorthodox methods.

How about you? Are you so tied into the status quo that you are bound to doing things “because we’ve always done it that way”? Nothing is more deadly in a church than such an attitude.

3. They dared to do the costly.

Somebody was going to have to pay for roof repairs (I doubt that his homeowner’s policy covered it). And that somebody was going to be those four men. When you do something for Christ, it will cost.

Imagine the surprise of those within the house. They are sitting and standing wall-to-wall to hear Jesus. He has been speaking to them of sin and repentance and the kingdom of God. Suddenly, there is a noise above their heads and a portion of the ceiling is removed.

Rather than the cutting of a hole in a wooden roof so that those beneath were exposed to falling debris and sawdust, this probably involved the removal of thatch and perhaps some boards.
--

They look up to see several faces staring back down. The hole in the ceiling widens and then, a pallet is lowered to the floor. On it lies a man. He may not even have been able to speak. We are not told that he made any request. He has only been placed at the feet of Jesus.

We are like that man. We have been paralyzed with sin. It affects everything that we do and everything that we say. We are helpless in its grip. The only way that we can even come to Jesus is in a state of complete helplessness. We must be brought. We have been brought by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And we have also been brought through the ministry of the bearers of the bed.

If you have come to Christ and have received spiritual healing in the forgiveness of your sins, then you have been given this commission. You

have been called to be a bearer of the bed. You have been commissioned to bring other helpless people to Jesus. You may not have to dig through someone else's ceiling to do it. But it will take effort. And it will require you to do the unorthodox. And it will cost.

A STARTLING STATEMENT

And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5).

In those days, there was something of a social stigma against anyone who was afflicted with a disease. There was a common feeling of that day that if you were sick or suffering with some disease, it was because of some sin in your life. You remember the time that Jesus was in the temple with His disciples and they saw a man who had been blind from birth.

*And as He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth.
2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned,
this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (John
9:1-2).*

The disciples thought that someone must have sinned to cause this blindness. They were right to a certain extent. There is a sense in which all disease and sickness in the world is caused by sin. It has come about because of that first sin in the Garden of Eden. If there were no sin, then there would be no sickness and no disease. However, this does not mean that everyone who becomes sick is sick because of some specific sin in their life.

That was the mistake Job's friends made. They saw that he was sick and that bad things had happened to him and so they went to him and advised him to confess the hidden sin in his life. Job responded, "I haven't done anything!" If you read through the rest of the story, you will find that God ultimately came and rebuked the three friends of Job for their baseless accusations against him.

As a side note, we ought to see that these men came with the implied request that their friend be physically healed. Instead, he was first given a spiritual healing. The lesson is that God, in His grace, sometimes answers our prayers in a way that is different from that for which we have asked.

Here is the principle. Bad things don't necessarily happen to someone just because they have been bad. And the corollary to that principle

is just as true - that good things don't happen to people just because they are good. Nevertheless, the ultimate reason that suffering and pain and sickness and death are in the world today is because of sin.

Thus as Jesus moves to minister to the needs of this man, He first moves to the root of his problem, his sin. He says in verse 5, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" This is the reason that Jesus came to the earth. It was so that He could provide a way of forgiveness of sins.

A righteous God cannot allow sin to go unpunished. We wouldn't think too much of a judge who had a murderer or a rapist brought into his court if he said, "Well, I know that you are guilty, but I want to be a nice guy and so I am going to let you go." Such a judge would be unjust.

God is not an unjust judge. He came forth with a plan that would provide a just judgment for sin, and yet still provide salvation for men. That plan was the cross. When Jesus died upon the cross, it was as our substitute. He died in our place and suffered the penalty that we deserved. And because of that, Jesus could say to this man, "Your sins are forgiven." This brings us to a problem. Only God can forgive sins.

THE SKEPTICISM OF THE SCRIBES

But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:6-7).

The scribes were those whose duty it was to copy the Scriptures. They were entrusted with the Law of God. They thought of themselves as guardians of the truth. And they took their duties very seriously. This is why they had come to hear Jesus. They wanted to see if He was speaking the truth. They wanted to make certain that His ministry was in compliance with the Law of God.

To tell you the truth, I find myself identifying with these men. They loved the word of God and they hated false teaching. They had stood firm against all of the false religions of a pagan world. And when they heard a man saying, "Your sins are forgiven," it bothered them because they knew that only God is able to forgive sins. They were familiar with the words of the Lord as recorded in the prophet Isaiah.

"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember

your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25).

These Scriptures were right. Only God can forgive sins. And for a mere man to say what Jesus was saying is blasphemy. Don’t miss this! You cannot listen to what Jesus has just said and conclude that He is only a good man. He is either a liar or a lunatic on the level of a poached egg or else His is the Lord. There is no other choice.

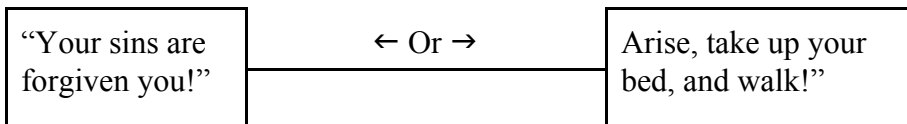
A SCOLDING FROM JESUS

Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?”

“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?”

“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” - He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” (Mark 2:8-11).

These scribes did not speak their thoughts or voice their disapproval. But it made no difference to Jesus. He could read their hearts. This is something else that only God can do. Jesus asks them a question. It is a question regarding the easier of two feats.



This is a riddle. It appears on the surface that neither is easier. Both are equally impossible for men to do. Both are possible only with God. On the other hand, it is possible for a man to claim that he can forgive sins when you can’t prove whether or not it had really come to pass.

The question asked by Jesus will take on new dimensions when we remember that, in order to forgive sins, He will have to go to the cross.

It is for this reason — that there might be evidence of the forgiveness of sins — that Jesus healed this man of his physical ailment. By doing the visible, He proves that he has the power to do the invisible.

There is an interesting contrast between the healing of this man versus the healing of the leper just a few verses earlier.

Mark 1:40-45	Mark 2:1-12
Healing of the leper.	Healing of the paralytic.
His disease made him unclean.	His disease made him helpless.
He came to Jesus.	His friends brought him to Jesus.
He voiced his faith.	His friends demonstrated their faith.
Jesus told him to go and show the priest.	Jesus told him to take up his pallet and walk.
The healed man disobeyed.	The healed man obeyed.

The question that repeatedly came up in the previous chapter was over the authority of Jesus. He had expressed His authority in His teaching and in His casting out demons. Now it is seen in His ability to forgive sins.

A SENSATIONAL CURE

And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this." (Mark 2:12).

Picture the scene. The scribes have not said a word. Nobody has spoken except Jesus. And now He tells the man on the pallet to stand up. Suddenly the man moves. He rises from his cot on sturdy legs, picks up his cot, and makes his way from the crowded room. The crowd opens up around him in amazement. Outside, his four friends meet him. He doesn't even need their help in carrying his bed. Where before there had been skepticism and unbelief, now there is a sense of amazement and awe.

That is the point of this narrative. It is that you see Jesus with the same sort of awe and belief. If you look at the incident and focus upon their efforts in bringing their friend to Jesus, you will miss the main point. It is that you find the same forgiveness of sins their friend found on that day. You are being called to come and see the One who has authority to forgive sins.

IN THE COMPANY OF SINNERS

Mark 2:13-17

Every so often I run into someone who tells me that he doesn't go to church because it is full of hypocrites. My standard answer is to reply, "Don't let that stop you, we can always take one more." And then I go on to explain that a Christian isn't someone who claims to be better than everyone else, but rather, one who is willing to admit that he is a sinner and is in need of a Savior.

Too many people today have the idea that religion is just for good people. But Christianity is for bad people who realize that they cannot approach a holy God on the basis of their own merit. That is the type of person we are going to see in this chapter.

Up to this point, we have seen the healing ministry of Jesus. He has cast out demons, cooled a fever, cleansed a leper, and mobilized a paralytic. Now he does something quite different. He changes the life of a sinner.

1:21	1:29	1:32	1:40	2:1	2:13	2:18
Healing Miracles					Life-changing Call	
Cast out demon	Healed fever	Many miracles	Cleansed a leper	Healed a paralytic	Calls Levi	Question of fasting

THE CALL OF LEVI

And He went out again by the seashore; and all the people were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he got up and followed Him. (Mark 2:13-14).

It is no accident that the call of Levi takes place on the heels of the healing of the paralytic. All three of the Synoptic accounts give this same order of events. All three describe the healing of the paralyzed man and then immediately follow it up with the call of Levi (though he is also known as Matthew). There is a reason for this. It is by way of a contrast. The contrast is between those who did not follow Christ versus this one man who did.

You remember the miracle. Jesus had been teaching in a house in Capernaum. It had been a packed house with even the standing room taken. Four men had brought a paralytic to be healed. When they could not approach Jesus because of the crowds, they had gone up onto the roof and had broken up the roof and had lowered the man down. And Jesus had healed the man. This man who had been unable to even move had stood up, thrown his stretcher over one shoulder, and had jogged back home.

There was a response to that miracle. The negative response was on the part of the scribes who sat and reasoned in their hearts. But the positive response is seen in a sinful tax collector.

1. Levi.

This man had both a Jewish name and a Greek name. His Hebrew name was Levi. This was a name with a tremendous heritage. He had been named after one of the sons of Jacob. It was from the tribe of Levi that the priesthood was descended. He also had a Greek name. His Greek name was “Matthew” (Gift of God). He might have taken this name after his conversion.

I imagine that when Levi was born his parents had high hopes for him. Perhaps he would be a rabbi or a scribe. But somewhere along the line he went astray. He became a tax collector.

2. A Tax Collector.

As Levi is introduced to us, he is sitting at his tax booth. Tax-collectors don’t necessarily rate at the top of my list of favorite people, but they do not have the stigma today that they had in that day.

Levi was not merely working for the I.R.S. He was an agent for the Romans. He had purchased a franchise from the Roman government which gave him the authority to collect taxes within this district. He was working for the very people who had subjugated his country.

His contract with Rome required that he collect a certain amount of taxes. Anything over that amount he could keep for

himself. This meant that he made a profit by overcharging people on their taxes. There was a great deal of abuse involved. He took bribes from the rich and he extorted money from the poor. He was hated by everyone. He was considered to be a turncoat - a traitor to his country. The only people who would have anything to do with him were other tax collectors and prostitutes. He was excluded from the synagogue and the temple. He was forbidden to speak in a court of law. His word would not be believed.

There were two types of tax collectors. They were both hated, but one was despised even more than the other.

a. The first was the general tax collector. He collected three general taxes.

- A land tax on property.
- An income tax on earnings.
- A poll tax that everyone had to pay for the privilege of living in a country that was ruled by Rome.

b. The second type of tax collector was the way-side collector. He was able to collect taxes on imports and exports, on anything bought or sold, on roads, bridges, and harbors. He could even invent taxes. He might charge a tax on the axles on your wagon, the number of wheels on your cart, or on your animals. He could even charge a pedestrian tax if he saw you walking on a road. He could tax the fish you caught and he even had the right to open your packages or private letters to see if they dealt with any business that might be taxed. The abuses were unlimited.

Levi was this second type of tax collector. And as Jesus comes up, he is sitting by the road, waiting for people to come by so that he could tax them.

3. A Call to Follow.

If I were looking for a qualified man to be a disciple of Jesus, to be one of His biographers and to be one of the preachers of the gospel, I never would have considered Levi. But then, I probably wouldn't have considered you, either. Or me.

If you can find one sufficient reason for Jesus calling you to Himself, then you haven't understood what it means to be called by

Him.

There were a lot of surprised people that day. The crowd was surprised. And the disciples were surprised. But the most surprised person of all must have been Levi.

4. A Motivated Response.

The call Jesus gave to Levi was probably the shortest, least motivated speech ever given to anyone except for one thing - Levi followed. Sometimes we forget about the supernatural power of the message that we preach. We get so involved in the packaging of that message that we forget the absolute power of the message itself.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16).

James Rand, at the beginning of his career, worked as a salesman for a banking equipment firm. He went to see Frank Muntzy, a publisher and financier who was opening some banks in Washington and Baltimore. In their meeting, Rand was so persistent and so persuasive that Muntzy wrote him a letter of introduction and sent him to his Washington office.

Rand was so excited about his product that, by the time he got to the head of the Washington office, he forgot all about the letter. Exercising that same persistent zeal, he went on to sell \$25,000 worth of bank equipment without ever once bringing out the letter. It was only when he got home that he remembered the letter and opened it. This is what it said: "Learn all you can from this man, but don't buy anything from him."

We carry a letter from the Father and it is a positive letter. But sometimes we spend so much time trying to give our sales pitch that we forget to give the letter.

Levi's response was whole-hearted. He didn't stop to grab a few bags of gold. He didn't even try to talk to Jesus about helping to finance His ministry. He merely obeyed. Our problem is that we try to take all of our baggage with us when we follow Jesus.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles

us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1).

Did you ever see a track star carrying a suitcase? You don't win races when you carry baggage with you. The only way you win races is by getting rid of anything that slows you up.

This is what Levi did. He had a great business going. All he did was sit around and take money from people. But he left it all to follow Jesus.

IN THE COMPANY OF SINNERS

And it happened that He was reclining at the table in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him.

When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"

And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:15-17).

Levi is so happy with his new life that he throws a big party. Jesus is the guest of honor. Invited to the party are all the friends of Levi. Of course, the only people who would attend a party at Levi's house would be tax collectors and other social outcasts. This was not the most socially acceptable group. These people were in a category known as "sinners."

<p><i>We tend to look at food as fuel. In that day, they looked at food as fellowship. (T.J. Campo)</i></p>

Jesus was notorious for His tacky taste in friends. He ate with renegades and traitors. He spoke with prostitutes. It is one thing to pass out tracts to this kind of person, it is another thing to associate with them. Jesus was accused of being a drunk because He associated with drunks.

1. The Scribes and the Pharisees.

We have already seen the scribes. They were the guardians of the law. It was their duty to make the handwritten copies of the Scriptures. This is the first time that Mark has made mention of the Pharisees. The word “Pharisee” seems to be taken from a root that describes “the separated ones.” The Pharisees were separatists. They were the Jewish equivalent of the Puritans. They were orthodox in their beliefs. They held to the Hebrew Scriptures and they attempted to obey the laws of God. They held the law in such high esteem that they had invented their own laws as a hedge around the law of God. And number one in their legal system was separating themselves from anything or anyone who was sinful.

2. They Spoke to His Disciples.

They did not go to Jesus with their criticisms. They have a sneaking suspicion that, if they do, Jesus will rebuke them. And so, they will go behind His back to speak to His disciples. If they can’t attack Jesus personally, then they will attack His disciples. Satan does this today. He really wants to attack Jesus, but Jesus is too difficult a target. So he goes after you instead.

3. Their Question: *“Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?”*

I don’t think that they were really trying to find an answer to this question. The is really a rebuke.

“Why on earth is He doing that?”

“How could He think of doing such a thing?”

“Isn’t He more spiritual than that?”

They had never seen a partying prophet and they saw a dilemma in the idea of a good man who hangs around bad people. The dilemma is that sin is a contagion. It is a problem that spreads. Their solution to sin was isolation.

4. The Answer of Jesus: *“It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

Jesus uses the analogy of a doctor. Healthy people don’t need a doctor. They do not make hospitals for healthy people. You don’t get up in the morning and say, “My, I’m feeling good this morning! I think that I shall go check into the Emergency Room.”

This is an indictment against the scribes and Pharisees. They are claiming that the tax-collectors and sinners are the sickest sort of people. By their own reasoning, it is these people who need a physician.

The analogy is simple. It is the job of a physician to work with sick people. By the same token, it is the job of a forgiver to work with people who need forgiveness. Jesus went to people who had the deepest need.

The words of Jesus are a rebuke. In effect, He is asking, “Are you a doctor who has no desire to cure the sick? Are you a physician who only accepts appointments with healthy people?”

They have come to point out the disease, but they want nothing to do with the cure. They thought that their job ended with the delivery of a diagnosis.

All too often, this thinking has invaded the church. We see churches which have doctors who don’t want to treat sick people. Can you imagine going to a hospital and having them say, “You can’t come in here! This place is only for people who have overcome their sicknesses. You go home and get healthy and then you can come back.”

The church is supposed to be a place where you come to find help for your hurts. It is the place where you can find strength for your weaknesses. And it is the place where you find forgiveness for your sins.

Jesus did not come for healthy people. He did not come for righteous people. He came for sinners. This is good news. If He had only come for the righteous, then He wouldn’t have come for you. Or me.

The problem is that there are many who think that they are righteous. They will not see their need. And because they can’t see their need, they will not come to the One who can help.

This is the negative aspect of the gospel. The gospel is good news. But before you can appreciate the good news, you have to hear the bad news. The bad news is that you are lost in sin. You are under the condemnation of a righteous God. You are without hope. It is only when you believe the bad news that you will come to the Great Physician to be healed.

Christianity is not a religion for good people. That is good because there are no good people. Christianity is for sin addicts. We confess that we have an addiction to sin and then we come to Him for healing.
--

LEGAL LIABILITIES

Mark 2:18-22

It has been said that Jesus had a tendency to make hamburgers out of sacred cows. He was never afraid to upset the status quo. He touched an untouchable and had an afternoon conversation with a woman of ill repute. In this chapter he does the same. This section is part of a large chiasmic parallel which starts and ends with Jesus and a multitude by the sea.

Jesus is by the seaside with “all the multitude” (2:13).

Levi called.

Scribes & Pharisees ask: “Why eat & drink with sinners”

Jesus answers: Parable of physician (2:14-17).

Jesus’ disciples & Pharisees: “Why not fast?”

Jesus: Parable of attendants of bridegroom (2:18-20).

Parable: Old cloth on new garment (2:21).

Parable: Old wine in new wineskins (2:22).

Jesus’ disciple & Pharisees: Why pick grain on Sabbath?”

Jesus: Example of David (2:23-28).

Man with a withered hand.

Pharisees watching Jesus to see what He would do.

Jesus asks: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” (3:1-6).

Jesus is by the sea with a “great multitude” (3:7).

The common theme throughout this entire section is the legalism of the scribes and Pharisees contrasted with the grace presented by Jesus.

A QUESTION ABOUT FASTING

John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and

they came and said to Him, “Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” (Mark 2:18).

The first issue brought up by the Pharisees deals with the question of fasting. Fasting was an important part of their religion. It was their practice to fast twice a week. Monday and Thursday were their special days of fasting. There is nothing wrong with such a practice. The Bible teaches and encourages fasting.

Consecrate a FAST, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. (Joel 1:14).

Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a FAST, proclaim a solemn assembly. (Joel 2:15).

Fasting was used in times of crises. In times of emergency prayer, a fast would be proclaimed. It was at such a time that David fasted when his son was sick to the point of death. Likewise, the people of Nineveh entered into a fast at the preaching of Jonah when they were told of a coming judgment. Furthermore, fasting is not limited to Old Testament times. It was also practiced within the early church.

And while they were ministering to the Lord and FASTING, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Then, when they had FASTED and prayed and laid their hands on them, the sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3).

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with FASTING, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23).

In each of these cases, fasting is linked with prayer. I believe it to be a sacrifice of comfort given to God as a part of prayer and worship.

The Pharisees knew about fasting. It was a part of their religious life. And they noticed something. They noticed that Tuesday and Friday had come and the disciples were still eating. They compared notes and found that these disciples were not in the habit of fasting at all. And while Jesus had fasted for 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry, He did

not participate in a regularly scheduled fast. This stood in stark contrast to the disciples of John the Baptist. His disciples did fast regularly.

<i>“John’s disciples fast”</i>	and...	<i>“The disciples of the Pharisees fast”</i>	BUT...	<i>“Your disciples do not fast”</i>
--------------------------------	--------	--	--------	-------------------------------------

Do you see what the Pharisees are saying? “Everyone who is spiritually minded is fasting, so why aren’t you?” This is religious peer pressure.

Peer pressure makes people do funny things. If you don’t believe that, then visit your local high school. Kids are notorious for trying to conform to the expectations of their peers. I grew up in a generation of non-conformists and we struggled to be exactly alike in our non-conformity.

But peer pressure isn’t limited to the young. It is just as evident among the old. And all too often, it is seen in the church. It is seen when we dress alike and talk alike and act in a manner that is expected of us - when we raise our hands alike or don’t raise our hands alike.

Spirituality is not to be measured in conformity to outward appearances. It is to be measured in our conformity to the person and character of Jesus Christ. Anything less is merely a cheap substitute.

Jesus didn’t bow to peer pressure. He didn’t care that “everyone else is doing it.” And we shouldn’t, either.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE ANSWER

The answer to the Pharisees’ question is given in the form of three illustrations. They are short parables.

2:19-20	2:21	2:22
Attendants of a Bridegroom	New Patches on Old Clothes	New Wine in Old Wineskins
Illustrates disciples	Illustrates scribes and Pharisees	

1. Illustration of a Bridegroom.

And Jesus said to them, “While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the

bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

“But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. (Mark 2:19-20).

There was not a more happy time in the ancient world than a wedding. When we have a wedding, we go to a church or some other meeting place, have a ceremony followed by a short party and then we send the couple off on a honeymoon. They used to do it differently. In the ancient world, everyone went on the honeymoon. They would have the wedding at the house of the groom and the couple would stay there with the guests for an entire week of honeymooning. That entire week would be a party time for the people who loved the couple. It was not a time of fasting. It was a time of rejoicing.

The attendants of the feast would be made up of the best friends of the groom. It was their responsibility to keep the party alive. They would promote the festivities and carry out the celebrations. One thing that these attendants would never do during the course of the party would be to mourn.

Do you see the connection? Fasting is always to be in conjunction with mourning or praying. It is used in crisis situations. But the Pharisees had turned it into a meaningless routine. They fasted only because it was a part of their program, not because there was any repentance on their part. They were only locked into their ritual.

Here is the meaning of the parable. Jesus is the bridegroom. When the bridegroom is present, it is time to party. Jesus is here and that makes it a time of celebration, not of mourning. There will come a time of mourning, but it has not come yet. It will not come until the bridegroom has been taken away.

Now I want to ask you a question. Should we fast today? I think that we should. We should fast in times of mourning, in times of repentance, and in times of spiritual crisis. But it should never become a mere ritualistic routine that is to be followed so that we can look down our nose at someone else.

2. Illustration of a Patch.

“No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it,

*the new from the old, and a worse tear results.”
(Mark 2:21).*

Now Jesus moves to a new parable. It deals with a patch from a new piece of cloth being sewn onto an old suit of clothes. How are we to understand this parable? Remember that Jesus is still explaining why His disciples do not fast. He has not changed the subject. He is merely illustrating it further.

In those days, clothes were made either from cotton or from wool. Both of these fabrics would shrink. If you had an old robe with a big hole in it and patched it up with a piece of new cloth, then the next time you washed it, the patch would shrink and rip the robe. The result would be an even bigger hole. If you wanted to patch an old robe, then you had to patch it with an old patch.

Here is what Jesus is saying. There is no way that the things which He is teaching can fit into the ritualistic systems of the Pharisees. His message of an internal holiness and a repentance from sin is like a new patch being placed upon an old garment. It will tear apart their system of legalism.

3. Illustration of a Wineskin.

“No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.” (Mark 2:22).

This is the third illustration, but it is still teaching the same truth. It illustrates the teaching with new wine and old wineskins. The Jews used to take wine and place it into the skin of an animal. The neck of the animal would be used as the spout and the rest of the skin would be sewn shut.

Once the skin had been emptied and then left without anything in it, the skin would begin to dry out and crack. If you then tried to put wine back into it, the cracks would become greater until the entire skin would burst, spilling the wine onto the ground and ruining it.

Old wineskins are a hazard. They become thicker and harder and eventually they will crack. They cease to be flexible. They lose their elasticity. They become brittle. And as a result, when fresh wine is poured into them, they cannot contain it. Jesus is the new wine. He is fresh and new in His approach. He comes on the scene,

threatening to break asunder the old forms. The Pharisees are the old wineskins. They are already leaking. They cling to their traditional hand-me-downs.

There is a principle here. Old structures cannot hold Jesus. The church must be ready to deal with change. Our outward forms must never be so rigid that they cannot hold people who are different.

The structures are not bad in themselves. They are merely meant to hold reality. But when they become too rigid, then they begin to strangle reality.

There are things which are essential - the wine. And then there are things which are useful, but not primary - the skins. What is more important, the wine or the container which holds the wine?

The Pharisees had come to the place where their focus was on the wineskin. They loved the fancy exterior, old and faded though it had become. They had lost sight of the reality behind the form.

The church has both reality and ritual. It has both faith and form. Faith is the gift from God - it doesn't change. Form is the packaging - it does change.

There are people who have the packaging, but who don't have the gift. You can tell them because they are only concerned that we never change the packaging. Others have the gift, but they are focusing upon the packaging and want to hold onto the old packaging. Still others want to bring up new packaging, but they have nothing to put into it. They want change, but there is no real content to their change.

Check out your wineskins. Are they looking a little worn around the edges? Stop patching up old wineskins. Jesus calls you to come to the new wine.

SABBATH CONTROVERSIES

Mark 2:23 - 3:6

One of the most important rituals observed among the Jews was the keeping of the Sabbath. The word “Sabbath” is the Hebrew word for “rest.” The Lord had commanded Moses to observe the seventh day of each week as a day of rest to commemorate the day in which He had rested from His work of creation.

The Sabbath was to be a day in which all men ceased from their labors and gave themselves to a remembrance of the Lord. However, the Pharisees in the days of Jesus had changed the Sabbath into something it was never meant to be. In their desire to protect and to uphold the law, they built a hedge around the keeping of the Sabbath. They had written up chapter upon chapter concerning what it meant to keep the Sabbath.

- They taught that you should not look in a mirror on the Sabbath because you might be tempted to pluck out a gray hair and that would be reaping.
- They said that you could only eat an egg which had been laid on the Sabbath if you killed the chicken for Sabbath-breaking.
- A donkey could be led out of the stable on the Sabbath, but the harness and saddle had to be placed on him the day before.
- An egg could not be boiled on the Sabbath, whether by normal means or by putting it near a hot kettle or by wrapping it in a hot cloth or by putting it in the hot sand outside.
- If the lights were on when the Sabbath came (Sabbath began at sundown), you could not blow them out. If they had not been lit in time, then you could not light them.
- It was unlawful to move furniture on the Sabbath. There was an exception to this where you were allowed to move a ladder on the Sabbath, but you could only move it four steps.
- It was unlawful to wear any jewelry or ornaments on the Sabbath, since this might be construed as carrying a burden.
- It was not permitted to wear false teeth on the Sabbath (that must have been a hit in the synagogue services).
- You were allowed to eat radishes on the Sabbath, but you were

warned against dipping them into salt because you might leave them in the salt too long and pickle them and this was considered to be Sabbath-breaking. The Pharisees actually had discussions as to how long it took to pickle a radish.

- It was fine to spit on a rock on the Sabbath, but you could not spit on the ground, because that made mud and mud was mortar, and that was work.
- If a woman got mud on her dress, she was to wait until it had dried and then she was permitted to crumple the dress in her hands one time and crush it and then shake it out once. If that did not do the trick, then she had to wear it.

It is against this cultural and religious backdrop that we have two specific events in the ministry of Jesus. Both of these events are found side by side in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 6:1-11). That suggests we are meant to see these events in juxtaposition to one another.

The First Sabbath Incident	The Second Sabbath Incident
Took place in a grainfield.	Took place in a synagogue.
The disciples picked grain and ate it - this was considered harvesting.	Jesus healed a man with a withered hand.
A verbal accusation was made against the disciples.	No verbal accusation made, but Jesus speaks to the accusations which they held in their hearts.

In each of these two cases, Jesus shows that He and His disciples have not really been guilty of breaking the Sabbath, that their actions are completely consistent with the Law of the Sabbath.

This is important. Jesus is not doing away with the Sabbath. He is not saying, "Forget about worshiping God one day a week." Neither is He calling His people to be workaholics so that they work seven days a week without a break. His actions and His teachings are in complete accord with God's command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. The issue is not whether one should or should not keep the Sabbath - rather, the issue is the nature of that Sabbath.

THE FIRST SABBATH INCIDENT

1. Hungry Disciples.

And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. (Mark 2:23).

It was the season of the harvest in Israel. As Jesus and His disciples walked through one of the many grainfields, some of the disciples began to pick kernels of grain, rub them in their hands to break open the husks, and then eat them.

This was perfectly legal. They were neither trespassing or stealing. The Mosaic Law specifically allowed you to go through a man's field, pick of the fruit, and eat it as long as you ate it on his land and did not try to carry such fruit away with you in a basket or in a wagon.

Likewise, you could pluck the heads of grain with your hands, but you could not bring in heavy equipment to begin your own harvesting operation on his land.

“When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.” (Deuteronomy 23:25).

The purpose of this law was so that those who were poor and who were traveling a long way would have a means of eating. It served as a public welfare system to make certain that no one would ever go hungry.

Indeed, farmers were prohibited from harvesting their entire fields. They were required to leave the outer edges of their fields untouched to provide for needy people. And so, on this particular day the disciples were grabbing an afternoon snack.

2. A Pharisaical Objection.

The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” (Mark 2:24).

The Pharisees do not accuse the disciples of stealing grain. Stealing would have been wrong on any day of the week. But that is not the issue here. The issue is that they are doing this activity on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees are accusing the disciples of harvesting and threshing - of working on the Sabbath.

The Mishnah listed 39 different categories of work that was forbidden on the Sabbath and reaping ranked third on the list. Even to pluck a grey hair was an infraction of this prohibition.

Now I want to ask you a question. Are there rules with which you are comfortable and which would bother you if they were not imposed? What would be your reaction if someone walked into your church service wearing a T-shirt and a pair of cut-offs? How about if the music director came up with a radically different style of music one Sunday? The truth is that we tend to become polarized to that which we are accustomed.

3. A Biblical Precedent.

And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; ²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" (Mark 2:25-26).

Notice that Jesus does not comment on the rabbinic rituals. He turns instead to the Scriptures. He refers to an incident described in 1 Samuel 21:1-6.

David and his men were on the run. They were being pursued by King Saul. If that were not bad enough, they were without food. It was in this condition that they came to one of the cities of the priests of Israel. It was here that David met with one of the priests and requested food for himself and his men. There was no available food except for the old bread which had been taken from the Table of Shewbread inside the Tabernacle of the Lord.

This was special bread. It had been set apart for a special purpose. It was considered to be holy. It had sat in the Tabernacle before the presence of the Lord. It had been designated as "the bread of the presence."

No one was allowed to eat of this bread except for the descendants of Aaron - those of the priesthood (Leviticus 24:9). This

was no mere rabbinic ritual - it was the unabridged law of God.

David and his men were given this bread to eat. They partook of that which only the priests were supposed to eat. Why? Because they had a need, because they were God's people, and because the needs of God's people transcend religious rituals, even when those religious rituals are right and proper.

Do you have a problem with that? Do you tend to think that religious rituals ought to be observed, no matter what? It is because you have failed to understand the true purpose of those rituals. They are not designed for God's welfare. They are designed for you. This is made clear in verse 27.

4. The Purpose of the Sabbath: *Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27).*

Ritual was made to serve man, not to bind him. It is to be a source of help to him, not a source of bondage. It is to provide for him a relief and a rest, not a burden which he must bear.

Let me ask you a question. Which came first, man or the Sabbath? Man did! Man was created on the sixth day of creation. The Sabbath was not instituted until the seventh day.

This means that man is a higher priority than does the Sabbath. He was not made to serve the Sabbath; the Sabbath was instituted to serve him. It was for his benefit.

5. A Striking Conclusion: *"So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:28).*

If the Sabbath was made to serve man, and if the Son of Man is Lord of all other men, then it stands to reason that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. He has authority over the Sabbath day. And that means His disciples can do whatever He directs to be done on the Sabbath.

THE SECOND SABBATH INCIDENT

Luke's account tells us that this second incident took place on a different Sabbath. It was at least a week later that Jesus came to a local synagogue.

1. A Critical Congregation.

He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. (Mark 3:1-2).

Imagine the scene. The synagogue consists of a large room with a double colonnade down the central aisle. Behind a partition is the place where the women are permitted to assemble and to listen to the services. At the front of the synagogue is a large raised dais on which rests the Bema Seat. Next to it is a lectern. It is from here that the Scriptures are read and taught.

On either side of the Bema Seat and slightly behind it are placed several chairs. These are the “chief seats” and are reserved for the rabbis and distinguished Pharisees.

From their vantage point, they can see that Jesus has entered their synagogue service. And they can also see something else. There is a man present who has a crippled hand. They know the reputation of Jesus as a healer. They have also heard his untraditional views on the Sabbath. Will He move to heal this man? They already know the answer. And they are already framing their accusations.

There is nothing more deadly to godliness than a critical spirit. It is poison to the people of God. The story is told of a man who was known for his critical nature and with finding fault with everything and anything. He was going out hunting with a friend and, upon seeing the friend's new hunting dog, he remarked, “Doesn't look like much of a dog.”

They were walking through the forest, when they came to the edge of a lake. As a flock of birds flew overhead, the hunters cut loose with their guns and one of the birds fell out of the sky and into the lake. Immediately, the dog ran forward, not swimming, but running on top of the lake, his little paws barely touching the top of the water. He crossed the lake, picked up the dead bird in his mouth and brought it back, still running on top of the water to lay the bird at the feet of the hunters.

“What do you think of my dog now?” asked the friend. “Dumb dog,” replied the fault-finder. “He can't even swim.”

Critical people are like that. You cannot make them happy, no matter what you do. Given the opportunity, they would even find

something in the Son of God about which to criticize.

2. A Legal Question.

He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" 4 And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. (Mark 3:3-4).

Jesus takes charge of the situation. He tells the man with the withered hand to stand before those who sit in the chief seats of the synagogue. He is going to perform a miracle and He is going to do it where everyone can see. But before He does, He poses a question to the synagogue leaders. It is a question that deals with activity during the Sabbath.

Is it lawful...	
To do good on the Sabbath?	To do harm on the Sabbath?
To save a life?	To kill?

This is not a mute question. These leaders have murder in their hearts. Before this day is over, they will be seeking how they can put Jesus to death.

In the days of the Maccabean Revolt, nearly 200 years earlier, the Jews had dealt with the question of whether it is permissible for a Jewish soldier to fight on the Sabbath.

The enemies of the Jews had hit upon a simple strategy. They would wait until the Sabbath and then they would launch their attack and the Jews would not defend themselves because it was the Sabbath. As a result of some terrible massacres, the rabbis had declared that it was permissible for soldiers to fight to protect themselves and to save lives on the Sabbath.

Jesus is asking a related question. If it is okay to fight to protect yourself on the Sabbath, then isn't it also permissible to cure a man of his disease on the Sabbath? If it is okay to kill a man on the Sabbath, then isn't it okay to cure a man on the Sabbath?

3. A Miraculous Healing.

After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mark 3:5).

Jesus was not unmoved at their rejection of Him. He had mixed feelings. There was anger at their critical spirit. And there was grief at their callousness of heart.

There is a lesson here. It is that Jesus is not unconcerned with sin. He is not apathetic to the plight of the lost. He cares. And that means we should care, too. We often think that the opposite of love is hate, but it is not. The opposite of love is apathy.

The healing of this man is almost anticlimactic. The Pharisees and the rulers of the synagogue are past the point where they are even impressed by the supernatural work of God in their midst. They can only see the infraction of their own petty rules.

4. A Consolidated Conspiracy.

The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. (Mark 3:6).

The Pharisees waste no time at all. They went out immediately to plan the downfall of Jesus. If we take this literally, then they did not even wait until the Sabbath was over. And if this is the case, then they demonstrated their own desire to kill on the Sabbath.

They conspired with the Herodians. These were made up of the pro-Herod political party. The Pharisees and the Herodians were on the opposite ends of the religious and political spectrum. This would be like leaders of the Moral Majority planning strategy with the leaders of Gay Rights.

Pharisees	Herodians
They had separated themselves from the influences of Greek culture.	They had joined themselves to Greek culture.

They endured Rome, longing for the day when they might again be free.	They embraced Rome since it was the legal source of power for the Herods.
They were ready to revolt when pagan statues were brought into Jerusalem and into the Temple.	They were unconcerned about such issues as idolatry and paganism in their midst.

The Herodians were made up of that political party which backed Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and son of Herod the Great. They desired nothing more than to see a return to the good old days when a Herod had sat upon the throne of a united Israel under Rome.

Perhaps there is a lesson here. It is that the only time that evil is ever unified is when it gets together to fight against good. When I was in college, it was popular to talk about world-wide conspiracies that were supposedly going around. Henry Kissinger was accused of being the Antichrist and the Pope was his right-hand man and the Illuminati was the organizational arm and the communists were somehow involved along with the A.C.L.U., the Masons, and the Ecumenical Movement.

Since that time, I've become convinced that evil is not that well organized. There is only one time that evil gets together, and that is when it comes together to fight against good.

Have you been facing any opposition lately? Does it feel like everyone is against you? It might be just your imagination. But maybe it is because evil will always get together to fight good.

A STRATEGY FOR MISSIONS

Mark 3:7-19

We live in the age of the mega ministry. Televangelism has become a byword and the super-church is becoming more and more commonplace. And yet, the mega ministry is not something new. It is very old. It goes all the way back to a Galilean rabbi and a handful of disciples in a rowboat.

Jesus was a man with a plan. From a humble carpenter's village, and in a space of only three years, He would set into motion a ministry which would change the face of the world. How did He do this? I want to suggest that it was not without a plan.

Jesus had a very specific and God-ordained strategy for success. It involved both a ministry to the multitudes as well as ministry to a small, selected group of disciples.

MINISTRY TO THE MULTITUDES

1. Withdrawal to the Sea.

Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and also from Judea, ^s and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. (Mark 3:7-8).

The opposition against the person and ministry of Jesus had begun to take on a new turn as the Pharisees joined forces with the Herodians in an effort to bring forth a plan to stop Jesus.

Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum (3:1-5).	Pharisees & Herodians consult to murder Jesus (3:6)	Jesus & His disciples withdraw to the sea (3:7-8)
--	---	---

At the same time that this opposition was growing, so also the popularity of Jesus was escalating at a dramatic pace.

1:5	Ministry of John the Baptist	<i>"All the country of Judea... and all the people of Jerusalem"</i>
1:28	Ministry of Jesus	<i>"All the surrounding district of Galilee"</i>
1:33		<i>"The whole city was gathered"</i>
1:45		<i>"They were coming from everywhere"</i>
2:13		<i>"All the multitude were coming to Him"</i>
3:7-8		<i>"A great multitude from Galilee... and from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon"</i>

Whereas the ministry of Jesus had originally been confined to the localized areas around Galilee, now He was drawing people from as far away as Jerusalem and the Transjordan area and from the Phoenician coast lands.

What was the attraction? Why were so many coming such a long way in order to see Jesus? It was because of what He was doing. It was because they had heard of the miracles which He was performing. They had heard the wonderful stories of this carpenter who could heal the sick, who could cast out demons with a word and restore the paralyzed.

Doctors were going out of business and pharmacies were closing down. Seeing eye dogs were wandering aimlessly about. Stores were having liquidation sales on crutches and wheelchairs. The news was spreading like wildfire. Jesus didn't have to launch a

publicity campaign. People did it for Him.

2. Ministry by the Sea.

And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him; ¹⁰ for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him. (Mark 3:9-10).

The word describing a “boat” is in the diminutive πλοιαριον (*ploiarion*) as opposed to a πλοιον (*ploion*, “ship”). It would have been of the size of a large rowboat.

The purpose of the boat was that He might continue to minister despite the great pressing crowds. Apparently, He would sit in the boat, using it as a floating pulpit as people came to hear Him preach and to be healed.

3. A Command to Silence.

Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, “You are the Son of God!” ¹² And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was. (Mark 3:11-12).

Jesus had been willing to accept the testimony of the masses who had spread the stories of Him throughout the country. He was more than willing to accept the testimony of John the Baptist. But there was one testimony which He would not accept, no matter how dramatic it might be. This was the testimony of the unclean spirits.

It was not that their testimony was inaccurate. They were absolutely correct in saying that Jesus was the Son of God. It wasn’t the content of the message that was the problem. The problem was the source of the message. These were unclean spirits. They were demons. They were messengers of Satan. Jesus refused to have anything to do with them.

There is a lesson here. It is that you need to take care with whom you associate. Charles De Gaulle was talking to the Governor General of Algeria. The Governor General said, “I have talked to a lot of my friends and a lot of my friends have trouble with your policies in Algeria.” De Gaulle smiled and replied, “Change your

friends.”

Jesus took care with whom He associated. That does not mean that He avoided sinners. To the contrary, He was criticized for being with sinners. What it does mean is that He was careful to associate with repentant sinners. He met people where they were, but He did not leave them where they were. He called them to repentance.

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE

The primary method of Jesus’ ministry was men. The first thing we saw Him doing following His baptism and temptation was to call a few men to follow Him. There were initially four: Simon and Andrew and James and John. Levi was called later. Now there will be a total of Twelve.

1. A Sovereign Call.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. (Mark 3:13).

Just as Moses had gone up onto Mount Sinai to receive the Law, so now Jesus goes up onto a mountain to choose those to whom He will entrust His teachings.

He did not call all men at this time. He only summoned “those whom He Himself wanted.” Jesus was under no obligation to choose all men. Neither is He under any obligation to save all mankind. The fact that He freely offers salvation to all men is a matter of grace.

2. The Purpose of the Call.

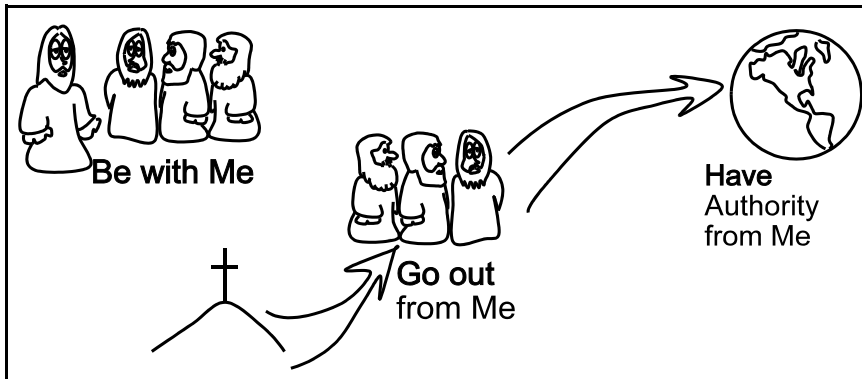
And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to cast out the demons. (Mark 3:14).

There are three aspects to the purpose of Jesus in calling these men. He called them so that they could...

- Be with Him.
- Be sent out by Him.
- Have authority from Him.

The first step to being a disciple of Jesus is to “be with Him.” This is a necessary part of discipleship. True discipleship is incarnational. It cannot be long distance. This is why God became a man - to be with him.

It would not be until the disciples had spent time with Jesus and had gotten to know Him that they would be ready to go out from Him. There is a principle here. It is a principle of discipleship. Disciples must be grown organically and through a process of osmosis. To state it in other terms, Christianity must be caught rather than merely taught.



THE TWELVE

And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), ¹⁷ and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, “Sons of Thunder”); ¹⁸ and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. (Mark 3:16-19).

The New Testament contains four different lists of the disciples of Jesus. It is noteworthy to compare those lists.

	Matthew 10	Mark 3	Luke 6	Acts 1
1st Group	Simon Peter Andrew James John	Simon Peter James John Andrew	Simon Peter Andrew James John	Peter James John Andrew
2nd Group	Philip Bartholomew Thomas Matthew	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
3rd Group	James Thaddaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James Thaddaeus Simon Judas Iscariot	James Simon Judas Judas Iscariot	James Simon Judas

- (1) Simon Peter is always mentioned first.
Judas Iscariot is always mentioned last when he is mentioned at all.
- (2) There are three distinct groupings of disciples. Those who were with Jesus the most are mentioned in the first group. Those who are mentioned less often are in the second group. Those in the third group are hardly mentioned at all (with the exception of Judas Iscariot).
- (3) The same person always heads up each group.
Simon Peter always heads up the first group.
Philip always heads up the second group.
James the son of Alphaeus always heads up the third group.

It has been suggested that each of these three groups had a natural leader. We know that Peter tended to lead his group and, in fact, provided leadership for all of the disciples.

1. Simon Peter.

There is no disciple of Jesus with whom we are more familiar than the person of Simon. We are told here that Jesus gave him a nickname - Peter (Πετρος), "Rock."

2. James, the son of Zebedee.

James is never mentioned in the gospels apart from his brother, John. Of the two, James is always mentioned first, indicating that he might have been the elder of the two.

3. John, the brother of James.

John describes himself elsewhere as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Jesus had a special nickname for these two brothers. It was Bo-anerges, “Sons of Thunder.” This might have been because they were so rowdy. Or it might have been because of a time when they had asked Jesus to strike a city with a bolt of lightning.

4. Andrew.

Andrew was a Greek name. It is the common Greek word for “man.” Andrew’s claim to fame was that he was Peter’s brother. Mark makes no further mention of him in this gospel account.

5. Philip.

This is also a Greek name. It was the same name as the father of Alexander the Great. It means “horse-lover.” Philip may have also had a Hebrew name, but we don’t know what it was. For some reason, Philip always went by his Greek name. It is noteworthy that when some Greeks wanted to come and speak to Jesus, they first went to Philip (John 12:20-22).

6. Bartholomew.

The name “Bartholomew” is made up of two Hebrew words. “Bar” is the Hebrew word for “son.” This man was the son of Tolmai (Ptolemy). He is known elsewhere as Nathanael Bar Tolmai.

7. Matthew.

This is the Greek name of Levi whose call we read of in Mark 2:14. He had been a tax-collector; a turn-coat traitor who sold out his country for money. There had been a time when he only cared about making a profit, but he had given it all up to follow Jesus.

8. Thomas.

Thomas has gotten a lot of bad press over the years. He has been labeled “Doubting Thomas” because of his reaction to the news of the resurrection of Jesus. But Doubting Thomas became Believing Thomas when he saw the risen Lord.

9. James the son of Alphaeus.

In Mark 15:40 he will be called “James the Less.” That is an unfortunate translation. He was known as “Little James.”

Mark 2:14 tells us that Levi was also the son of Alphaeus. This was a fairly common name and is probably of no relation to James.

My younger brother is named Dennis. My older brother’s son is also named Dennis. For many years, it was the custom within our family to refer to them as “Little Dennis” and “Big Dennis.” The problem is that Little Dennis eventually grew up to be bigger, taller, and heavier than Big Dennis. But the designation has managed to stick through the years, much to the chagrin of Little Dennis.

I think that is what happened among the disciples. It became inconvenient to distinguish between James, the son of Zebedee, versus James, the son of Alphaeus, so the other disciples took to calling them Big James and Little James.

10. Thaddaeus.

The name “Thaddaeus” means “breast baby.” This might have been a term of endearment given to the baby of a family. He is known elsewhere as Lebbaeus, meaning “heart child.” It is a nickname for someone who is courageous. His real name was “Judas” - the Greek form of Judah.

11. Simon the Zealot.

The Zealots were a political party within Judaism. They were the nationalist party. They were intent on driving the Romans from the land and restoring an independent state. A revolt had been organized under a Galilean Zealot named Judas (Acts 5:37). Judas had been killed and his followers scattered, but the Zealots lived on.

They would finally bring about another revolt in 66 A.D. which would slaughter the Roman garrison in Jerusalem and defeat a Roman legion from Syria. The Romans would respond by sending

a total of four Roman legions and Jerusalem would be destroyed and her temple burned.

Simon was from this movement. He had looked earnestly for the coming of a military Messiah who would lead the Jews to revolt against Rome. Perhaps he initially came to Jesus for this reason. But somewhere along the line, he would fall in love with Jesus.

12. Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

Judas is the Greek form of “Judah.” This was a common name among the Jews. The name “Iscariot” is made up of two words:

- “Ish” is the Hebrew word for “man.”
- “Kerioth” was the name of a town in Judea; located near Hebron.

This designation merely tells where Judas was from. He was the “Man of Kerioth.” As far as we can tell, Judas was the only one of the disciples who was not from Galilee.

Judas was initially attracted to Jesus. He didn’t start off any worse than the other disciples. Matthew was an extortioner. Simon was a rebel terrorist. The whole group of disciples were a motley group of sinners. But something happened to Judas. He turned from a disciple to a betrayer. He stopped loving the Lord and he began loving himself and the money which he could get for himself. And he ultimately sold his soul for thirty pieces of silver.

ARE YOU FAMILY?

Mark 3:20-35

The scene is Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel has convened. This body of the seventy leading elders of Israel has assembled to discuss the key issues facing their nation. Caiaphas, the high priest and president of the Sanhedrin asks the scribe, “What is the next order of business?” It concerns a young Galilean carpenter who has left his workshop and begun a ministry of preaching and teaching and healing.

“He is reported to have the complete sanction of John the Baptist.”

“He has gathered several disciples together.”

“The leader of the synagogue at Nazareth says that He disrupted a recent service by His teachings.”

“We have a complaint against this man from the Galilean Physicians Association - they report that He is hurting their business.”

“There is even a civil suit of a man wanting a refund from a mortician.”

“Who is this man?” asks Caiaphas.

“His name is Jesus.”

Upon hearing the name, one of the more distinguished members of the Sanhedrin raises his head with a start. He closes his eyes and remembers a moonlight meeting, but no one notices that the mind of Nicodemus is wandering to a midnight conversation and a troubling dialogue.

“What is to be done about this man?”

“I move that a delegation be sent to observe Him and determine if there is any warrant to these charges.”

“So ordered.”

I don’t know if that is exactly the way in which these events played out, but we do read of a delegation coming from Jerusalem to make a determination on the ministry of Jesus.

AN IRREVERENT ACCUSATION

*And He came home, and the multitude gathered again,
to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal.*

And when His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." (Mark 3:20-22).

The religious officials in Jerusalem had already sent a delegation to Galilee to keep tabs on Jesus. This Jerusalem delegation was made up of scribes. These were the intellectuals of the day. It was their duty to make copies of the Scriptures. They knew the word of God inside and out. They could tell you how many Hebrew letters there were on any given page of the Bible.

They have been watching Jesus for some time now. They had heard of this man who taught with authority and not like the scribes (Mark 1:22). They had heard of His ministry of healing and casting out demons. They had been present when the paralytic was healed (Mark 2:6). And now they have a problem. They cannot deny that miraculous power has been at work.

People who have been lame are throwing away their crutches. People who have been deaf can now hear a pin drop. Seeing-eye dogs are being put out of work. People are asking for refunds from funeral homes.

The scribes can't laugh off that kind of power. They cannot deny that the supernatural is taking place. And so they have one of two options:

1. They can accept Him as Messiah, believing His message, repenting of their sins, and trusting in Him alone for salvation.
2. Or they can reject Him, looking for an alternate explanation.

Why do they choose the latter? It is because they have a vested interest in unbelief. That is always the reason that people choose to reject Christ. Let's face it, Jesus has a way of changing a person's life. And if you choose not to have your life changed by Him, then you have to reject Him. To do that takes effort. It takes effort because there is something compellingly attractive about Him. And so, you begin to look for rationalizations of why you should not follow Him.

These scribes did that. They could not deny that there was real spiritual power in their midst. And so, they came up with an alternate explanation. They attributed the power of Jesus to Satan.

"He is possessed by Beelzebul!"

The name "Beelzebub" refers to an old Canaanite deity. "*Baal*" is the Canaanite word for "lord." "*Zebub*" was a reference to "flies." He was

known as Baal-zebub, the “Lord of the Flies” in 2 Kings 1:2-6. He was the god of diseases.

The Jews had taken this name and changed it to Baal-zebel which meant “Lord of the Dung.” It was a term of derision. And they eventually came to use it as a title for Satan.

Do you see what they are doing? They are pointing to Jesus and they are saying, “He is Satan in the flesh! He is only able to cure diseases because he is the demon of diseases!” They have seen the power of God’s Holy Spirit at work and they deliberately and knowingly reject that Spirit.

Have you ever been unjustly accused of something? Take heart, because you are in good company. Jesus was also unjustly accused.

A REASONED DEFENSE

And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!

“But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.” (Mark 3:23-27).

Jesus now makes His defense. The defense of Jesus is given in three parts.

1. The Devil is Defeated (3:23).

The scribes have already conceded this point. They could not deny the obvious outward miraculous power that Jesus manifested. Satan has plainly been cast out.

2. Division is Destructive (3:23-26).

When there is civil war in a nation, that nation does not prosper. When a husband and wife set themselves against one another, it is not long before their marriage begins to collapse. By

the way, the same is true of the church. The quickest way to destroy the church is to allow division to exist in our midst.

Now we come to the application. Jesus has been casting out demons. He has been in a war against Satan. If he is fighting Satan, then He is obviously not on Satan's side and not receiving His power from Satan.

3. Delegation is Limited (3:27).

You cannot delegate more than you already have. Satan cannot delegate more power than he already has. If the power that is being used against Satan is greater than what Satan has himself, then he cannot be the source of that power.

This is illustrated by a strong man who is about to be robbed. If you want to rob a strong man, you do not go into his house and ask him to help you. He will throw you out on your ear. You must first tie him up.

Here is what Jesus is saying. He has been tying up Satan. He has been robbing the kingdom of Satan. We all once were the property of Satan. We used to belong to his kingdom.

For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son. (Colossians 1:13).

When we came to Christ, we were taken from Satan's domain. We have now become a prized possession of the Son. Jesus is still in the business of tying up Satan. Every time that you see a man or a woman turn from their sin and come to Christ, you are seeing an example of Satan being bound.

AN IRREPARABLE TRANSGRESSION

“Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” - ³⁰ Because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.” (Mark 3:28-30).

Now Jesus turns from His own defense to speak about those who have

just accused Him. They have just accused Him of performing miracles by the power of Satan. They have witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit and they said, "That is Satan!" They pointed to the Holy Spirit and said, "Unholy and unclean!"

Jesus calls this blasphemy. The word blasphemy is a compound word made from the Greek words "to speak" (*phemi*) and "to hurt" (*blapto*). It describes the act of speaking of someone in a hurtful way. Blasphemy is speaking evil against God. This is a serious sin. In the Old Testament, it called for the death of the offender.

Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:16).

Blasphemy was a serious crime. It was a capital offense. And yet, even blasphemy can be forgiven. The Apostle Paul confessed to having been "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor" (1 Timothy 1:13). But he was shown mercy.

We have a God who forgives. Forgiveness is a crucified Messiah praying to His Father that those who had pounded the nails into His flesh would not be held accountable. This is why Jesus came. He came to die and by His death purchase forgiveness for every man. He is able to forgive every manner of evil - except one.

"But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29).

It is the Spirit that draws you to Christ. It is the Spirit that regenerates you - that brings new life to you. It is the Spirit that opens your eyes so that you can see Jesus. Blasphemy against the Spirit is to speak against the work of the Spirit and to resist Him in such a way that you can no longer hear His voice calling you to repentance.

Every once in a while, I meet someone who is worried that they have committed the unpardonable sin. I have news for you. If you are worried about it and wish that you could repent of it, then you haven't committed it. It is like the man who went to the doctor and said that he had a horrible disease. The doctor said, "Nonsense! If you had that disease, you wouldn't know it because there are no visible symptoms." The man replied, "That's how I know I've got it. I feel wonderful!" If you had committed the

unpardonable sin, then you would not be concerned with rejecting the Spirit.

The scribes had been given all of the evidence. They had seen the miracles. They had heard the teachings. And they still rejected Christ. They rejected the very One in whom it was necessary to believe in order to receive forgiveness. They also rejected the Spirit of God that would draw them to that One. As a result, there remained no possibility of forgiveness.

The same is true today. You have been exposed to the truth of the gospel today. You have been offered eternal life through faith in the Son of God. If your final conclusion is that this is not the truth and that you will have no part in it, then you are unredeemable.

A RELATIONAL REQUEST

And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him.

And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."

And answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?"

And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold, My mother and My brothers!

"For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35).

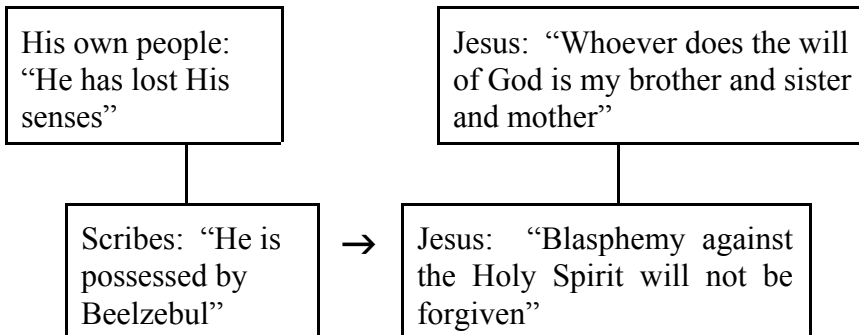
As we come to this paragraph, it seems at first glance to have no bearing on what has come before. Jesus has just accused the Jerusalem Delegation of committing an unpardonable sin. They have rejected Him and they in turn have been rejected by Him. Now the family of Jesus arrives on the scene. They haven't come to hear Him preach or to see the miracles. They have come to talk to Him. They have heard of His sudden rise to popularity and they have concluded that He has lost contact with reality and they have come to take Him into custody. This is seen back in verse 21.

And when His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." (Mark 3:21).

Do you see that phrase "His own people"? It is literally, "those from His side." This was a common figure of speech in the Septuagint to refer to

someone's family.

"His own people" in verse 21 were very likely "His mother and His brothers" of verse 31. The passage is chiasmic in its format.



You see, the brothers of Jesus didn't believe in Him (John 7:5). They had grown up with Him and had lived with Him for many years and they did not believe that He was the Messiah of Israel.

That is amazing. I can understand the scribes from Jerusalem hearing and not understanding, but his own brothers? There is a lesson here. Sometimes there is a correlation between proximity and distortion. People who grow up in a religious home often have a harder time coming to know the Lord because they are too close to the subject. They never really come face to face with their need.

I grew up in a religious home. We went to church every Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday night. My brothers and I were made to read the Bible every night and we hated every minute of it. I went for years without any reality of God in my life until I moved away from the Lord and from the church in a period of real rebellion. It was then, for the first time, that I began to be really aware of my need.

Jesus is going to remove Himself from His family. They are seeking to approach Him on the basis of their physical relationship. He will not allow it. He is establishing a new relationship - one based on faith and obedience to Him.

You may have been watching the scribes commit the unpardonable sin and thinking to yourself, "I was raised as a Christian and I would never do a thing like that." But having Christian parents and being raised in a Christian family is no guarantee of forgiveness. It doesn't matter that you were brought up in Sunday School or that your name is on a church roll or that you sing Christian songs or eat Christian cookies.

You must enter into a family relationship with the Heavenly Father. It is an eternal family. It is bound together with a bond that makes earthly families distant by comparison. And there is room in that family for you.

STORIES TO LIVE BY

Mark 4:1-34

Mark is known as the epistle of action. There is constant movement throughout the book. Jesus is constantly doing. But the greater part of this chapter reflects a deviation from that pattern. This chapter contains a sermon. It is one of only two sermons in the entire book.

SETTING FOR A SERMON

He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.

And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching (Mark 4:1-2).

Once again, Jesus comes to the Sea of Galilee. He has been here before. Again there is the sea. Again there is a large crowd. Again there is a boat. This time we are specifically told that He got into the boat and utilized it as a floating pulpit from which to teach. As was appropriate for a teacher in that culture, He sat down to teach. But this time, there was a difference. This time, He taught by means of parables.

What is a parable? It is a story with a meaning. It is truth illustrated. A vocal cartoon. The story might be pretend or it might be a true story. The point is not the story but the truth it illustrates.

Jesus had dramatically changed His mode of teaching. The reason for this is because there had been a change in the audience. That change had been vividly illustrated in the previous chapter when certain Jewish leaders had declared His miracles to be empowered by Satan. The change was one of growing unbelief. And in the face of that unbelief, Jesus begins to teach in parables.

The first parable will be a parable about sowing seed. But that is merely the picture that is used to teach a deeper truth. It is really a parable

about listening. It is a parable about hearing the word of God, listening to that word, and taking it to heart.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

“Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up.

“Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

“Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

“Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

And He was saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mark 4:3-9).

The first story that Jesus tells is of a farmer going forth to spread his seed upon the ground. He did not have to explain this process. His story was familiar to everyone listening. There were no doubt many in the crowd who were farmers themselves. It was common practice to scatter the seed first and then to come back and plow the earth to cover the seed.

The initial character described in the story is the farmer. But the focus of the story quickly changes. The sower will not be mentioned again. Instead, our attention is focused upon the seed and its reception. The seed falls onto four different types of ground.

1 st Seed	2 nd Seed	3 rd Seed	4 th Seed
Beside the road	Rocky ground	Among thorns	In good soil
Not much soil	No roots	Bad company	Growth
Eaten by birds	Scorched by the sun	Choked by thorns	Bore fruit
No life	Temporary life		Eternal life
No fruit			Fruitful

The same sower sowed all the seeds. The seeds themselves were all the same. The only difference was in the ground where the seeds landed. Certain types of soil brought about certain results.

- Seed beside the road had no protection. It was eaten by birds even before it had a chance to grow.
- Seed in rocky ground had no chance to establish roots. Although there was some initial growth, it quickly withered and died under the heat of the sun.
- Seed among thorns also saw an initial period of growth. But the thorns grew at the same time and soon the good seed was choked.
- Finally, seed was sown on good ground. This grew up into plants which produced an abundance of fruit.

The story Jesus is telling is being acted out before them. He is doing what He is describing. He is the sower. He is sowing the word. The sowing takes place over four different types of ground and with four different results.

This story is told amidst a great crowd that had gathered by the Sea of Galilee. This crowd was so large that there was not even standing room and Jesus had resorted to using a boat as sort of a floating pulpit. They had gathered to hear His preach and you would have thought that they were ready to listen and to take His preaching to heart. This parable points out that looks can be deceptive. One can look like he is accepting the teaching of the Lord and yet that word has not taken root.

The point of the story is that, although the sower does his job and the seed is sufficient, it is only when it falls upon good ground that there is growth.

THE PURPOSE FOR THE PARABLES

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables.

And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹² so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven." (Mark 4:10-12).

I imagine that as the disciples heard the parables, they nodded their

heads as if in understanding. But as soon as they were out of earshot of the crowds, they asked Jesus what their meaning might be.

Unspoken is the question behind the question: Why is Jesus speaking in parables when the meaning of those parables is not immediately clear? It is one thing to give an illustration so that everyone can understand. It is another thing to give illustrations in such a way that no one understands. And yet, this is exactly what Jesus was doing. Even His disciples did not understand the meaning of these parables.

Up to this point, Jesus had not spoken in parables. At the most, he had given a few vivid illustrations, but they were always in the context of clearly stated teachings. But now there is a change. He has now begun to teach exclusively in parables.

What can account for this change? Why is the preaching strategy of Jesus so different from this day forward? It is because of what happened in the last chapter. It is because of the unpardonable sin. It is because of the rejection of Jesus by the scribes. It is because they pointed at the work of God's Holy Spirit and labeled in the work of Satan. It is because they had pointed at the Spirit of God and called Him the devil. As a result, Jesus will no longer speak clearly to these scribal authorities. The door of salvation has been closed to them.

1. Mysteries Revealed: *"To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God..." (4:11)*

When we think of a mystery, we usually imagine an Agatha Christie novel and a suspicious butler. But we must understand that the word "mystery" is a transliteration of the Greek word *μυστήριον* (*musterion*) carries the idea of something that has been hidden and which is now being revealed to the initiated. The Greek cults described their cultic rites as the *μυστήρια* - the rituals which only the initiated were permitted to observe.

These parables are going to reveal a number of truths which had previously been hidden. Those truths will continue to be hidden to those who are not disciples of Jesus.

The word "parable" (from *parabole*) means "to throw up along side." It is an earthly story thrown up along side a heavenly truth which is being taught. But the way Jesus used parable did more than illustrate truth. It also hid truth.

Have you ever watched an unbeliever hear the parables? They don't get it! They listen to the story, but they do not understand what it is trying to teach.

2. Mysteries Hidden.

“...but those who are outside get everything in parables, ¹² so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” (Mark 4:11-12).

Jesus quotes from the book of Isaiah. His quote is taken from the passage where Isaiah has his vision of the glory of God. It is a glorious vision with angels and the majesty of God and a call to be a spokesman for heaven. Isaiah answers the call, “Here am I. Send me!” And the very next thing that we read is a commission to speak to a people who will not listen.

And He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’

“Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.” (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Jesus quotes this passage and likens it to His own situation. In the same way that the people in Isaiah’s day did not listen to him, so also the religious leaders of Israel had now rejected Jesus. In the same way that the Israelites of that day had been condemned, so now Jesus issues a condemnation against those who have rejected Him. In the same way that judgment had come upon Israel in the form of the Assyrian conquest, so now judgment would come at the hands of the legions of Rome. The immediate manifestation of this judgment is in different teaching modes utilized by Jesus.

To You	To Those on the Outside
Disciples	Unbelievers
Given the mysteries of the kingdom of God	Given everything in parables

Here is the principle. God’s truths are not given to those who

do not want God's truths. The secrets of the kingdom are family secrets. There are things that my family knows that no one else knows. The only way that you would know these things is if you became a part of our family. The kingdom of God is like that. It has family secrets and only those who are a part of the family are entitled to those secrets.

Now you are probably thinking, "I've always been taught that we are to give God's truths to everybody. Didn't Jesus tell us to go out and make disciples of every nation?" Yes, He did. But when people hear the gospel and then decide that they want no part of it, we are to stop presenting the gospel to them.

That is what Paul did during his missionary journeys. He would go into a city and he would preach to the Jews. If the Jews rejected him, then he would turn to the Gentiles. If the Gentiles also rejected him, then he would move to another city.

The same principle can be applied today. Are you a wife with an unbelieving husband who wants no part of the gospel? Don't talk to him about the gospel.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ² as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Peter 3:1-2).

There are times when, in my zeal for the gospel, I have not followed this principle. In those instances, I have seen unbelievers hardened to the gospel in a dramatic way. On the other hand, I have also seen times when I was obedient; when I stood back and allowed the Holy Spirit to do His work, with the result that a new brother eventually came into the kingdom.

EXPLANATION OF THE PARABLE

Jesus now prepares to explain the parable of the sower. He will not explain all of the parables, but He does explain this one. And He prefaces this explanation with a question which seems to underline the importance of this particular parable.

And He said to them, "Do you not understand this

parable? How will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:13).

It is possible that the parable of the sower serves as the key to the understanding of all of the other kingdom parables taught in this chapter. Both the parable and its explanation is found in all three of the synoptic gospels.

“The sower sows the word.

“These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.

“In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; ¹⁷ and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

“And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, ¹⁹ but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:14-20).

Unlike most parables which teach only one major point, this parable has a number of points. Let us begin by identifying the elements of the parable.

Parable	Spiritual Truth
The Sower	The One who sows the Word - Jesus
The Seed	The Word of God - the message of Jesus
The Soil	The hearts of men

The Sower is Jesus Himself. He has been preaching to the people. He has been sowing the Word among them. We have also been given a ministry of sowing the word. Jesus gave His disciples a charge to go out and

make disciples of all men. The Sower commissioned others to continue the work of sowing. We share in that commission.

As the disciples have been watching Jesus sow the word, they have also been watching the reaction of the crowd. Though there has been some opposition, much of the reaction has seemed to be positive. And yet, this parable will serve as a warning that not all who initially react in a positive manner to Jesus will bear fruit.

We normally think of people and their reaction to Jesus and we see that there are two possible reactions to Him. One either accepts Him and His message and believes the gospel, or one rejects Him. This parable takes that second group and subdivides it into three. There are four specific types of ground upon which the seed falls.

Type of Ground	Initial Response	Type of Response	Final Result
Ground beside the road	Does not understand	Casual reception	Satan takes it away
Rocky places	Receives it with joy	Shallow reception	Falls away in the face of affliction
Among the thorns	Heard the word	Worldly reception	Choked by the things of the world
Good ground	Understands and accepts	Responsive reception	Bears fruit

Notice that there is a progression in each of these four cases. The first sees no growth at all. The second sees initial growth, but the roots have nothing onto which to hold. The third grows strong roots, only to be strangled by the surrounding thorn bushes and weeds. Only the fourth makes it to maturity.

1. The First Instance.

This is the seed which was sown beside the road. It represents the casual receiver of the word. He is like the hard, beaten-down path that is well-traveled. He hears the word of God and it has no impact at all upon his life. It is like water off a duck's back. He is an unbeliever and he wants to go on being an unbeliever. He will get his wish.

2. The Second Instance.

This one represents the shallow receiver of the word. He hears the gospel and his immediate reaction is positive. He has an emotional high and gets a case of the “warm fuzzies.” He jumps onto the Jesus bandwagon. But something is wrong. There is no root.

Paula and I have some fake flowers. They are very bright and cheerful and Paula has set them into a planter just as if they were real flowers. They have leaves and petals and look just like the real thing. There is only one problem. They are fake. They have no roots and no life. This person is like that. He has leaves, but no roots and no fruit. He is spiritually dead.

It is easy to be spiritual on Sunday morning. It is harder to be faithful where you live and work. When the going gets tough, the fake fall away. This is why persecution so often has a purifying effect upon the church. All those people who are false on the inside fall away.

3. The Third Instance.

This is the worldly receiver of the word. This is the man who hears the word and who wants to receive it, but something gets in the way. He is the double-minded man. He wants to live for God on Sundays and Wednesdays and to live for the devil the rest of the week. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler? He had too much stuff. His material possessions got in the way of following Jesus.

Just as the rocky soil represents someone who cannot handle adversity, so the thorny soil represents the one who cannot handle prosperity.

4. The Fourth Instance.

This is the responsive receiver of the word. He is the Christian - the one who hears the word and believes it and whose life is changed by it. The evidence of this change is that he bears fruit. You know what fruit is. Fruit is the natural outgrowth of a living plant. The fruit of the Spirit is the supernatural outgrowth of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

There are some important lessons in this parable.

- The lesson of false beginnings.

Two of these instances saw an initial period of growth, only to have the plants die. These represented an initial commitment to Christ that did not last. They ultimately fell away. And by doing so, they showed that they were not a part of the kingdom.

- The lesson of an effectual seed.

Ability does not negate the effectiveness of the seed. I have already suggested that you have a ministry to sow the word. But you might feel that you are not skillful at presenting the gospel. That is okay. Even the unskilled sower will manage to get some of the seed on the good soil where it will bear fruit. The response of the soil does not depend upon the skill of the sower.

There is a sense in which every Christian goes through this progression. As you first hear the message of the gospel, it is the first scenario which presents the greatest danger. This is the point where you might walk away from the gospel and ignore its message. Once you pass that point, it is the vulnerable rootless existence that is the most dangerous.

The next pitfall is that either of worry or of riches. Where are you? If you tell me which danger you have overcome, then I can tell you which one lies ahead.

THE PARABLE OF THE LAMPSTAND

And He was saying to them, "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?"

"For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4:21-23).

The purpose of a lamp is to give light to an area in darkness. A lamp belongs on a lampstand. It is only there that it accomplishes its purpose. When you cover up a lamp by placing it in an inappropriate place, it cannot perform that function for which it was designed.

The kingdom is like that. It is meant to be seen before a watching world. Its message is meant to be proclaimed to the nations. This will

involve taking it beyond the borders of Israel. The truth will be heard. The kingdom will not be able to be suppressed. Truth is like that. It always finds a way to be revealed.

THE LAW OF INCREASE

And He was saying to them, "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides. 25 For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." (Mark 4:24-25).

A man's getting is determined by his giving. Whatever you put into something, that is what you will get out of it. You get what you give. And you get it with interest. Because of this, you actually get more than you give. This is why farmers farm. They place a seed into the ground in order to receive, not simply a seed, but an entire fruit tree. There is an increase.

At the same time, the increase you get is a proportional increase. When you sow a lot of seed, your chances are better that you will reap a greater harvest. Increased effort generally leads to a proportionally greater reward.

But there has to be an initial planting. There has to be an initial action in order to receive a reaction. And with respect to the kingdom, there must be an initial commitment to that kingdom in order to receive kingdom truths. This is illustrated in the next parable.

A PARABLE OF GROWTH

And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows -- how, he himself does not know.

"The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29).

Once again, we have a parable which utilizes the realm of agriculture

to illustrate God's kingdom. Again there is the sowing of seed. Again there is the resulting growth.

1. Growth comes from God.

No farmer was ever able to bring about the growth of a plant. You can plant the seed, cultivate the soil, and add water. You can remove the thorns and build fences and scarecrows to keep away the ravages of animals and birds. But the growth takes place apart from any effort on the farmer.

The kingdom is like that. There are a lot of things that I can do in the service of the kingdom, but its increase will be the work of God.

2. Growth comes in stages.

You do not plant a seed in the ground and then jump out of the way as a full-grown tree shoots up to its full height. Growth comes in slow, steady stages.

3. The Goal of Growth is the Harvest.

There is coming a day when the harvest shall come. The kingdom will be completed. The harvester shall return to His field. History is headed toward a goal. That goal is the return of Christ and the redemption of the world. It is illustrated by means of a harvest. God is growing something. There is coming a day when that growth shall be completed.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?"

"It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade." (Mark 4:30-32).

This is the third parable that has dealt with seeds and with growth. This time the parable deals with a certain type of seed - a mustard seed. The Greek term is a *κόκκο σινάπεος*, a grain of mustard. The mustard plant was a large herb, growing from a very tiny seed to a height of 12 to 15 feet. The kingdom is like that. Starting with a simple Galilean carpenter-turned-rabbi and a handful of fishermen, it will grow to fill the whole world.

This parable is very important for the disciples to hear. They are not world leaders or great statesmen or mighty generals. And yet, they have been called to change the world. In the darkness of their nights, they will wonder if they have made a mistake. They will wonder if they have followed a Don Quixote and are fighting windmills. And so, Jesus gives them this parable to let them know that they will succeed. Out of the little seed, their word will grow to start a mighty tree.

With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. (Mark 4:33-34).

We have already noted that the parables were meant, not only to reveal truth, but also to hide truth. What makes the difference? A part of the difference is seen in the explanations that accompany the parables. Those who do not believe are not given these further explanations. Those who do believe are made privy to them.

In which group are you? These parables are meant either to enlighten you or else they are meant to keep you in the dark. The difference will depend upon the state of your own heart.

STILLING A STORM

Mark 4:35-41

What kind of person was Jesus? He was the kind of man you could invite to a wedding, even when things didn't go right at the reception. He was the kind of man to whom you could come with questions in the middle of the night. He was the kind of man with whom you could share your deepest secrets without worrying that you might shock Him. He was the kind of man who went fishing with a boatload of rowdy Galileans, who accepted a dinner invitation to the home of a known swindler, and who could sit at ease talking to a woman of ill repute.

And yet, there was another side to Jesus that was not so familiar. It was a side that tended to make people uncomfortable when they saw it. It is that side that we shall see in this passage.

A PRIVATE WITHDRAWAL

*On that day, when evening came, He said to them,
"Let us go over to the other side."*

*Leaving the crowd, they took Him along with them in
the boat, just as He was; and other boats were with Him.
(Mark 4:35-36).*

It had been a long day. It had seen an unpardonable sin performed and a sermon full of parables given to a multitude gathered by the seashore. Now as the day drew to a close and the crowd began to disperse, Jesus suggested to His disciples that they cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It will be a trip of 8 to 10 miles and, if the wind is right, will take several hours.

The same boat which had served all day as a pulpit now serves as transportation to take Jesus and His disciples across the large lake. I imagine that Peter and Andrew and James and John took charge of the sailing details, the rest of the disciples being landlubbers.

A PERILOUS STORM

And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. (Mark 4:37).

The waters of the Sea of Galilee lie 680 feet below sea level. The Sea measures some thirteen miles from north to south and is surrounded by mountains. This ring of mountains is broken by the Jordan River in the south and in the north by a narrow gorge to the north which winds its way thirty miles to the snowcapped heights of Mount Hermon. This gorge acts as a funnel for the winds that blow off the surrounding mountains. When cool air currents from the mountains rushing down the gorge collide with the heated air over the lake, the result is sometimes a violent storm.

But the storm on this particular night was so severe that it took even the seasoned fishermen by surprise. Mark calls it a “fierce gale of wind.” The Greek phrase *λαίλαψ μεγάλη άνεμου* carries the idea of a “storm of great wind.”

This boat had not been designed to weather a storm. It was not a sea-going vessel. It was a freshwater fishing boat. It was designed for fishing upon the lake. And when it began to take on water, the disciples became afraid. Most of them probably did not know how to swim. And those that did were too far from shore to be able to make such a distance.

A PLAINTIVE REQUEST

Jesus Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38).

All this time, Jesus has been asleep in the back of the boat. He isn’t faking it. He is truly exhausted. And He has been sleeping throughout the entire storm.

The disciples should have taken their cue from Jesus. He is sleeping. He is relaxed in this situation. He is not pacing the deck. He is not biting His nails. He is completely relaxed. And the disciples should have known that they could relax, too.

What are the storms in your life? Are you facing some major problem? You need to know something. God is not worried about your situation. He is not biting His nails. And you don’t have to, either.

You see, it had been Jesus' idea to get into the boat and to sail across the sea. Now that the storm has come, the disciples have forgotten that they were following Jesus. When you follow Jesus, you don't have to worry about where you are going. If He is leading you, then He will make certain that you get there.

By the way, if you have a storm in your life and you are not following Jesus, then you have every reason to be scared to death. If you are not following Jesus, then death is the most terrifying thing in the world.

The disciples awake Jesus with a question. "Do you not care that we are perishing?" When sailors ask an ex-carpenter what to do in a storm, then you know that things are pretty bad. They are on the verge of panic and despair. They have nowhere else to turn.

Notice their question. It centers, not on the ability of Jesus, but on His attitude toward their predicament. "Don't you care?" They have interpreted the unconcern of Jesus with an uncaring attitude. I don't think that they are really expecting a miracle. Perhaps they just want Jesus to help bail.

AN IMPERIOUS COMMAND

And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Hush, be still." And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. (Mark 4:39).

The One who created land and sea now stood up and rebuked His creation. Why did Jesus do that? I think that it was so that He might fulfill a prophecy from the Old Testament.

*Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters;
They have seen the works of the Lord,
And His wonders in the deep.
For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind,
Which lifted up the waves of the sea.
They rose up to the heavens,
They went down to the depths;
Their soul melted away in their misery.
They reeled and staggered like a drunken man,
And were at their wits' end.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,*

*And He brought them out of their distresses.
He caused the storm to be still,
So that the waves of the sea were hushed.
Then they were glad because they were quiet;
So He guided them to their desired haven. (Psalm 107:23-30).*

Notice who it was who stilled the storm. It was the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the same one who still the storm in our narrative in the gospel of Mark. This passage is meant to tell us something about the identity of Jesus.

Jesus commands the storm to be stilled and it is stilled. It is one thing to command the storm to be stilled. It is another thing for the storm to obey such a command.

A PLEA FOR FAITH

And He said to them, "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

This is not a mere rhetorical question. Jesus was pointing out that there was no need to be afraid. Once you believe in the love and the power of God, then you can weather any storm.

These disciples had seen an abundance of miracles. They had seen the power of God. And they had seen the love and the compassion of God. But they still lacked faith.

Before we judge the disciples, perhaps we should examine our own lives. After all, we have seen the power of God and the love of God. Isn't it amazing how we can see that power and that love, but then when our storms come we then forget about it altogether?

A PROFOUND FEAR

They became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:41).

The disciples have a sudden attack of xenophobia - the fear of the unknown. They realize that Jesus is not a normal human being. He is different than the disciples. He is other than the rest of mankind. He is holy.

He is set apart and different from the rest of His creation.

Man's reaction to the holiness and "otherness" of God is always fear. Do you remember the reaction of Isaiah when he had his vision of the holiness of God?

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3).

This was a glorious vision. It was a vision which took Isaiah into heaven, into the very throne room of God. We are not told the details of how Isaiah came to see this vision. Perhaps he had come to the temple in Jerusalem to worship and, while here, was given a glimpse of what the true temple in heaven looks like.

He sees God sitting upon the throne. All around the throne are angels. They comprise a royal bodyguard. They proclaim the holiness of their Creator. What was Isaiah's reaction to this heavenly vision? It is seen in verse 5.

Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5).

Isaiah was filled with fear. When he was confronted with the greatness of the gulf between himself and his Creator, he felt a heaviness within him. For the first time in his life, he realized what it was to stand in the presence of God.

These disciples in the boat in the middle of the midnight sea felt the same thing. Before they had been afraid of the storm. Now as they gaze upon the One who has stilled the storm, they are filled with a different kind of fear. It is a fear of the Lord. And they do not know it, but they have just taken a step toward a higher wisdom.

Have you ever stopped to think about what Jesus said about Himself? The ways in which He identified Himself are striking:

He said, "I am the vine."

He said, "I am the light."

He said, "I am the way."

He said, "I am the bread."

He said, "I and the Father are one."

No one else in history has ever made such claims as Jesus made. This means that you cannot view Jesus as merely a good man. He refused to be called that. He said that only God is good. Either Jesus is God, or else Jesus is not good.

Jesus broke up every funeral He ever attended. He healed the sick. He gave sight to the blind. He restored hearing to the deaf. He stilled the raging storm. But there were also things that Jesus never did. He never confessed sin. He never apologized. He never admitted that he was wrong. He never asked for advice. He never corrected any of his teachings. In any other person, this would have been the height of arrogance. But for the One who could still the storm, it was right.

The disciples were afraid. They were not just afraid. They were "*very much afraid*." Why? They had seen miracles before. They had seen healings and they had seen demons being cast out. But this was different. This time it involved them directly. This time they were in the boat and in the storm. And it happened to them!

It is one thing to hear the gospel and to see the power of God at work. It is another thing to personally be a part of the gospel through faith and to have God work in your life. One is simple knowledge about God. The other is to know Him personally.

DEMONS AND DELIVERANCE

Mark 5:1-20

One of the major evidences within the book of Mark that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is His power over the unseen forces of this world — the host of demons.

Mark 1:22-28	Jesus casts out a demon in the synagogue
Mark 1:32-34	Jesus cast out many demons
Mark 1:39	Jesus was casting out the demons
Mark 3:11	The unclean spirits would cry out, “You are the Son of God.”
Mark 3:14-15	The twelve given authority to cast out demons
Mark 3:22	Accused of casting out demons by power of Satan

Why this emphasis upon the casting out of demons? If Jesus is the One who will remove the curse of sin and overthrow the forces of Satan, then He must be able to break the power of the supernatural world.

The initial confrontation between Jesus and Satan took place in the wilderness (Mark 1:13). Satan tempted Jesus. Although the result of this temptation is not stated in Mark’s account, it is evident that Jesus overcame that temptation. But throughout the following chapters, it becomes evident that the power of Jesus goes far beyond just being able to resist the temptations of Satan. It is not what Satan can do to Jesus, but what Jesus can do to Satan.

The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of Man appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8).

The reason that Christ came to earth was so that He might destroy the works of the devil. The works of Satan began in the garden of Eden. They began when Satan tempted Adam and the woman and the human race plunged into sin. Jesus came to remove sin from man. He came to purchase men from their slavery to sin. He came to destroy the works of Satan. And in the casting out of demons, He was giving samples of this principle.

This chapter will contain three miracles. It will show the power of Jesus over three areas.

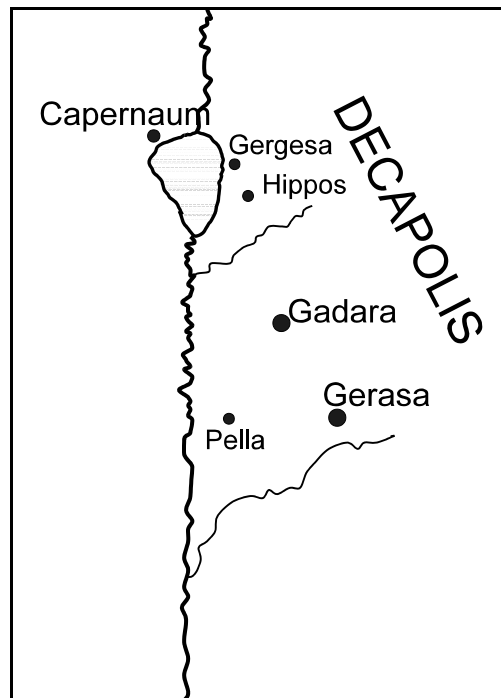
Jesus deals with...		
5:1	5:25	5:35
Demons	Disease	Death

THE COUNTRY OF THE GERASENES

They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes. (Mark 5:1).

The city of Gerasa was one of the cities of the Decapolis — one of the ten cities which made up a loose federation to the east of the Sea of Galilee. The problem is that Gerasa was located 35 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee near the Jabbok River while this passage seems to make it clear that the events took place by the edge of the Sea.

On the other hand, there is a much smaller town located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee named Gergesa (Γεργεσα). Origen, one of the early church fathers, stated that this was the site of this miracle. It contains both the steep cliffs and the caves mentioned in the passage.



The previous chapter ends with Jesus stilling the storm. This chapter begins as their boat lands on the eastern shore. This was a pagan land. It was a land outside of the covenant community. It was the land of the ten Greek cities known as the Decapolis. As Jesus and His disciples set foot on this land, they are confronted with a manifestation of the paganism of this land.

THE PLIGHT OF THE DEMONIZED MAN

When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, ³ and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him.

Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones. (Mark 5:2-5).

As Jesus and his storm-drenched disciples depart from the boat, they are confronted with a terrifying spectacle. It is “*a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit.*” Notice the chiastic description of this man:

Matthew’s account indicates that there were two demon-possessed men (Matthew 8:28). Mark mentions only one..

Who had his dwelling among the tombs

and no one was able to bind him

even with a chain

he had often been bound with shackles and chains

no one was strong enough to subdue him

He was screaming among the tombs...

In chapter 3, Jesus had spoken of Satan as a strong man who must be bound in order to “rob his house.” The actions of Jesus in casting out demons had been paramount to binding Satan. Now as we come to chapter

5, we find that attempts had been made to bind this man, but they had all been unsuccessful. People could not bind him with chains or fetters. Jesus will bind the forces that bind the man and then He will liberate the man. This would be a good opportunity to review what the Bible has to say about the subject of demons:

1. Demons are real. They are described under a number of different terms.
 - Demons.
 - Unclean spirits.
 - Fallen angels.
2. They were especially evident during the ministry of Jesus.
3. They seek to indwell mankind.
Many people like to make a distinction between being oppressed, obsessed, possessed, and influenced by demons; but the Bible never makes such distinction.
4. The Bible does not tell us of the origin of the demons, though some have seen in Revelation 12:4-9 an allusion to their career.
5. There seem to be many of them.
6. They are under the leadership of Satan.
7. Christ is superior to Satan and any of his demons.

It is interesting to note that of all the instances of demon-possession recorded in the New Testament, not one of them took place within Jerusalem. It seems as though most cases took place in rural settings. Why is this? Perhaps it is because Satan adapts himself to the sophistication of the level of society in which he is working.

Demon activity of this sort seems to be more frequent in the less sophisticated societies where pagan religions are honored. In more sophisticated settings, it seems that Satan usually uses other methods. This is because he is a master tactician. He seeks to do his work, not to increase the faith of those whom he tempts, but in order to undermine that faith.

THE LEGION AND THE LORD

Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; 7 and shouting with a loud voice, he said, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!"

For He had been saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

And He was asking him, "What is your name?" And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

And he began to implore Him earnestly not to send them out of the country. (Mark 5:6-10).

As we read through this passage, we are left with no doubt as to who is in charge. Even though Jesus may have been numerically out-numbered, He will demonstrate power and authority over the demons.

The demons begin by asking a question: *"What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"* The implication is that, since Jesus is so very different from the demons, that He should ignore them.

Satan often uses that message. He tells the Christian, "What does the world have to do with you." And as a result, the Christian abandons the world to Satan. He says to the Christian, "What does the public school system have to do with you?" And soon the public school system is teaching only Satan's lies. He says, "What does the government have to do with you?" And soon, the government is becoming atheistic in nature.

The people of Gergesa did not know who Jesus was. The multitude which Jesus had left back on the seashore had not recognized Him as the Son of God. Even the disciples were asking themselves, "Who is this, that the wind and the sea obey Him?" But the demons knew beyond question the true identity of Jesus. James 2:19 says that the demons believe in God. And they believe in Jesus, too.

There is a lesson here. It is that you can believe all kinds of facts about Jesus and it won't do you one bit of good. You are not saved by believing facts about Jesus (although it is true that you cannot be saved without believing certain facts about Him). You are saved as you trust in Him and acknowledge Him as your Savior and as your Lord.

The demons have identified Jesus. Now He calls upon them to identify themselves. *And he said to Him, "My name is Legion; for we are many."* There were 6000 men in a full Roman legion. This does not necessarily mean that there exactly 6000 demons inside of this man, but it does mean that there were a lot of them.

THE LEGION AND THE LORD

Now there was a large herd of swine feeding nearby on the mountain. ¹² The demons implored Him, saying, "Send us into the swine so that we may enter them."

Jesus gave them permission. And coming out, the unclean spirits entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, about two thousand of them; and they were drowned in the sea. (Mark 5:11-13).

The slopes of the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee make a sudden drop down to the water's edge. This served as the setting for a remarkable event. At the permission of Jesus, the demons went into a herd of pigs and they responded by stampeding down the steep bank and into the water where they drowned.



Sea of Galilee with the eastern cliffs in the distance

Jesus is going to liberate this man from the legion of demons that possess him. In doing so, He will play the part of a liberator. The great liberator of the Old Testament was Moses. He is the prophet of God who brought the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea. The liberation that Jesus brings is presented to us in terms that are supposed to make us think of Moses.

Moses	Jesus
He took the twelve tribes into the wilderness.	He has appointed twelve apostles to be the leader of His new Israel.
He divided the waves of the Red Sea with the wind so that the people can pass through.	He stills the wind and the waves to bring His disciples to the other side.
He takes the Israelites into the lands of the Gentiles.	He takes His disciples into the Decapolis.
He confronts the false gods of Egypt.	He confronts the legion of demons possessing this man.
Pharaoh's army drowns in the sea.	The demonic army is cast into the sea.

According to Jewish tradition, there were three doors to Gehenna:

- The desert (Numbers 16:33).
- The sea (Jonah 2:2).
- Jerusalem (Isaiah 31:9).

The demons did not fear Jewish tradition, but they did fear Jesus. They recognize His power over them and so they ask permission to enter into a nearby herd of pigs. The implication is that, without His permission, they would have been powerless to accomplish this. Do you see what this means? They were bound!

You might be thinking, "They don't look very bound." And Satan doesn't look very bound. But that is because he is out on bail. Jesus bound Satan with every demon that was cast out and with every soul that came to faith and repentance. He is still binding Satan today.

That does not mean that Satan is inactive. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking someone to gobble up. But if we submit to the Lord and resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7).

THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE

Their herdsmen ran away and reported it in the city and in the country. And the people came to see what it was

that had happened.

They came to Jesus and observed the man who had been demon-possessed sitting down, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they became frightened.

Those who had seen it described to them how it had happened to the demon-possessed man, and all about the swine. ¹⁷ And they began to implore Him to leave their region. (Mark 5:14-17).

Pigs were considered by the Jews to be an unclean animal. The Jews were forbidden to eat pork and they had nothing to do with pigs. But these people are not Jewish. These people are from the cities of the Decapolis. They are Gentiles. Their culture is the culture of the Greeks. And the pig was a holy animal to the Greeks. The pig was to the Greeks what the lamb was to the Jew. It was the animal of sacrifice.

The miracle that Jesus performed in the casting out of these demons was witnessed by three groups of people.

- The herdsmen of the pigs.
- The disciples.
- The man who had been demon-possessed.

We are not told the reaction of the disciples. I don't think they had gotten over the miracle of the stilling of the storm. But we DO read of the reaction of the herdsmen. They ran back to report it to the people in the country and in the city. They told everyone.

This is a natural reaction to witnessing the power of God. The reason more so-called Christians do not witness is because they have never really experienced the power of God in their lives. They have nothing of which to witness.

The news brought out a crowd. The crowd saw Jesus and the disciples and the formerly demon-possessed man. And no pigs. Their response was one of fear. And because of their fear, they invited Jesus to leave.

This is not the kind of fear that is the beginning of wisdom. This is not a fear that draws men closer to the Lord. It is a fear which asks for a separation. It is a fear stemming from unbelief and from superstition. It is a sinful fear. We have not been called to be superstitious. We have been called to be confident before the Lord. We need to replace fear with faith.

I think that there was a second reason that they had in asking Jesus to leave. They didn't want to lose any more pigs. The loss of the pigs

represented a significant dollar value and, if Jesus remained in the area, who knew what they might lose next? It made no difference to them that a man had been healed. It made no difference to them that One was in their midst that held that kind of power in His hands. They had lost their pigs. And they were more interested in pigs than in people.

Are there any pigs in your life? I'm not talking about someone with a messy habit. I'm talking about something in your life that is keeping you from Jesus. Maybe you wouldn't say it the same way these people did, but do you secretly wish that Jesus would go away and leave you and your pigs alone?

What is it that you value more than people? Whatever it is, you need to know that it is only a herd of pigs and that it is going to end up some day in the depths of the sea. Ask the Lord to take your pigs, and He will give you something a lot more valuable in their place.

THE REACTION OF THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN HEALED

As He was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed was imploring Him that he might accompany Him.

And He did not let him, but He said to him, "Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you."

And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed. (Mark 5:18-20).

In contrast to the people of the area who were afraid of Jesus and who wanted Him to leave, there was one man who wanted to remain with Jesus and follow Him. It was the man who had been healed. Jesus refuses. The man will not be permitted to accompany Jesus. There is an interesting contrast.

The Demons	The Man who had been Healed
Requested permission to enter into the herd of pigs	Requested permission to follow Jesus
Request granted	Request denied

The request of the demons was granted while the request of the man was refused. There is an interesting lesson here. An answered prayer does not necessarily mean that you are in God's will. And an unanswered prayer is not necessarily as sign of God's disfavor.

This man was given a commission. He will serve Jesus, but he will do so without leaving his home. He will be a witness of Jesus to his own people. He has not been educated. He has no seminary education, but he does not need any. He needs only to tell people what happened to him.

Here is the principle. You need not leave your home to be a missionary. Jesus had called the Twelve to leave their homes and to follow Him. But He told this man to stay home and spread the word. He will have a significant ministry right where he is. The principle is one of obedience. When Jesus says, "Go!" then you go. And when He says, "Stay!" you do that, too.

Can I tell you the rest of the story? This man became a missionary to the entire Decapolis — this region with its ten major cities. The next time that Jesus came to this region, they did not ask Him to leave. In Mark 7:31 Jesus is going to return to the Decapolis. This time the people will be ready to listen. A crowd of 4000 people will gather to hear Him preach. What made the difference? I do not know, but perhaps it was due in part to the ministry of this man.

We are like that man. We have been cleansed from the impurity which once polluted us. Now we have been left behind. Our job is to prepare the way so that, when Jesus comes this way again, people will be ready to meet Him.

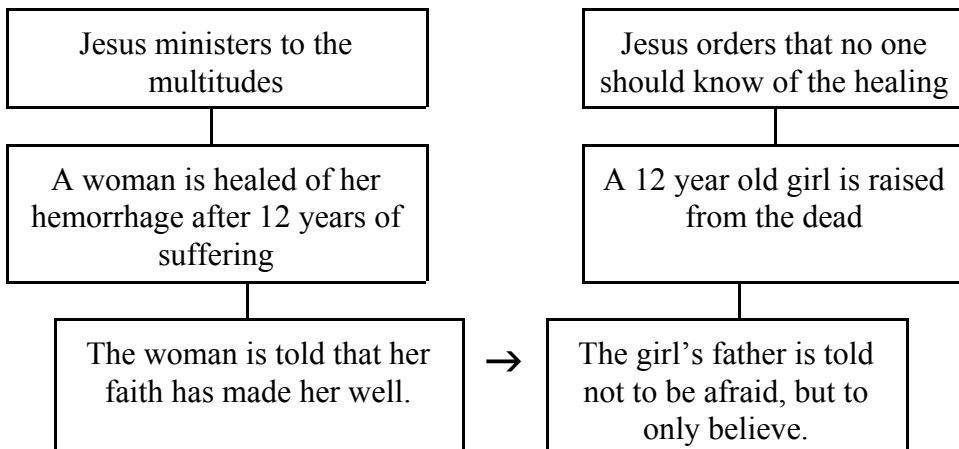
DELIVERANCE FROM DISEASE AND DEATH

Mark 5:21-43

We live in a world that has been cursed by sickness, sorrow, and death. Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, man's history has been the story of a dying race. The one inescapable fact that every man must face is the reality of death. The Old Testament promised that in the day of the kingdom, the effects of this curse would be overthrown.

He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 25:8).

The truth of these promises was seen in Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the promises of the kingdom by healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and even raising the dead. He banished disease from first century Palestine to demonstrate that He was the King who had brought His kingdom.



Notice the “divine coincidence” that the disease of the woman had begun to afflict her on the same year that this girl had been born. Each situation had been carefully prepared by God to be a special vessel of honor

which would demonstrate the power and the compassion of Jesus.

MINISTRY TO THE MULTITUDES

When Jesus had crossed over again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered around Him; and so He stayed by the seashore. (Mark 5:21).

Jesus had spent a long day of preaching on the previous day. It had been a day of preaching in parables (and explaining the meaning to the disciples during the breaks). Then He had crossed the Sea of Galilee with His disciples, stilling a raging storm which struck in the middle of the night. On the eastern shore of Galilee, he cast demons from a man into a herd of pigs. A crowd had gathered and they had asked Jesus to leave. He now returns to the west bank of Galilee and again a crowd gathers.

You might think at this point that Jesus would have said to the people, “I’m sorry, I’ve had a rough night and a long day yesterday and now I’m going to go and play golf.” He doesn’t do that. He has time for people. He has time both for the crowds and for individuals.

There is an interesting contrast between the reception of Jesus at Gerasa and the request that is made of Him here. They had asked Him to leave. A man now approaches Jesus and asks Him to come.

AN EARNEST REQUEST

One of the synagogue officials named Jairus came up, and on seeing Him, fell at His feet ²³ and implored Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death; please come and lay Your hands on her, so that she will get well and live.”

And He went off with him; and a large crowd was following Him and pressing in on Him. (Mark 5:22-24).

I want you to notice something about Jesus. He was accessible. You didn’t have to go through five secretaries and a vice president to get to him. He didn’t stay in an office on the 48th floor. He wasn’t in a monastery. He moved among the people. He was in the villages and streets. He was in people’s homes. He was even available for little children. He was often in a crowd.

This tells me something about God. God is always available. I never have to worry about getting a busy signal when I pray. I will never get a voice-mail.

Jesus is going to meet two different people in this passage. They are given by way of contrast.

The Synagogue Official	The Woman with a Hemorrhage
Up and in	Down and out
A man	A woman
A leader in the synagogue	Considered ceremonially unclean and unable to enter either temple or synagogue.

Jesus was available to each of these people. And He was available not only so that you could go to Him, but also so that He could come to you. He made house calls!

The name of this man was Jairus. He was an official within the synagogue. This would have made him a respected member of the community - a man of prestige. But power and wealth and prestige are irrelevant when a little girl dies.

One of the deceptions of our culture is that bad things do not happen to rich people. But money is not an immunizer against tragedy. This man was evidently well-to-do. His wealth is attested by the fact that he was able to hire mourners and flute players. And he held a place of high honor within his community. Not only that, but he is also a religious man.

There is a lesson here. It is that rich people and respectable people and religious people suffer tragedy just like anyone else. And tragedy often makes one turn to the Lord.

This man was a part of the religious establishment. From where had most of the opposition the Jesus come up to this time? From the religious establishment! But this man did not care about social pressures. His little girl was dying. He had a need and he didn't care about anything else. This is why people always come to Christ. If you don't have a pressing need to come to Him, then you probably won't.

This man came in desperation. His motives may not have been the best. He did not come simply because he loved Jesus and wanted to get to know Him. He came because he was hurting. His heart was crushed. But even though his faith is inadequate and his motives are selfish, Jesus is going to meet his need.

We are like that man. We did not come to Jesus until we realized our need. We are still like that. It often takes a “divine two-by-four” over the head to get our attention. The story is told of a farmer who went to town to buy a mule. The salesman said, “I have a great mule. All you have to do is to sit on him and say, ‘Go mule,’ and you will find that he is very obedient.” The farmer bought the mule and got up on him and said, “Go mule!” The mule didn’t move. The farmer kicked his heels into the mule’s side and said, “Go mule!” The mule didn’t move.

The farmer got down off the mule and led it back to the salesman, complaining, “I spoke to the mule just like you told me and the mule wouldn’t budge.” The salesman instructed the farmer to get back up on the mule. Then he picked up a two-by-four and hit the mule over the head and the mule began to go. “I thought you only had to say, ‘Go mule!’” protested the farmer. “That’s right,” replied the salesman, “But first you have to get his attention.” We are often like that mule. God often has to do something drastic to us just to get us to pay attention.

A MIRACLE OF HEALING

A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, ²⁶ and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse -- ²⁷ after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak.

For she thought, “If I just touch His garments, I will get well.”

Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. (Mark 5:25-29).

The entire crowd was following Jesus as He made His way to the house of Jairus. Most followed from mere curiosity. But there was one woman in the crowd who had a special reason for being there. She had a need.

Notice the contrasting needs. The daughter of Jairus was twelve years old. She had enjoyed twelve years of life. This woman had endured twelve years of suffering. She had a hemorrhage. Under the ceremonial laws, she was considered to be perpetually unclean. She had spent all of her money on doctors and was worse than ever (it is interesting that the account

of Luke, the physician, does not mention this fact). She was unclean. Her clothes were considered to be unclean. Any furniture which she touched would become unclean. And any person with whom she came into contact would become unclean. Her husband was entitled to divorce her. She was shunned by the community. She was excluded from the temple and the synagogue.

She comes through the crowd and she reaches out to Jesus as He passes and touches His cloak. Her reasoning is that *“If I just touch His garments, I will get well.”*

Do you see it? She had faith. It may not have been a mature faith. It seems to have been more on the order of superstition. But God honors it. God takes an inadequate faith and causes it to grow. If the Lord were to wait until we presented Him with a mature faith in order to save us, then no one would ever be saved.

FAITH IN THE FACE OF DISEASE

Immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power proceeding from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched My garments?”

And His disciples said to Him, “You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’”

And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. ³³ But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. ³⁴ And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.” (Mark 5:30-34).

Jesus was on His way to heal the daughter of Jairus. Suddenly there is an interruption. Jesus knew how to handle interruptions. Sometimes important things happen when you are going somewhere else.

How do you handle interruptions? You need to learn something. Your spouse is not an interruption. Your children are not interruptions. From the time my daughter was a little girl, she used to come into my study and I always made it a point of trying to stop what I was doing and give her my attention. Sometimes her interruption was not very important. Sometimes it was rather trivial. But it was not trivial to her.

John Lennon once said that life is what happens to you while you are planning something else. As you make up your agenda, be aware that God

has His agenda and that at first it seems to be only an interruption.

This interruption took place when Jesus perceived that something special had happened. “*Who touched My garments?*” This says something about the perception of Jesus. He was aware of people. And He was aware that something special had just taken place. He was aware that He had been a source of healing power.

His question does not seem to be rhetorical. It seems as though He actually did not know who had touched Him. And so, He asks, “*Who touched My garments?*”

The woman comes forth and confesses what she has done. In doing so, she bears witness of the power of God. What was before known only between her and Jesus is now made public for all.

There are several lessons I want you to see here. First, notice that Jesus did not play favorites. He did not turn around and say, “Look lady, if you’ll stop touching Me, then I can get to this VIP’s house and, if we can win him over to our side, then we will really have a celebrity who can push our cause.” Jesus did not play favorites on the basis of social position. He did not cater to those who were the most popular or the most respected or the most handsome or the most wealthy.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised; God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are 29 that no man should boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

We are a pretty motley crew. Not the wise, but the foolish. Not the mighty, but the weak. Not the noble, but the base and the despised. To be sure, it does not say that there are not any wise, or that there are not any mighty, or that there are not any noble. But the majority of the members of the church do not fit into those categories.

Secondly, I want you to notice what the woman wanted versus what Jesus wanted. The woman wanted to get well. She wanted to be healed. That was accomplished, but Jesus wanted more. He wanted a relationship. He seeks her out and engages her in conversation. He presses her for a faith-relationship.

Jesus said to the woman, “*Daughter, your faith has made you well.*” This is striking. There were many people who were healed who had no faith

at all. Healing is always a sovereign act of God. How then can it be said that this woman's faith has healed her?

The phrase "*has made you well*" is translated from the perfect tense of the Greek word *sozo*, "to save." This woman was saved by her faith. In this context, Jesus is referring to her salvation from her physical illness. But the same application can be made to her spiritual salvation.

On the one hand, it is God who saves people. On the other hand, they are saved through faith. Such faith is given by God. This woman was saved as a result of her faith. But what she does not realize is that her faith has been given to her by God.

She has faith, but it is an immature faith. She has thought there might be something magical about the clothing of Jesus. Jesus does not say, "First you need to get your theology straightened out, and then I can heal you." He isn't nearly so interested in her theology as He is with her heart. When the heart is right, the theology will take care of itself.

FAITH IN THE FACE OF DEATH

While He was still speaking, they came from the house of the synagogue official, saying, "Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?"

But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." (Mark 5:35-36).

There is a point when circumstances seem to pass beyond the realm of hope. This is where real faith begins. This happened to Jairus as he and Jesus approached his home. He had believed that Jesus could heal his daughter, even though she was at the point of death. But what about someone who has already died?

This was the line beyond which some were unwilling to venture. They came to Jairus with advice which seemed sound from a strictly humanistic point of view.

"*Your daughter has died; why trouble the Teacher anymore?*" After all, you don't ask the doctor to make a house call when the patient is already dead. However, if the physician is One who has power over death, then it is another case entirely.

Jesus speaks words of hope. "*Do not be afraid any longer, only believe.*" Just as Jesus had told the woman that her faith had saved her, so now He tells this man that he must have faith.

He had just seen a living object lesson on the result of faith. Now he has a decision to make. He can listen to the advice of his friends. Or he can trust in Jesus.

You have the same choice. Friends from the world will tell you not to bother God right now because He has plenty to do and your situation is irrelevant to Him. They will advise you that faith is a nice thing to have, but there comes a time when you must put your faith aside to face “reality.” God says that He is reality. His is there and He has not been silent. And He calls you to believe in Him.

RESURRECTION!

And He allowed no one to accompany Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James.

They came to the house of the synagogue official; and He saw a commotion, and people loudly weeping and wailing. (Mark 5:37-38).

It is quite a scene as Jesus arrives at the home of Jairus. The culture of the ancient world called for loud commotion at the death of a loved one. In the case of those who were wealthy, professional mourners were often hired. The bereaved would rend their garments. The Talmud contains 39 different regulations on how you were to rip your clothes in such situations.

- You had to do it while you were standing.
- You had to do it over your heart and then leave it ripped for several days.

There were special rules on how women were to do this so that they did not expose themselves.

“The husband is bound to bury his dead wife and to make lamentation and mourning for her after the custom of all countries. And also the very poorest among the Israelites will not allow her less than two flutes and one wailing woman.” (Mishna Ketuboth 4:4).

Can you imagine what a mess this must have been? A great crowd has gathered and they are making a racket. It is into this scene that Jesus comes. The Prince of Peace raises His voice and calls for an end to the

racket. In the previous chapter He had ordered the storm to be silent. Now he calls for the mourners to be silent.

And entering in, He said to them, "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep." (Mark 5:39).

What does Jesus mean by this? Were the people mistaken? Had the girl really died? I believe that she had. Luke's account makes it very clear that she was really dead (Luke 8:53). But God has a different perspective on death than we do. We tend to view death as permanent. He views death as temporary. To Him, it is like falling asleep.

Have you ever noticed the reaction that children have when you tell them to go to sleep? They usually do not want to. When we fear death, we are acting as children. There is a lesson to learn here. It is that we have no reason to fear death. We have been joined to the One who has conquered death.

Did you ever stop to think that Jesus never preached a funeral sermon? Every time He attended a funeral, He broke it up by raising the dead.

Perhaps were we to understand the true nature of death, we would be able to rejoice. A Christian funeral has been described as a procession of solemn caterpillars dressed in black, carrying the corpse of a cocoon to its final resting place. The poor, distressed caterpillars continue on their way, never noticing the fluttering butterfly above them.

They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions, and entered the room where the child was. (Mark 5:40).

Now I want to ask you a question. Why did Jesus keep the crowd out? I think that it was because there are some things which the crowd is not meant to see.

The people on the outside were those who had been so arrogant that they had laughed at Jesus. They will not be permitted to witness this miracle. It will be kept from them. This is not a new principle. Jesus taught it in His Sermon on the Mount.

<p>The professional mourners move quickly from mourning to laughter and mockery. Their mourning was hypocritical. The definition of a hypocrite is a sympathetic funeral director at a \$20,000 funeral.</p>
--

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you into pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

You don’t give pearls to pigs. And there are some things that you don’t share with pagans because they just won’t understand. You can share the gospel with pagans. But when they laugh and mock and reject the gospel, then you can stop.

Thus, as Jesus enters the room in which the child lies, He takes with Him the parents and several of His own companions. Verse 37 says that these were Peter, James and John.

Why did Jesus take these three disciples? Under the Mosaic Law, the testimony of two or three witnesses was required to confirm an event (Deuteronomy 19:15).

This is the first time that Jesus has selected these three specific disciples to be singled out. It will not be the last time. They shall accompany Jesus up the mountain to witness the transfiguration (Mark 9:2). They shall accompany Jesus into the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33). Each time, they shall serve as witnesses. They shall witness His power, His majesty and His agony.

Passage	Instance	Manifests
Mark 5:37	Raising of daughter of Jairus	Power of Jesus
Mark 9:2	Transfiguration	Majesty of Jesus
Mark 14:33	Gethsemane	Agony of Jesus

Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “Talitha kum!” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). (Mark 5:41).

Jesus spoke to the child in Aramaic - probably because this was the language which she knew. Jewish people in that part of the world were trilingual. They were able to converse in three languages.

Hebrew	The language of their Scriptures.
Aramaic	The local language of the Middle East.

Greek	Universal language of the ancient world since the days of Alexander.
-------	--

Jesus speaks to this little girl in Aramaic - her native tongue. He says that words, “*Talitha kum!*”

- “*Talitha*” is the feminine form of the word for “little one.”
- “*Kumi*” is the feminine imperative of the verb, “to arise.”

Immediately the girl got up and began to walk, for she was twelve years old. And immediately they were completely astounded. (Mark 5:42).

The healing took place immediately. There was no gradual recuperation process. Life returned to the lifeless body and the girl arose (aorist tense) and began walking about the room (imperfect tense), indicating that she kept on walking.

And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this, and He said that something should be given her to eat. (Mark 5:43).

Why did Jesus order this? Why did He tell them to keep quiet about the miracle? It was obvious that the news would get out about the raising of this girl. The family could not keep the news silent. So why did Jesus give this command? I think that there are several reasons.

First, Jesus knew that people would take the words that He had spoken to be some kind of magical formula. He didn’t want people running into funeral homes yelling the words, “*Talitha kum!*” Indeed, this later took place in the days of the book of Acts as people tried to use the words of Paul as a magical formula to cast out demons (Acts 19:13).

A second reason may have been concern over the child’s continued welfare. Jesus did not want the girl to be the object of people’s undue attention. You will remember that after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Jewish Sanhedrin went so far as to plot the murder of Lazarus in order to cover up the miracle of his resurrection (John 12:10).

However, I think that the primary reason Jesus commanded silence is because of the unbelief of the multitude. Until they believed, no more signs would be given to them.

“For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and

whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” (Mark 4:25).

Here is the point. You have been given truth from God. You now have a decision to make. What are you going to do with that truth? If you merely take it and place it on the shelf to be dusted off each Sunday, then there will come a time when that truth will be taken from you.

JESUS THE PROPHET

Mark 6:1-6

Prophets have never been very popular people. They have been beaten, stoned, thrown into prison, fed to the lions, burned alive, and sawn asunder. Turned out of their homes, they have made their homes in caves, in mountains and in deserts.

Why are prophets so unpopular? I think that it is because they expose sin. We do not like to have our sins exposed. We do not like it when a pastor “leaves preaching and moves to meddling.” Moses promised that there would one day come a prophet to whom God’s people would finally listen.

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Jesus was that prophet. He spoke the words of the Lord in a way that no prophet had ever done. He did not merely say, “Thus saith the Lord.” He often said, “I Myself say unto you.” He spoke on the basis of His own authority as well as on the authority of the Father.

This was striking in a day when the common preaching style was to quote one of the great rabbis. And yet, there were those who did not listen to Him. Most notably were the members of His own home town and of His own family.

AN EXPECTANT HOMECOMING

Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. (Mark 6:1).

For several chapters we have followed the ministry and movements of Jesus around the region of the Sea of Galilee. Now he leaves the sea and climbs into the foothills of Lower Galilee, coming at last to “his hometown.” Back in Mark 1:9 we read that Jesus had come “from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The village of Nazareth is not mentioned again here. Perhaps there is a reason for this. It is so that we do not focus upon Nazareth and the people there and their reaction, but that we focus instead upon ourselves. What kind of reception have you given to Jesus? One of faith? Or have you also turned a skeptical ear to the Savior?

A SKEPTICAL RECEPTION

When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. (Mark 6:2-3).

Notice the reaction of the people. At first they were astonished. But the final outcome is that *they took offense at Him*. Why? What was the reason for their offense? It was because He was from their own hometown.

They could have believed in a Messiah that was from Jerusalem. Perhaps they could even have accepted a Messiah from one of the major metropolitan centers of Judaism like Alexandria or Antioch. But they could not accept the One who grew up down the street and who had brothers, sisters, and a mother still living in the community.

One of the problems with being a Christian for a long time is being a Christian for a long time. It is possible to become bland with an irreverent familiarity. For the first few years of our marriage, Paula and I lived right on the beach. To go to the ocean, we merely had to walk downstairs, out the door and we were at the seashore. But we noticed that after a few years, it got so that we hardly ever went to the beach. It had become bland.

Does that describe you? Has the sparkle gone out of your relationship with Christ to be replaced by a dull blandness? If it has, then this passage has something to say to you.

These people took offense at Jesus. And because of their offense, they did not recognize Him as the Messiah.

1. They got Distracted by their focus on Facts.

When Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, returned from his space flight in 1961, he made the remarkable announcement that he had not seen God in the heavens. A Russian orthodox priest in Moscow responded to him by saying, “If you have not seen God on earth, you will never see Him in heaven.”

These people had some of the facts - Jesus was the carpenter of Nazareth, son of Mary and brother to the children of Mary and Joseph. And their focus upon these facts would not allow them to see any others.

2. They got Close without becoming Convinced.

If you get close without becoming convinced, then you will become contemptuous. That is why we say that familiarity breeds contempt. This means that if a person hears the gospel and does not accept it, his resistance to the gospel will increase in direct proportion to his exposure to the gospel.

A PROPHETIC PRINCIPLE

Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.” (Mark 6:4).

I have been teaching the Bible for many years. My family has been very supportive of my ministry. But it was also quite a long time before my parents and my brothers were able to listen to me teach and accept it. After all, I was a part of their family. How could I be a teacher of the truths of the Lord?

This was true in the case of Jesus. His own brothers and sisters did not believe in Him. They found it hard to accept His teachings. Indeed, it would not be until after the resurrection that some of His brothers would begin to believe.

How about you? Husbands, are you able to listen to the counsel of a godly wife? (And I don’t mean someone else’s wife). Wives, are you able to accept the spiritual leadership of your husband? Children, do you value the guidance of your parents?

Our problem is often that we do not value that which is too familiar. We are quite ready to believe a Messiah who comes from some other location, but not one who comes from next door.

AN UNFORTUNATE RESULT

And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching. (Mark 6:5-6).

The result of their unbelief was that Jesus was unable to perform very many miracles in that location. Notice that it does not say that He would not do these miracles. It says that He could not do them. Why? Although the reason is alluded here, it is taught explicitly in Matthew 13:58. The reason He could do no miracles here was because of their unbelief.

There is a lesson here. It is that the prerequisite for God's intervention is belief. Miracles are preceded by belief. Belief is preceded by relationship with God. And relationship with God is preceded by grace.

GRACE ⇔ RELATIONSHIP ⇔ BELIEF ⇔ MIRACLES
--

This means that belief is a gift of God's grace. You can't get belief by hustling for it. You only get it when you go to God. HE is the author of faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Is God doing something special in your life? Is there something in your life that can only be explained in terms of the supernatural? If there is not, then maybe it is because there is no faith.

In the heart of unbelievers, familiarity breeds contempt. But in the heart of the believer, familiarity breeds love. To know Him better is to love Him more so long as that knowledge is mixed with faith.

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill was trying to get General Montgomery to take a course on logistics. Montgomery admitted that he was unfamiliar with the subject, but he quipped, "Familiarity would breed contempt." Churchill replied, "Yes, but without some familiarity, we wouldn't breed anything."

You are breeding something in your life today. You are either breeding contempt, or else you are breeding love.

SENDING FORTH THE TWELVE

Mark 6:7-13

When Christ set out to build His kingdom upon earth, there were many different strategies which He could have used. He could have waved His hand and erected a giant city with streets of gold and mighty ramparts. He could have sent forth His holy angels to announce the news in every tongue and in every land. He could have written His message upon the clouds for all to see. But He did none of these things. He had a different strategy.

Men were His method. The Gospel of Mark opened with Jesus selecting a small handful of men through whom He would change the world. Mark 3:13-19 tells of the initial appointment of the Twelve. Now we read of their first sending out. This is their first commission. It serves as “on the job training.”

They had followed Him. They had watched Him do the work of ministry. Now it is their turn. Like a mother eagle pushing her babies out of the nest, Jesus is going to send forth the Twelve on a short-term mission trip.

After this mission trip is over, the Twelve shall come back to spend a great deal more time being personally taught by Jesus. Indeed, they are going to learn better after this time because they are going to get a taste of what they really need to know.

There is nothing like experience to teach you what you don't know. That is why high school kids think that they know everything. They haven't had the experience to teach them what they don't know.

A STRATEGIC COMMISSION

And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits (Mark 6:7).

They were sent out in pairs. Six teams of two. Why? Certainly they

could have covered more ground if they had gone out separately. But there is an important reason for them being sent out in pairs. It is a “one another” principle.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. 10 For if either of them falls, the one will life up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).

The New Testament is filled with such “one another” passages. The point is that we are never meant to “go it alone.” We are called to live out our Christianity in community.

Notice also that they were given authority. This authority was over the realm of unclean spirits. This authority carried with it the power to cast out demons. There is another lesson here. It is that God never calls us without giving us the power to accomplish the task. Do you remember the last thing that Jesus ever did before ascending to heaven? He gave a final commission to His disciples. And in that commission was a promise of power. They would receive power from the Holy Spirit. We have the same promise of God’s Spirit. And we have the same resource for God’s power. What is it that God is calling you to do? Whatever it is, God will also provide the power to do it.

A HUMBLE PREPARATION

...and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff -- no bread, no bag, no money in their belt -- 9 but to wear sandals; and He added, “Do not put on two tunics.” (Mark 6:8-9).

Rabbinic law ordered that when a man entered the Temple courts he was to put off his staff and shoes and money belt. As Jesus sends His disciples out to do a holy work, He gives similar instructions to them - but allows them to wear sandals. They were to travel lightly. And their wallet was to travel lightly, too. They were not to be in the ministry for the money. They were not sent out to do deputation work, raising money for their support on the mission field. Instead they were to depend upon the Lord and upon the hospitality of His people for their

The term “bag” (pera) can refer to a collection bag used by priests to collect offerings.

upkeep. They were to limit their support. Even though they might possess greater resources, they were to limit that which they took with them.

There is a principle here. Whatever you own owns you. Most of us have too much stuff. All that stuff hinders us. We spend altogether too much time taking care of our stuff.

What would happen if you lost all of your stuff? Would you still be able to praise God? If you would not, then you have become enslaved to your stuff.

This is true of all Christians, but it is especially true of those whom God has called to shepherd His church. We are called to hold to Christ rather than to our possessions.

A DECISIVE RECEPTION

And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. 11 Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." (Mark 6:10-11).

The rabbis were never to place a price upon their teaching. This did not mean that their teaching was considered to be worthless. Rather it was to be considered priceless. The physical needs of the rabbis were to be met by the people to whom they ministered. The Talmud speaks of the blessings given to those who meet the physical needs of the rabbis.

Oriental culture dictated that it was the duty of citizens of a town to offer hospitality.
--

"If a man entertains a rabbi in his house and lets him enjoy his possessions, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had sacrificed the daily burnt offering." (Berakoth 10b).

Paul would later set forth this same principle for the church, teaching that *"the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel"* (1 Corinthians 9:14). The principle is that the minister of the gospel is not to be concerned with the meeting of his material needs. Those needs should be met by those to whom he is ministering.

Rabbinic Law stated that when an Israelite left the land of Israel and traveled abroad and then returned, he was to stop at the borders of the land

and shake the Gentile dust from his clothes. The implication in this passage is that anyone who did not accept the message of the apostles was to be considered on the same level as a pagan Gentile.

AN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

*They went out and preached that men should repent.
12 And they were casting out many demons and were
anointing with oil many sick people and healing them. (Mark
6:12-13).*

The ministry of the Twelve is a mirror to the ministry of Jesus. They did exactly what they had seen Him do throughout His ministry. We have seen three major aspects to the ministry of Jesus in our study of the Gospel of Mark.

Preaching Repentance	Casting out Demons	Healing the Sick
The Message	Credentials of the Messengers	
What they are to say	What they are to do	

1. Preaching of Repentance.

The disciples were to go forth and make an announcement. It is not really an evangelistic crusade. They are not to engage in apologetics. It is not their job to convince the world how wrong it is. They are not reformers. They are announcers.

We have not been called to win arguments or to get people to dress like we dress or to talk like we talk. We have been called to proclaim a message.

The message is a call to repent. This was the message which Jesus always preached. It is the message which the disciples preached. And it is the message that was preached throughout the book of Acts. What is repentance? Let me suggest several aspects.

- a. The word translated “repent” (*metanoeo*) is a compound of the words *meta* (“after”) and *noeo* (“to think”). It literally means “afterthought” or “change of mind.” But its meaning does not stop there. It always carries with it the idea of a

change of purpose. In the New Testament, this always includes a turning away from sin - a repudiation of the old life of sin to take up a new life of service toward God.

- b. Repentance is a gift of God, not merely a human work. The early church spoke of God granting repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).
- c. Genuine repentance involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will. It is not limited to any one human faculty - it involves the whole person.
- d. Sorrow in and of itself is not repentance. Judas felt remorse for his sins (Matthew 27:3) but he did not repent. Likewise, the rich, young ruler went away sorrowful (Matthew 19:22), but he still went away.
- e. Repentance is not a one-time act. The repentance which takes place at conversion is merely the beginning of a progressive, life-long process.
- f. Paul called men both to repent as well as to perform "*deeds appropriate to repentance*" (Acts 26:20).

2. Casting out Demons.

In verse 7 the Twelve were given authority over unclean spirits. They used this authority in casting out demons.

3. Healing the Sick.

Added to this is that they were anointing these sick with oil. This evidently served as a sign of the healing ministry of the Spirit.

The healing of demon possession and of various other sicknesses was to serve as the credentials of the Twelve. They have no credentials from an accredited university. They have no degrees behind their name. Their degrees are from the Lord.

There is something significant about these particular credentials. After all, Jesus could have given the disciples the ability to leap tall buildings with a single bound or to be faster than a speeding bullet. But these particular credentials were people-oriented. They were credentials which

met real physical needs.

Now let's make this personal. What are your credentials? I don't mean what kind of degree you have received from an academic institution. And I don't mean that you have some ability to heal the sick or to cast out demons. I mean what is there in your life that can only be explained in the terms of the supernatural? Do you have credentials from the Lord? And are they people-oriented?

It matters not in the long run what degrees you may be able to hang on your wall or what letters you can place along side your name. What matters are your heavenly credentials and the people whose lives you have touched with the gospel of Christ.

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark 6:14-29

The career of John the Baptist was given to us in a mere five verses at the beginning of Mark. We were told there of his sudden appearance in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance. He did no miracles, but people flocked to him anyway, eager to hear his message and to be baptized in the Jordan.

Then Jesus came to be baptized by John and from that time, our attention has been riveted to the carpenter-turned-rabbi as He travels through Galilee, performing works of healings, casting out demons, and preaching this same gospel of the kingdom which had been proclaimed by John. Now, as we are brought back to further consider the story of John, it is by way of a flashback, for by this time in the narrative, John has been put to death.

A GUILTY CONSCIENCE

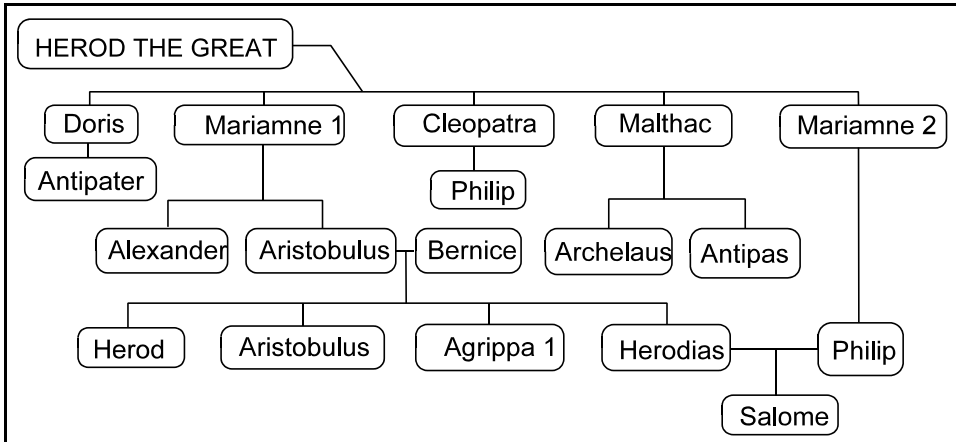
And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him."

But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" (Mark 6:14-16).

This is Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. Herod had a number of sons, some who actually survived the reign of their father. They all went by the name Herod. Herod Antipas is loosely called a king in this passage. He held a position of rulership akin to that of a governor - but it was via a political appointment from Rome.

The Herods had been the prominent political family in Israel for the past 70 years. Herod the Great had reigned over a united Israel from 37 B.C. to his death in 4 B.C. It was he who attempted the assassination of the infant Jesus recorded in Matthew 2. At his death, his kingdom was divided up among three of his surviving sons.

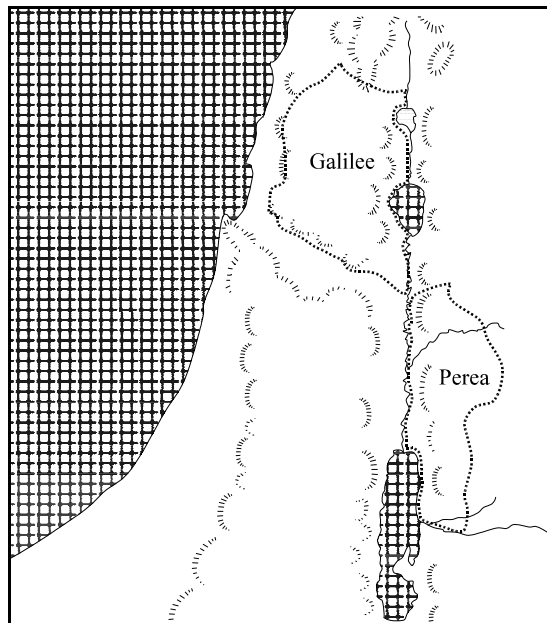


Archelaus had been given Judea, but had done such a poor job of ruling it that he had been removed from office and a governor put in his place. The current governor was Pontius Pilate.

Philip, the son of Herod by Cleopatra (not the one from Egypt), had been given the Tetrarchy of the lands of Trachonitus and Ituria to the northeast of Galilee; the area known today as the Golan Heights.

Antipas was given Galilee on the west and Perea on the east bank of the Jordan River. His title was that of a Tetrarch (literally, “ruler of a fourth part”). He built his palace at Sepphoris, only 4 miles to the northeast of Nazareth.

Thus, Herod Antipas was not actually a king. He ruled at the whim of Rome. In later years he would travel to Rome and request that the



Emperor Caligula make him a king, but he would be refused.

Although he was technically not a king, it was common for his subjects to refer to him as their king. After all, if it walked like a duck and it quacked like a duck, then it was only natural that they should call it a duck, even if Rome chose to call it a Tetrarch.

The situation that brings Herod into our story is the sending by Jesus of the Twelve in teams of two. He had commissioned them and He had instructed them and then He sent them out. They were to do what He had been doing.

- They were to preach.
- They were to cast out demons.
- They were to heal the sick.

Since the death of John the Baptist, more and more attention had come to the ministry of Jesus. He had been preaching and casting out demons and healing the sick. He had been traveling throughout Galilee and the Decapolis and news of His works and words had traveled far and wide. But now there is a change. The change comes by way of multiplication. Instead of Jesus alone, there are now twelve men in the mold of Jesus. It is as though Jesus is suddenly everywhere.

It is not long before news of this expanded ministry reaches the ears of Herod Antipas. Speculation runs rampant. A number of theories are voiced as to what could be at the bottom of this explosive ministry. And at the heart of the question is the true identity of this Galilean rabbi. Who is Jesus?

- John the Baptist risen from the dead.
- Elijah, whose coming had been promised in Malachi 4:5.
- A prophet like one from the Old Testament era.

The question, "Who is Jesus?" is still the most important question that can be asked. And the range of popular answers are no less misleading today than they were in that day.

Herod favored the first view, not because of any particular evidence, but because of his own guilty conscience. His guilty conscience made him overly superstitious. There is a proverb that says, "the wicked flee when no one is pursuing" (Proverbs 28:1). Such was the case with Herod. He feared that John the Baptist might be returning to haunt him.

A WRONGFUL IMPRISONMENT

For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her.

For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; ²⁰ for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him. (Mark 6:17-20).

During a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas had stayed in the home of his half-brother, Herod Philip (not Philip the Tetrarch) and his wife and half-niece, Herodias. Herodias was married to her half-uncle, Philip. They had a daughter named Salome. However, Herodias was discontent to be the wife of a commoner and she was impressed by the dashing young Antipas. They entered into an adulterous affair and secretly plotted to divorce their own spouses so that they could marry one another.

This presented some problems because Antipas was married to the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia. King Aretas was not going to take kindly to the divorce of his daughter and they reasoned that it would be best if she met with some kind of "accident." When the princess learned of the plot, she ran home to daddy. This would ultimately lead to a war in which Antipas would suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of his ex-father-in-law. Josephus relates that many of the Jewish people attributed the defeat of Antipas to his murder of John the Baptist.

"Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness toward one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism... Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure against him." (Antiquities 16:5:2).

With his wife gone, Herod wasted no time in bringing Herodias to live with him in Galilee and marrying her. Everyone in Galilee knew what was happening and everyone gossiped about the situation, but no one said anything publicly. No one except John.

John spoke out against this adulterous affair. He spoke out publicly and in the hearing of Herod. His ministry was to call people to repentance. This involved pointing out sin, especially when it was evident among the leaders of the people.

There is a principle here. It is that leaders are called to a higher responsibility. It is true in the church. You have only to read the qualifications for the offices of elder and deacon to see that it calls for a high standard of living. It is also true in government.

It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established on righteousness. (Proverbs 16:12).

It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. (Proverbs 31:4b-5).

Are you in a position of authority? It might be within the church or in government or in your job or even in your family. You have a high calling and a high responsibility.

John spoke out against the sin of Herod. And in doing so, he brought down the full wrath of Herodias. She was an ambitious woman. She manifested all of the ambitions of the other Herods. She had left her own husband because she wanted the prestige of being a queen. She would be the driving force behind the aspirations of Herod Antipas. She would tolerate nothing in her way - including this meddlesome prophet. Like Jezebel of old, she sought to have her Elijah killed. There was only one problem. The problem was Herod.

1. *Herod was afraid of John (6:20).*

He knew that John was right in what he was saying. He found it difficult to put a man to death for telling the truth. Josephus adds that Herod was also afraid of the public reaction were he to put John to death.

2. *Herod... used to enjoy listening to him (6:20).*

There was something about the preaching of John that Herod longed to hear. Perhaps he felt the stirrings of the Spirit of God. He was touched by the words of John. And this left him in a quandary. Should he believe the words of John and leave his adulterous relationship? Or should he reject those words?

There is a principle here. Truth always moves you. As you hear truth, you will always be moved either toward that truth to grasp it and hold it and appropriate it, or you will be moved away from it as you are hardened to its influence.

A FOOLISH PROMISE

A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; 22 and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you."

And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." (Mark 6:21-23).

Herod had a winter palace on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea located at the extreme southern point of his domain in Perea. It was known as Macherus. It had been built in the days of the Hasmoneans and had then been enlarged by Herod the Great and surrounded with elegant defenses. The town stood on the shoulder of the hill over which stood a mighty fortress, surrounded by walls over 200 feet high. Within this fortress was a magnificent palace.

From the heights of this fortress, one could look across the Dead Sea 3800 feet below to see the mountains of Judea in the distance. Josephus tells us that it was here that John the Baptist was brought and imprisoned.

The daughter of Herodias is not mentioned by name in the Bible, but Josephus tells us that her name was Salome (Antiquities 18:5:4). We do not know the nature of this dance, but it was sufficient to draw from Herod this amazing promise of up to half his kingdom.

We only understand the foolishness of this promise when we realize that it was a promise which Herod could not possibly keep because his kingdom was not his to give. He had begun to think of himself as an oriental king when he was only an appointed puppet acting at the behest of Rome.

There is a lesson here. It teaches us the danger of acting upon

impulse. I have a personal rule which I try to follow (I don't always succeed). It is that I try never to make important decisions on the spur of the moment or when I am tired or depressed.

A MURDEROUS REQUEST

And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist."

Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." (Mark 6:24-25).

Upon hearing the promise of Herod, Salome sought out her mother to ask her advice. It was evidently a stag party with no women present. Herodias had for some time entertained a grudge against John the Baptist. Now is her chance for revenge. And so, she instructs her daughter in this murderous request.

Herodias is the real villain of this story. She manipulated her daughter into degrading herself and she manipulated her husband into an act of murder. The Jewish rabbis had a saying that a good woman might marry a bad man, because she might be able to make him as good as herself; but a good man can never marry a bad woman, for she will eventually drag him down to her own level. Herod was not a good man to start with - but his wife made him a lot worse.

There is a lesson here for wives. You are going to influence your husband. The question is whether you are going to influence him for good or for evil.

THE POWER OF PEER PRESSURE

And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her.

Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. (Mark 6:26-28).

Herod had resisted his wife's past attempts to have John killed. He knew that John was right in what he said. And yet, something caused him to act in a way contrary to what he desired. It was peer pressure. Even kings and tetrarchs are not immune to its pull. We need to be aware of its dangers.

You might be thinking to yourself, "Not me! I would never let myself be persuaded to act through peer pressure." You need to be aware that peer pressure takes many forms. It can make you dress a certain way. It can make you talk a certain way. It can cause you to act and it can cause you not to act when you know that you should. Peer pressure will take place anytime that you place the opinions of people over the opinions of the Lord.

Herod had invited the lords, the military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee to impress them. He wanted them to think highly of him. This is why he had been trying to act like a king. And now he was trapped into this evil deed.

Herod was to come to an ignominious end. In later years, he would suffer defeat at the hands of King Aretas of Arabia. Then at the urging of his ambitious wife, he and Herodias would travel to Rome to seek the kingship of all of Palestine. His request would be his undoing. As he stood before Emperor Caligula, he was accused of conspiring against Rome and banished with his wife to Gaul where he died as a penniless pauper.

BURIAL OF A MARTYR

When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb. (Mark 6:29).

As we conclude this narrative, we are struck by the various ends of the key characters. From a strictly human point of view, it seems as though the forces of darkness have won. John the Baptist has been silenced. Unlike Elijah of old, he has been silenced by the modern-day Ahab and Jezebel.

And yet, there is a question. The question haunts Herod as he continues to sit upon his shaky throne. Who is Jesus? And what is His relationship to John? For Herod there will be no answer. The answer does not come to those who bend to peer pressure. It does not come to those whose main interest is the furtherance of their own petty kingdoms.

The story of John the Baptist does not end here. It will not be over until the day of resurrection. The one who was buried in the ground will rise again from the dead. To find a crown of life awaiting him. He will stand before the King of kings and will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" And the prophet who lost his life shall find it.

FEEDING FIVE THOUSAND

Mark 6:30-44

Of all of the miracles which are recorded during the ministry of Jesus, only one is described in all four gospel accounts. It is the one which we find in this chapter - the feeding of the five thousand.

This was an especially significant miracle. It was significant because it involved the most number of people. It had the most eye-witnesses. It also had the most volume. The only other miracle that ever came close to it was the turning of water into wine. Bread to the multitude; wine to the wedding guests. Bread and wine - He still offers it to us. The setting for the story took place in a time of retreat - a time when Jesus was seeking to get away from it all.

RETREAT TO A LONELY PLACE

And the apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught.

And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat).

And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. (Mark 6:30-32).

It had been a time of great activity. There was a growing intensity to the ministry of Jesus that reached its culmination as He sent the Twelve out on a short-term mission trip.

Now they are back. They have done a good job and they are tired. And so, He determines to take them away from the crowds. They will go to a lonely place so that they can recharge.

Have you ever suffered from burn-out? You can come to the point when you are tired and just can't get the emotional energy to go on. At such

Verse 30 is Mark's only instance of using the term "apostle." He does so here because they have been <i>sent out</i> and were now returning.
--

a time, you need to find a lonely place. You will find Jesus waiting for you there.

THE COMPASSION OF THE CHRIST

And the people saw them going, and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them.

And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. (Mark 6:33-34).

It was one thing for Jesus and His disciples to make plans to get away from it all. It was another thing to accomplish it. They got away from the crowds, but the crowds did not get away from them.

Jesus could have gotten angry at the multitude. After all, they were intruding at a time when they were not wanted. The office was closed and Jesus and His disciples were going on vacation. Couldn't they make an appointment?

Instead, the reaction of Jesus was one of compassion. He saw their needs and He felt for them. He cared. The Christ event is the evidence that God cares. He did not stand aloof from humanity. He became involved. He was involved in the discipleship of the Twelve. Now He will be involved in a ministry to the masses.

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE CHRIST

And when it was already quite late, His disciples came up to Him and began saying, "The place is desolate and it is already quite late; 36 send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat!" And they said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" (Mark 6:35-37).

Imagine the scene. Jesus and His disciples have left the crowded

cities and have made their way to a lonely place. They were followed by the crowds, so instead of spending the day in rest and relaxation, Jesus and His disciples have a day of teaching.

Now at the end of the day, the disciples are tired and hungry. And they aren't the only ones. The people are getting hungry as well. And so they come to Jesus with a suggestion. It is that He send the multitude away to surrounding areas where they will be able to purchase food. The plan of the disciples is entitled: "Every man for himself." But Jesus has another plan. He says to them, "You feed them."

This was an impossible request. I can picture their consternation. They pull out his pocket calculator and begin punching buttons: "Price of hamburgers multiplied by 5000 equals 200 denarii." A single denarius was considered to be an average day's wage. At this rate, it would take all Twelve disciples working for three weeks could make enough money to make the purchase demanded by Jesus.

A denarius was a small silver coin. Its name meant "ten-piece" because it took ten copper coins to make a single denarius.
--

This was an impossible situation. But Jesus has the answers to those kinds of situations. He is trying to teach you something in the midst of your impossible situation. And it is in the understanding of that lesson that impossible situations become bearable.

What is your situation? No matter what it is, don't forget to look for the lesson. Listen for the instructions of the Christ. Listen, because Jesus has the answers to the questions that trouble you.

You see, this situation did not come about by mere chance. It was brought about purposefully. It was brought about to manifest the power of God. The same is true of your situation.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHRIST

And He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they said, "Five loaves and two fish."

And He commanded them all to recline by groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ And they reclined in companies of hundreds and of fifties.

And He took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them;

and He divided up the two fish among them all. 42 And they all ate and were satisfied. (Mark 6:38-42).

Mark's attention to detail is striking. He tells of how the people are commanded to recline by groups on the green grass. Why is this significant? Because of the imagery that has already been invoked. In verse 34, the people had been described as sheep without a shepherd. Now the sheep are told to sit on the green grass. This description echoes from the world of the Old Testament.

*1 The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters. (Psalm 23:1-2).*

Jesus is doing the work of a shepherd. He comes to those who are like sheep without a shepherd and He leads them and He feeds them as they lie down in green pastures.

We can imagine the scene. The grass is green. The sun is low in the sky. The cool breeze is blowing off the Sea of Galilee. The disciples are quietly obedient in organizing the people into groups of 50's and 100's. They may have been weak in faith, but they still obeyed. And as a result, God will do something wonderful.

Having problems believing? Have a difficult time in the faith department? Welcome to the crowd. We live in an age of doubt and unbelief and Christians are not exempt from this problem. But when you face your doubts, there is a lesson here for you. It is a lesson for when you find it difficult to believe. When you are having trouble believing, obey anyway. Obey as though you believe, and eventually you will find strength for your faith. The disciples obeyed the words of Jesus. He has them divide the people into workable groups. There is a prayer of blessing.

I cannot help but think that the disciples were peeking during the prayer to see where the delivery trucks were going to come from. And yet, when the miracle takes place, we are struck by its simplicity. The heavens did not open. Trumpets did not sound. We are not told how Jesus did it.

We simply read that the disciples begin to disperse the food. And there is more food. And still more. And people are getting seconds. And there is still more. There is a lesson here. It isn't that Christianity has been tried and failed, it is that it hasn't been tried.

"God's blessings are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, not according to the depth of our faith." - Max Lucado

Are you...

- afraid?

His courage is sufficient for you.

- alone?

His presence is sufficient for you.

- in sin?

His grace is sufficient for you.

- in need?

His abundance is sufficient for you.

THE ABUNDANCE OF THE CHRIST

And they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. 44 And there were five thousand men who ate the loaves. (Mark 6:43-44).

When it is all over, the disciples begin cleaning up. Twelve disciples picking up twelve full baskets of food. One for each disciple. Do you see the lesson? It is a lesson in abundance. Jesus is not just sufficient for our needs. He is abundantly sufficient.

The reason that the disciples are assigned cleanup duty is so that they will learn this lesson. They had wondered earlier where they would get enough food to feed the multitude when there was barely enough food to feed themselves. They may have thought, "If we give what we have to everyone else, then we will have to go hungry." Instead of going hungry, each disciple will end up with a load of food.

As we read of this miracle, we should note that it is an echo of a previous event from the pages of the Older Testament. It reminds us of the time that God brought His people, Israel, into the wilderness after delivering them from Egypt. He fed them in the wilderness.

But Jesus is to be seen as the better Moses. Moses fed the people and there was enough for that single day; Jesus feeds the multitude and there are twelve baskets left over. Moses calls down bread from heaven; Jesus is Himself the bread from heaven who provides bread from His own hand. The disciples were being taught a lesson. It is the same lesson that we need to learn. It is the lesson that Jesus is sufficient for our needs.

Dr. David Livingston, the famous missionary-explorer to Africa, had a medical condition which required a regular diet of milk. He kept a goat which supplied the necessary milk. Dr. Livingston was praying one morning and he told the Lord, "Everything I have is Yours, Lord." He was visited that

same week by the tribal chief and he noticed that the chief was eyeing his goat. Desiring to show God's love, he took the goat and gave it to the chief. In return, the chief presented him with the staff which he was carrying.

Later that day, Livingston confided in one of his friends, "I don't know why I was so stupid as to give my goat away. All I have to show for it is this stupid stick." His friend replied, "You don't understand. That isn't just a stick; it is a scepter. You no longer own one goat. Now you own all the goats in the village."

When we come to the Lord in faith, giving Him our lives, we find that He has given us a scepter in return. And we have been walking around, thinking that it was just a stick.

A SAVIOR IN THE STORM

Mark 6:45-52

Have you ever gotten a pop quiz? It is the sudden, unexpected test which takes you by surprise. It isn't like the final exam for which you spend the previous night cramming. There is no warning. You walk into class and the professor says, "Take out a sheet of paper because you are going to be tested."

The disciples are about to get a pop quiz. They have just been through an incredible day. After sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him teach the multitude, they watched Him feed over 5,000 people with five bagels and two sardines.

This wasn't done with mirrors. There was no trick photography involved. They felt the loaves of bread with their own hands as they passed them out to the multitude. And then they picked up twelve bags full of leftovers.

What next? What do you do after such an experience? Jesus followed this up by sending them away.

THE SAVIOR WHO SENDS

And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away.

And after bidding them farewell, He departed to the mountain to pray. (Mark 6:45-46).

I want you to notice how this story starts. Jesus told His disciples to do something and they did it. They were doing what Jesus told them to do in the right place and at the right time and they still found themselves in the middle of a storm.

Are you in a storm right now? You may be thinking to yourself, "Lord, what did I do to deserve this?" It may be that you have done nothing wrong. It is possible to be completely obedient to the Lord and to still find yourself in the middle of a storm.

Bad things happen. And sometimes they happen even though you have done nothing wrong. Sometimes they happen simply so that God can draw near.

The disciples had only just come from the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee that very morning. Now they are being sent back. No explanation is given. But as a result of their obedience, they will have an unexpected encounter with the Lord.

THE SAVIOR WHO COMES

And when it was evening, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and He was alone on the land.

And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea (Mark 6:47-48a).

As we read this passage, it is familiar to us. The thing of which you ought to be aware is that it was familiar to the disciples, too. Back in Mark 4:37 they had been in the same boat on the same lake in a similar storm. They had come to this same spot on the lake and the boat had begun to sink. They woke up Jesus who had been sleeping in the back of the boat and He had stilled the storm.

Now they are here again. I imagine Peter saying, “I know what to do! We'll wake up Jesus and He can turn the storm off!” John answers, “Uhh Peter, we have a bit of trouble. We left Jesus back on the shore.” And to make matters worse, John's gospel tells us that they had taken the only boat.

What do you do when you are alone in the midst of the storm? You know that Jesus is aware of what you are going through. But look as you might, you can't see Him.

The passage seems to indicate that, although Jesus could see His disciples from His vantage point where He had gone to pray, they could not see Him. This situation continued until *the fourth watch of the night*.

I believe that there was something in the boat that should have comforted the disciples. There were twelve baskets of leftovers which bore mute testimony to the power and the compassion of God. When they looked at those twelve baskets, they should have realized that the God who provided for the needs of the multitudes would not fail to provide for them in the midst of this storm.

We are guilty of the same thing. We have been blessed by the Lord in an abundant way. But when the storm comes, we forget. That is why we

are instructed to remind one another. The world says, “Drink and forget your troubles.” Jesus says, “Drink and remember.”

This storm was no accident. It started when the disciples got out into the middle of the Sea. It ended when Jesus got into the boat with the disciples. It had a script. It was there for a purpose and when that purpose was accomplished, the storm stopped.

Storms are not very pleasant. They can be frightening. They are loud and wet and uncomfortable. But your storm is not an accident of nature. God has ordained your storm. It is His storm. He has a reason for it, even if you do not know what that reason is. And when that reason has been fulfilled, then your storm will end.

Now I want to ask you a question. Why did Jesus come walking on the water? It is more than that He merely wanted to get to the other side. It is to teach the disciples something. But what is it?

It is not to teach the disciples how to walk on water. They never learn to walk on water after this and most people running around today claiming to be able to perform miracles have problems with this one.

Jesus walks on water to prove to the disciples that He can. He can always do the impossible. Why do they need to know this? Because He is going to send them out to do the impossible, too. He is going to commission these very ordinary men to go out and make disciples of all men in every land. Impossible! They are not natural born leaders. They are not even seminary graduates. But they will accomplish the impossible. With God, all things are possible.

Why do you need to know this? Because God has called you to do the impossible. He has called you to live a clean life in a dirty world. He has called you to be a faithful witness of Him. He has called you to be Christ to the world. And He has shown you that this is possible because He is with you.

THE SAVIOR WHO IS RECOGNIZED

And seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.

But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were frightened. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, “Take courage; it is I, do not be

afraid.”

And He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were greatly astonished, ⁵²for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened. (Mark 6:48-52).

The Jews divided the night into three watches. The Romans divided it into four watches.

First Watch	6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Second Watch	9:00 p.m. to midnight
Third Watch	Midnight to 3:00 a.m.
Fourth Watch	3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.

The fact that Jesus came to them in the fourth watch means the disciples rowed against the storm all night. And right when it seemed as though things could get no worse, they did. Or at least, they seemed to.

At this point, I want you to notice something. The disciples had been straining at the oars all night. Evidently, they had been fighting the storm all night. But as bad as the storm was, the boat remained afloat in the storm throughout the entire night. There is a lesson here. It is that things are not always as bad as they seem.

The story is told of a man who was walking along a railroad track on a very dark night when he came to a bridge. He had gotten halfway across when he heard a train whistle up ahead. He quickened his pace, but soon could see the light of the oncoming locomotive approaching. With nowhere else to turn, he got down and lowered himself over the side, hanging onto the trestle as the train thundered past above him. However, after the train had passed, he found that he hadn't the strength to pull himself back up. He called out for help, but there was no answer. He hung there all night, terrified that he might slip and fall into the yawning abyss below. As day broke, he looked down to see a drop of only six inches.

We are like that man. We look at our situation and it looks really bad. If we could only see it from God's perspective, it would be nothing at all, not because the situation is so small, but because God is so big. Jesus said that with faith we could move mountains. But the reverse is also true. Without faith, we tend to build our own mountains.

When the disciples finally did see Jesus, they did not recognize Him. I don't know what they were expecting. Angels to descend. The heavens to

open. A divine proclamation to still the storm. Or perhaps just the boat to sink and for them to drown.

I don't know what they were expecting. But I do know that they were not expecting to see Jesus walking on the water. They knew that people cannot walk on water and they knew that Jesus was a person and they reasoned that this could not be Jesus. And since Jesus came in a way that they did not expect, they almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers. Unless we look and listen closely, we risk the same thing.

When I was about twelve years old, I had a paper route. The route took me along the back of one of the canals in South Miami. One rainy day, I spotted a baby duckling along the road. He was being stalked by a big old tomcat. I chased the cat away, but he didn't go very far, figuring that as soon as I went my way he could come back and have some duckling stew. I decided that I would take the little duck home for his own safety. However, as I approached him, he scuttled across the way and tried to hide under some bushes. I wanted to tell him, "Little duckling, I'm not the problem; I'm the solution!"

Jesus must have felt the same way with the disciples. They saw Him in the middle of the storm and they called Him a ghost. They saw the glow but did not recognize God. They saw the light but missed the Lord. When we see small lights on the horizon of our storms, we often have the same reaction.

Because we look for the bonfire, we miss the candle. Because we expect the shout, we miss the whisper. But God often comes in the still, small voice. And the next time you are in the midst of your storm, stop and listen. He is closer than you think.

JESUS AND TRADITION

Mark 7:1-23

The theme song of the play “Fiddler on the Roof” is sung by Tevya at the very outset and is entitled, “Tradition.” It is a song that speaks of the various traditions of the Orthodox Jews. They have traditions for everything. Their traditions tell them how to eat, how to work and how to play. They touch every area of life.

Traditions are not necessarily bad. We have traditions within the Christian church and some of them are good traditions.

The confessing together of the Apostles Creed.

The singing of the Gloria Patri.

The meeting of Christians in a common place on Sunday morning.

The observance of the Lord’s Supper is a tradition given by the Lord Himself.

These traditions are not bad. They reflect our Christian faith. They are a heritage left to us by our spiritual ancestors. And yet, there is a danger. It is the danger of moving from tradition to traditionalism.

Tradition is the living faith of those now dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living. This is the problem with which Jesus deals in Mark 7. It is the problem of a dead faith.

6:1	6:14	6:30	7:1	7:24
Home Town	Herod Antipas	Disciples <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feed 5000• In the storm	Scribes & Pharisees	Syrophoenician woman
No faith	Superstitious Faith	Little Faith	Dead Faith	Great Faith

In the previous chapter, we saw Jesus presented as the Lord of the universe who exercises His power over the creation in stilling the storm, moving over the waters as the Spirit of old moved over the primordial waters.

Now we come to see that Jesus is also the Lord of the spiritual universe as he comes on the scene to set men free of religion.

THE DELEGATION AND THE DIRTY HANDS

The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, ² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.

For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; ⁴ and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots. (Mark 7:1-4).

This incident begins with the coming of a group of scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. This is not the first time we have seen these two groups in the Gospel of Mark. They were first seen in chapter 2.

The scribes were the official interpreters of the Mosaic law. One of their duties was the copying and preserving of the Scriptures. They had no printing presses and each copy of the Scriptures had to be written by hand. The scribes saw themselves as the protectors of the law. It was their interpretations which formed the basis for the practices of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a select denomination which had emerged in the first century before Christ. The title "Pharisee" literally meant "the separated ones." Unlike many Jews of that era, the Pharisees had remained separate from pagan Greek philosophy and pagan Greek culture. They did this by holding fast to all of the Jewish traditions.

They were the evangelicals of Orthodox Judaism. They held to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. They believed in the supernatural, in angels, and in a life after death. But their beliefs did not stop there. In an effort to protect and sanctify the law, they had build a great hedge of rules and interpretations around the law.

The Pharisees had already conducted meetings on how they might put Jesus to death. Their official position on Jesus was that He was in league with Satan - that He was using the power of Satan to perform His miracles.

The event that brought about this particular crisis was over the issue of their tradition of ceremonial hand-washing. They saw *that some of His*

disciples were eating their bread with impure hands.

We are not told that this took place at someone's home or at a formal meal. It will not be until verse 17 that Jesus and His disciples will enter a house. They were not sitting down to eat a meal now. They were catching a between-meal snack.

Notice what they were eating. They were eating bread. Where do you think they got this bread? Perhaps it was some of the leftovers from the feeding of the 5,000. They had gathered up twelve baskets full of bread - one for each disciple. Now they are snacking on that bread.

But there is a problem. They have not washed their hands. It is not that their hands are especially dirty. Their hands haven't been anywhere the bread hasn't been. But Jewish tradition calls for a ceremonial cleansing to take place before eating.

When we read that they *were eating their bread with impure hands*, the Greek text says they were eating with "common hands." Their hands had not been ceremonially sanctified through a ritual cleansing. The requirements for this ritual of cleansing were very exact. The Mishnah devoted 30 chapters to purification rituals.

- There must be water enough to fill one and a half eggshells.
- The water was to be poured on the hands which must be free of any covering.
- The hands would then be lifted up so that the water would run to the wrist and thereby make certain that the whole of the hand was washed.
- The water which ran down to the wrist could not be permitted to drip back to the fingers which were now pure.
- If anyone performed this rite of handwashing in the morning with the intention that it should apply to the meals of the whole day, it was considered valid.
- This ritual demanded that the observer sprinkle water on himself both before and after eating.
- Those who were especially pious would even wash between the main course and the desert.

The rabbis taught that even God must submit to these rituals of purity. They said that Aaron purified the Lord after He had become defiled by going down to Egypt. They also taught that the Lord defiled Himself by touching the dead body of Moses and that He had to cleanse Himself by washing Himself in a bath of fire.

The rabbis told the story of one heroic Jew who had been imprisoned by the Romans and who, when he was brought water in his dungeon, used it

for purification rather than for drinking and so suffered dehydration rather than ceremonial uncleanness.

It did not matter than not one verse of Scripture taught anything about washing hands before eating. The Jews took their tradition as being of an equal authority to the written law. They taught that Moses wrote down one law at Sinai but was also given another “oral law” and that this oral law was passed from generation to generation to become their traditions.

This oral law contained hundreds of interpretations of the written law. For example, when Exodus 34:26 taught that “*you shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk,*” the oral law said that this meant that it was a sin to eat meat and drink milk at the same time. The rabbis had gone on to teach that if a pot of milk boils over and some of the milk drips over into a pot of meat, then the meat is unclean and must be thrown away. Jesus was facing the entire weight of these traditions as He confronted these scribes and Pharisees.

A QUESTION OF TRADITION

The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”

And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. ⁷ But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ ⁸ Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:5-8).

This delegation of Pharisees and scribes challenge Jesus on the behavior of His disciples. They haven’t observed the proper ritual for handwashing. They have broken with tradition. It did not matter that the Bible did not teach this tradition. It was a tradition and they were bound to it and they wanted everyone else to be bound to it.

The problem here is one of legalism. What is legalism? It is a love of the law that supersedes the love of the God who made the law. It is a love of law for the sake of law.

Jesus could have ignored the delegation. Or He could have told them that their oral law was silly and superficial and that they should stick to the Scriptures. But He does much more than that. He goes to the heart of their problem.

Jesus rebukes the delegation. He calls them hypocrites. He does this

by quoting to them the words of Isaiah: *“Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites.”* The word “hypocrite” comes from a Greek word that was used to describe an actor. The actors of Greek theater would hold a mask in front of their face while they were playing their part on the stage. A ὑποκριτής was one who hid his true self *under a mask*.

These scribes and Pharisees are doing that. They are not sincere. They are merely playing a part. They are trying to act spiritual with their ceremonies and rituals. They are hiding behind a mask.

But before we judge too harshly the scribe and Pharisees, perhaps we ought to talk about you and me. Are we hiding behind our own masks? Do we put on our own masks of respectability and spirituality on Sunday morning as we go to church? If so, then we need to take note of the words of Jesus. The quote that Jesus gives is taken from Isaiah 29:13. It is a passage of condemnation spoken against the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me; and their reverence for me consists of tradition learned by rote, ¹⁴ therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.” (Isaiah 29:13-14).

Isaiah wrote in the days of the divided kingdom. The nation of Israel was a nation divided. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had built its own temple and ordained its own priesthood. They would soon find themselves destroyed.

But this passage was not written to the Northern Kingdom. It was written to the Southern Kingdom. It was written to the people who had the true temple of God and the true priesthood and the true sacrifices. Because of what they had, they looked down their arrogant noses at the Northern Kingdom. But the Lord challenged their false worship. He said that it was all a sham. They were worshiping on the outside, but their hearts were not in it. The contrast that Jesus presents is between the commandments of God versus the doctrines of men.

God’s Commandments	Men’s Traditions
<i>“But in vain do they worship Me” (7:7).</i>	<i>“Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (7:7).</i>

<i>"Neglecting the commandment of God" (7:8).</i>	<i>"You hold to the tradition of men" (7:8).</i>
<i>"You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God" (7:9).</i>	<i>"In order to keep your tradition" (7:9).</i>

There is nothing wrong with tradition until you elevate your tradition over the commands of God and try to impose them upon others. The problem with the legalist is that he attempts to bind other people with his own laws and traditions as if they were God's.

You might be thinking, "That doesn't apply to me. I don't hold to any traditions that aren't in the Bible." Really? What would be your reaction if someone came into your church next Sunday in a T-shirt and a pair of cutoffs? How about if a major portion of the church funds were taken and given to the poor? Or what if the pastor announced that from now on he would preach 2-hour sermons? I have found things like this to shake churches to their very foundations. The reason is because legalists usually hate change.

A PROFANE PRACTICE

He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; ¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),' ¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; ¹³ thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that." (Mark 7:9-13).

The hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees was seen in their practice of the tradition of Corban. The word "Corban" is a Hebrew term. It is the Hebrew word for "offering." It describes something that has been dedicated to God as an offering.

The Jews had developed a tradition in which a man would declare his money to be Corban - it would be dedicated to God and the temple ministry. This does not mean that he would give the money to the temple. He would keep it and spend it as necessary. But when he died, it would then go to the

temple.

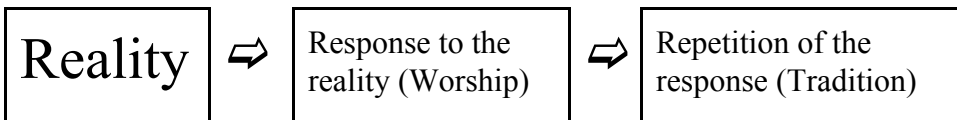
Thus, if a man's parents became needy and came to their son for financial help, he would tell them, "I would like to give you some money, but I cannot because all of my money has been dedicated to God." They would use their tradition as an excuse not to honor their father and mother - an undermining of one of the Ten Commandments.

There is heavy irony in the voice of Jesus as He says, "*You nicely set aside the commandment of God...*" (7:9). The scribes and Pharisees prided themselves on being experts in the law. Jesus commends them for being such experts. He says, "You guys are doing a great job in setting aside the law of God so that you can guard against any infringement on your own tradition."

There is something about hypocrites which make them strive for the praise of other men. And so, Jesus gives them praise. But it is the praise of irony. It is not that Jesus is against all tradition. It is that He is against the misuse of tradition.

There is a principle here. If you do everything the way other people have always done it, then you are blind. The corollary is that if you do nothing the way other people have always done it, then you are a fool. We are not called to blindly follow tradition; neither are we called to blindly reject all tradition.

Tradition starts with a reality. Then there is a response to the reality. This is what worship is. And then there is a repetition of the response. This is tradition. We can chart the process like this:



The danger only comes when you begin to have the repetition without the reality. Sometimes you need to stop in the middle of your worship and ask, "Why am I doing this?" And if you don't have an answer, then you need to stop and go back to the reality.

A PARABLE OF PURITY

After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: 15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. 16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him

hear.” (Mark 7:14-16).

Having dismissed the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus returns to the multitude. Apparently they had retreated from the presence of the delegation. Perhaps they had been intimidated by these pious Jerusalem officials. Now as Jesus speaks to the multitude, it is concerning the false ideas of the scribes and the Pharisees.

We would probably say to Jesus, “You shouldn’t use the pulpit as a platform for your disputes with the scribes and the Pharisees unless you are willing to give them equal time.”

We would be wrong. The scribes and the Pharisees had come on the scene, spreading their false traditions. Jesus now speaks against them. Why? Because it is always the duty of the shepherd to protect the sheep from wolves. Jesus had a shepherd’s heart for the people. And He would not stand by quietly and permit false teaching to go unexposed.

Jesus points out that *“there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man”* (7:15).

The Pharisees and the scribes put all of the emphasis on which outside thing went into a man. They wouldn’t touch something that was deemed unclean. They wouldn’t eat without going through an elaborate ritual. When they traveled abroad, they would even stop at the border of their homeland and shake off the Gentile dust from their clothes. Their emphasis was upon the outside. They should have been more concerned with what was on the inside.

THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.

18 And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, 19 because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.)

20 And He was saying, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride

and foolishness. 23 All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” (Mark 7:17-23).

The disciples still had not understood. They come to Jesus and He further elaborates.

That which is Outside	That which is Inside
Goes into the man.	Comes out of the man.
It does not go into his heart, but into his stomach and from there is eliminated.	Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.
Does not defile him.	Defiles him.

There are several ramifications of this teaching. These ramifications are found in the explanation of Jesus.

1. It means that all foods are clean.

This is a precursor of what shall be revealed to Peter in Acts 10-11. It means that the Old Testament dietary laws were only designed for that particular period to set apart the people of God - but what really sets apart the people of God is what is on the inside.

2. It means that you are not what you eat.

One of the popular saying today is, “You are what you eat.” But that isn’t so. What you are is determined by what comes out of you, not by what goes into you. Verses 21-22 presents a list of things that come out of people: *evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.*

The reason you sin is because you are a sinner.

The point is that the reason men do these deeds (and notice that they are not all outward deeds) is because of what is on the inside. The heart is at the seat of what you DO. If your heart is

wrong, then what you do will also be wrong.

We use the expression, “Freudian slip.” What we mean is that the truth of what was on the inside slips out. The problem with the legalist is that he says if you will only stop doing certain things then you will be okay. But that fails to take this principle into account. Cleaning up the outside is never enough. Real change must come from the inside out.

You can take a pig and dress him up in sheep’s clothing, but he will still be a pig. You can wash him, paint his toenails, give him sheep lessons, and even teach him to say, “Bahhhh.” But he will still be a pig. Let him loose near a slop pile, and his little piggy nature will reassert itself.

To be a sheep he has to be born as a sheep. That is why God gives you a new birth. You are born again so that you can have a new nature. And this begins a process within you called sanctification. It is a process which works its way from the inside out. It results in a changed life.

Have you been trying to change your life from the outside in? Maybe you have been going to church and hanging around with Christians, hoping that some of it might “rub off” onto you. It won’t work. Just because a mouse crawls into a cookie jar, it does not make him a cookie. Joining a church and hanging around Christians will not change you. It takes a miracle of God to change you. It takes a resurrection. That is okay, because God is in the resurrecting business.

A GENTILE FOR JESUS

Mark 7:24-30

The chasm which existed between Jew and Gentile could hardly have been wider. The Jews made it a point of faith not to eat at the same table with Gentiles. Indeed, one tradition had it that the reason God created Gentiles was to provide fuel for hell. In light of this, it is especially noteworthy that we see Jesus interacting with Gentiles.

Mark 7:1-23	Mark 7:24-30
Clean and Unclean Foods	Clean and Unclean People
Religious attitudes concerning unwashed hands	Religious attitudes concerning uncircumcised Gentiles
Jewish Pharisees exhibit no faith.	Gentile woman exhibits great faith.
Lesson to Disciples: All foods are clean.	Lesson to Disciples: Gentiles are clean.

We have seen Jesus cast demons out of Jewish people. Now He will heal a Gentile that is demonized.

A TIMELY RETREAT

Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice. (Mark 7:24).

For several chapters we have seen the theme of Jesus desiring to get away from the crowds. Following the short-term mission trip of the Twelve, He had suggested that they retreat to a lonely place in order to rest for a time. But the crowd had followed and Jesus had fed them. Then He had spent a

night in prayer while the disciples rowed back across the Sea of Galilee. This solitude had been interrupted by a storm.

Now He actually leaves the lands of Galilee to travel northward to the ancient city of Tyre. Tyre was an old city. It had once been the home of the mightiest navy in the world. But these days it was a mere shadow of its former self. Just a tiny fishing village jutting out on a peninsula.

Jesus comes here to escape the crowds. He is seeking peace and quiet (“he wanted no one to know of it”). Why? Perhaps it was because He knew of the great trial that lay before Him. It is possible that He was taking advantage of the calm before the storm.

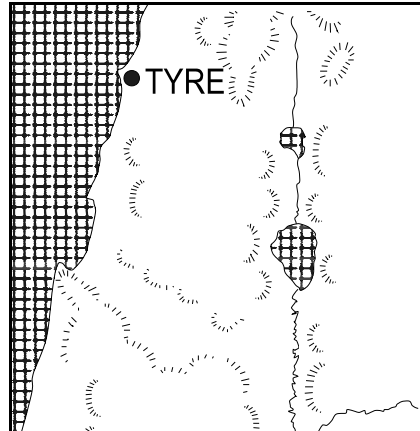
One of the reasons we don't do too well in the midst of storms is that we haven't taken advantage of the quiet before the storm.

There is a direct correlation between what you do in a crisis and what you did before that crisis. Are you in the quiet before the storm? Are things going pretty good in your life right now? It isn't a time for playing checkers. It is a time for you to get ready. It is the quiet before the storm.

Perhaps another reason that Jesus may have left was that He was tired of religion. In the previous verses, He had just gone through a confrontation with the Pharisees over a hand-washing ceremony. And Jesus may have been tired of it.

Have you ever been around a brand new Christian lately? He hasn't learned all of the cliches. He isn't trying to put on a show of looking spiritual. He is like a breath of fresh air.

Sometimes I get tired of being around stuffy religious people. In those times, I want to pack up and run away. And that is what Jesus did.



A PERSISTENT REQUEST (7:25-26)

But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet.

Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her

daughter. (Mark 7:25-26).

There is something special, not about the request, but about the maker of the request. This person was...

- A woman - as such she was doing something out of the ordinary in coming and speaking to Jesus.
- A Gentile - The text calls her a Greek, but this is used as a general term to describe one who was not Jewish.
- A Syrophoenician - from an ancient race of idol-worshippers.
- A mother - this was the source of her need.

Her daughter “had an unclean spirit.” She was demon-possessed. And so she came to Jesus. The Greek tense indicates that she continued to ask Jesus to cast out the demon. She did not stop with a single request. She asked and then she kept on asking.

A RADICAL REFUSAL

And He was saying to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” (Mark 7:27).

The reply of Jesus seems harsh in the extreme. That is because we tend to feel that He owed her something. He did not. His mandate, “Let the children be satisfied first,” seems to point to the disciples. Jesus had not come here in order to draw a crowd. He had not come here in order to heal. He had come here to spend time with His disciples. They seem to be the object of the reference to “children.” His time on earth was limited. And His time with His disciples was equally limited.

In spite of this, the reply of Jesus still seems overly harsh. Especially in view of his referring to the woman and her Gentile ancestry as “dogs.”

The Jews called the Gentiles “dogs” in the same way we would call someone a “bitch” (Matthew 7:6; Philippians 3:2; Revelation 22:15). It was a term of contempt.

But Jesus does not use the normal Greek word for “dog,” κυνον (*kunon*). He uses instead the diminutive form, κυνάριον (*kunarion*), “puppy.” Perhaps this gives us a clue that we should not be imagining a harsh tone in His words. Perhaps there is a twinkle in His eye as He makes a play on the words that had so commonly used in an insulting manner.

A HUMBLE RESPONSE

But she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:28).

The woman was not insulted by the words of Jesus. She accepts His judgment. And then she asks Him again for His help. There is no false pride here. She does not become offended. She recognizes her unworthiness, even as she continues her request, pointing out that "even the little puppies under the table eat the little crumbs of the little children."

This woman is a loser. She is a woman in a man's world. She is a Gentile before a Jewish Messiah. But that is the kind of person to whom God can respond in grace. He only reaches out to losers. If you are going to Christ because you want Him to tell you how wonderful you are, then don't bother. But if you are a loser, then call out to Him and He will help you.

A GRACIOUS REWARD

And He said to her, "Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left. (Mark 7:29-30).

Against all odds, the woman had come to Jesus and had continued to petition Him until her prayers were answered. She had faced a challenge to her faith and she had persisted, wrestling with the Lord until she received the blessing she sought.

The reason God doesn't answer our prayers is because we really don't believe that He will. When you pray for rain, do you take your umbrella? If not, then you don't really believe.

There is a sense in which this woman represents the Gentile world. Jesus had come to His own people, the House of Israel. But the leaders of the Jews rejected Him. That bread of heaven which was rejected and thrown away by the Jews is now received by the Gentiles. But there is a warning. If we do not receive that same bread of life from the hands of Jesus, then it will be taken from us.

COMMUNICATING LOVE TO A DEAF-MUTE

Mark 7:31-37

The great event of history is that God became man. The Creator of the universe, the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, born as a little baby. An act of love. There was nothing about becoming a man that was particularly desirable except that, by doing so, God could redeem a people for Himself. We are the reason for the incarnation.

One of the things that I love about the incarnation is that it was personal. The Lord did not send us a form letter when He moved to communicate His love to us. We did not receive a computer-recorded telephone call or an Email from Him. He came in the flesh.

That tells me something about how He deals with us. He deals with us as individuals. When He spoke to men, He began with who they were. He talked to a Samaritan woman about water from wells. He talked to Galilean fishermen about becoming fishers of men. He was equally comfortable attending the party of a retired tax-collector or sitting in the company of the learned.

This nature of Jesus' dealings with men is manifested in His healing of the deaf man recorded in this chapter. The story begins as He and His disciples return from their travels abroad.

A ROUNDABOUT RETURN

And again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis. (Mark 7:31).

Jesus had left the region of Galilee earlier in this chapter. Departing from those regions governed by Herod Antipas, He traveled north to the ancient land of the Phoenicians, coming at last to the city of Tyre. It was here that He healed the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman.

Leaving Tyre, He and His disciples continued north through Sidon and then turned south and east, past the snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon to come at last to the Decapolis, the region to the east of the Sea of Galilee. This was a long and strenuous journey. It is 60 miles as the crow flies and they were not flying, they were going up and down hills and valleys.

It was a retreat. A time to get away from all of the crowds and the teaching and the ministry and the miracles. A time for Jesus to be alone with His disciples.

Do you have any disciples? You ought to. Are there any people in whose lives you are building the character of Christ? If you have any children, then they ought to be among your disciples. If you are married, then your spouse ought to be one of your disciples.

It is a fundamental principle of discipleship that you can only affect those with whom you spend time. Jesus understood that principle and He deliberately set time apart from His very busy schedule to spend some times with these men.

As Jesus and His disciples comes back southward, they find themselves once again *within the region of Decapolis* (Mark 7:31). The word "Decapolis" is a compound made from the joining of two Greek words.

- *Deca* is the word for "ten."
- *Polis* is Greek for "city."

This was the land of the ten cities. There were ten Gentile cities in this region (Damascus, Raphana, Hippos, Dion, Kanatha, Gadara, Scythopolis, Pella, Gerasa and Philadelphia). Because of the high percentage of Greek immigrants to these cities, they had formed a political league among themselves and had developed a tradition of self-government. It was a land of heathen temples, or marble amphitheaters and of Greek culture and art.

Jesus had come to this area already. We saw in Mark 5 that Jesus had come here and had been confronted with a man who was possessed with a number of demons. He had cast the demons out of the man and had allowed them to enter a herd of pigs. The pigs had stampeded down the hillside and into the waters of the Sea of Galilee to drown. The man, now healed, had wanted to follow Jesus. Instead, Jesus instructed him to go home and to tell everyone about what had happened to him.

Some time has now passed. Jesus has returned to the Decapolis. And it seems as though the man who had been healed had done his job. Everyone in the area has heard about Jesus. It is not long before a crowd gathers.

A REQUEST FOR A MAN WHO CANNOT ASK

And they brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they entreated Him to lay His hand upon him. (Mark 7:32).

The crowd had heard of the miracles of Jesus. And so, they bring to him a man who has a need. This man had not heard of the miracles. He hadn't heard of anything. He couldn't hear. Because he could not hear, his speech was also affected. The Greek text says literally that he was "thick-voiced."

The Septuagint uses this word (*mogilalos*) to refer to someone who is mute. This man had vocal chords and could make sounds, but they were not understandable.

The fact that this man could not ask for himself meant that he was totally helpless. He was not only deaf and mute, but he could not even ask Jesus to heal him. And so, certain people among the crowd asked on his behalf. The man had no faith, so the crowd believed for him. It was because of their faith in Jesus that they brought this man to be healed. This man had no faith of his own. But that was about to change.

HEALING FOR A MAN WHO CANNOT HEAR

And He took him aside from the multitude by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva; ³⁴ and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, "Ephphatha!" that is, "Be opened!" ³⁵ And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly. (Mark 7:33-35).

Can you put yourself into the sandals of this deaf mute? He has been in this condition for a very long time. It has been a lonely life. He has no one with whom to talk. He cannot participate in the worship in the synagogue because he cannot hear the Scriptures or listen to the prayers. He is a social outcast. He has no friends and his family considers him to be a liability rather than an asset. He cannot even express the frustration that he feels.

Then one day, a group of people come to him. They are excited and they are talking about something, but he cannot understand them. They pull

at him and perhaps he is afraid. What are they trying to do to him? Is he being accused of something? Does some new persecution await him? They lead him to where a large crowd has gathered. But since he cannot hear what is being said, he can make no sense of what they are doing or why they are here.

And then, there is another hand upon his shoulder. It firmly guides him away from the crowd and the confusion. He looks at his new guide and sees a man with Jewish features. This man seems genuinely interested in him. Now that they are alone and free from the distractions of the multitude, the Jewish stranger begins a series of pantomimes.

1. *He... put His fingers into his ears (7:33).*

Jesus takes the deaf man and touches his ears, pointing out that He is aware of the hearing problem the man has and that He is going to do something about it.

2. *After spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva (7:33).*

Notice that the words “with the saliva” are italicized in the English translation. This indicates that they are not a part of the Greek text. They were added by the translators. I do not think they should have been. By spitting and then touching the man’s tongue, Jesus was letting him know that he intended to deal with his speech problem.

Why is Jesus doing this? Because He wants to create a measure of faith within the man before He heals him. Up to this point, the only people who have demonstrated any faith are those who brought the deaf-mute to Jesus. He has no faith of his own. And so, Jesus makes His intentions known to the man so that he can have his faith aroused.

3. *Looking up to heaven with a deep sigh (7:34).*

The sigh and the looking up to heaven were also for the deaf man’s benefit. As he saw Jesus looking up to heaven, he would realize where the power for this miracle was coming from. As he saw Jesus breath a deep sigh, he would perhaps understand that Jesus is praying on his behalf.

The Greek word translated “sigh” is the aorist active indicative of *stenazo*. It is the same word that is translated “groan” in Romans 8:23; 1 Corinthians 5:2-3 and Hebrews 13:17.

Why did Jesus groan? I think that it was because He was touched by this man's infirmity. The real importance of the incarnation is that God became flesh so that He could touch us and so that He could be touched by us. We do not pray to a God who is unable to identify with our problems. He has been touched by the same things that touch us.

4. *He said to him, "Ephatha!" that is, "Be opened!" (7:34).*

This man had not been able to hear for a very long time. Suddenly as he looks into the eyes of Jesus, he hears His voice. This single Aramaic word is the first thing that he hears.

Moreover, his healing is immediate. He can hear what Jesus is saying to him and he can speak so that others can understand him. The use of the imperfect tense means that the man started speaking plainly and that he kept on speaking plainly. In fact, people couldn't shut him up.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A PEOPLE WHO WON'T LISTEN

And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. ³⁷ And they were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak." (Mark 7:36-37).

This is not the first time that Jesus had told people not to spread the news of his miracles. With the sole exception of the demonized man here in the Decapolis, Jesus had been telling people to keep the news of His miracles quiet. Rather than obeying, they begin to spread the news of His miracle all the more. Do you want to spread a story? Tell someone and then tell them that it is a secret. It is a sad commentary that we have television, telephone and "tell-a-Christian."

Whereas the deaf man had not been able to hear, the rest of the people refused to listen. Which experienced the greater deafness? The people who could hear and who did not were no better off than the man who could not hear in the first place. There is a lesson here. It is summed up in the oft repeated words of Jesus: He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND

Mark 8:1-10

Alfred Edersheim suggests that at every transitional point in the ministry of Jesus, He gives the people a meal (1977:2:62).

- John 2, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus turns water into wine.
- In Mark 6:34-44 Jesus feeds 5000 Jews of Israel.
- Here in Mark 8 Jesus feeds a mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles.
- In Mark 14:17-25 we shall read of the Lord's Supper.
- And if we were to turn to John 21, we would see Jesus feeding His disciples by the sea of Galilee.

Jesus does that for us today. He calls us to His table and He nourishes us with the once-and-for-all sacrifice that was made on our behalf. He gives us a meal before He sends us to work. It is a meal that is sufficient.

THE COMPASSIONATE CHRIST

In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, ² “I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat.

If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance.” (Mark 8:1-3).

Jesus was back! He had been gone on a retreat with His disciples over the past few weeks which took them north to the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon and then across the cedar forests of Lebanon before returning to Decapolis. But now He is back and a crowd quickly gathers. This was a big crowd. It is called a “great multitude.” They also seem to have been a mixed crowd.

- There were Jews and Gentiles.

- Men and women.
- Adults and children.

They had only one thing in common. They were hungry. They were hungry for the teachings of Jesus - what else would keep them at that location for three days of preaching? And because of their spiritual hunger, they were now physically hungry.

Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where you are hungry for God? Where you desire His company and His fellowship more than the basic necessities of life?

These people had come for a sermon and when the sermon went overtime, they didn't grumble or complain or set their digital watches to start beeping. I've seen people complain when a sermon went three minutes past noon. This sermon went on for three days.

What is more, the crowd had not come prepared for a three day sermon. They had not brought with them three days worth of provisions. And this brought about a problem. It was a very practical problem. There were those who were now so hungry that they might not be able to safely make their way back home. And so, Jesus calls His disciples together to explain to them the problem. Notice how He begins.

"I feel compassion for the multitude..."

Why does He say this? He says it because He feels compassion for the multitude. He cares. But that is not all. He tells His disciples of this compassion because He wants them to feel compassion for the multitude, too. You see, it is one thing to feel compassion for a demon-possessed daughter or a deaf mute or even for a disciple's mother-in-law. But it is hard to feel compassion for an entire multitude. They are the faceless masses. The unknown. The little people. But not to Jesus. To Him there are no little people. He knows each and every one. He cares.

And so, He turns to His disciples. He speaks to them in such a way so that they will begin to see the crowd through His eyes. There is a principle here. When the Lord begins to move to meet a need, He often does it by moving His people. He could have bypassed the disciples. He could have merely caused it to rain bread and fish or even literal cats and dogs. But he used the disciples. His method was men. It still is.

Do you see a need in someone's life? Perhaps the Lord is showing you that need so that you can be His instrument in meeting that need. He continues to use people to do His work and His will in the world.

THE PERPLEXITY OF THE DISCIPLES

And His disciples answered Him, “Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?” (Mark 8:4).

This is simply incredible! These same disciples had recently seen Jesus feed a bigger crowd — a crowd numbering 5,000 (Mark 6:34-44). The scene had been very much the same.

- A hungry multitude.
- Jesus had been there.
- There had been the 12 disciples.
- There had been a handful of loaves and fishes.

It is now several months later. There is a slightly smaller crowd, a few more loaves and a few more fish than the last time. What makes the disciples think that Jesus is going to do any worse than He did on the previous occasion?

But before we come down too hard on the disciples, perhaps we ought to examine our own lives. We have the record of all of the great works of God. We have the witness of the Scriptures that God is faithful to meet the needs of His people. We have the test of time to see that this is not just a passing fancy. And yet, how often do we fail to come to Him in our need? How often do we hit the panic button and run and yell and scream and forget to turn to the One who is able to meet all of our needs?

All too often, we think of prayer only as a “last resort.” When everything else has failed, we turn to the Lord. What we ought to be doing is turning to Him first.

THE PERFORMANCE OF A MIRACLE

And He was asking them, “How many loaves do you have?” And they said, “Seven.”

And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. ⁷ They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. (Mark 8:5-7).

Once again, Jesus calls for the resources of the disciples. Once again, what they have is not enough to meet the need at hand. There is an interesting contrast to be seen between this feeding and the one which took place in chapter 6.

Feeding of the 5,000	Feeding of the 4,000
Mark 6:34-44	Mark 8:1-9
Took place after the multitude had been with Jesus for one day.	Took place after the multitude had been with Jesus for three days.
The multitude was mostly Jewish.	The multitude would have been mostly Gentile.
Took place near Bethsaida Julius on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.	Took place in the Decapolis on the southeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.
Jesus used 5 loaves and 2 fish.	Jesus used 7 loaves and a few small fish.
There were 12 small baskets of leftovers.	There were 7 large baskets of leftovers.

In spite of the differences between the two miracles, I am certain that the disciples were struck by the sense of the familiar. What Jesus had done near Bethsaida Julius, He is now doing here in the Decapolis. What He had formerly done among the Jews, He is now doing among the Gentiles.

A PRINCIPLE ILLUSTRATED

And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces.

About four thousand were there; and He sent them away.

And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. (Mark 8:8-10).

This miracle takes place in the region known as the Decapolis. There was a Jewish tradition that stated that this was the place where the seven Canaanite nations relocated after having been driven out by Joshua. Those seven nations are mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:1 as the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Paul makes reference to these same seven nations in Acts 13:19 when he speaks of how God “destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan.” It is because of this that the Jews came to look at these seven Gentile nations as being representative of all the Gentile nations.

When Jesus did this same miracle in the feeding of the 5,000 there was a Jewish audience. Now His audience is primarily Gentile. They represent the outsiders, those who are apart from the covenant community. And so, we shall see seven baskets filled, corresponding to the seven Canaanite nations of Jewish tradition.

In the feeding of the 5000, there were twelve baskets filled with leftovers. In the description of that first feeding, the word κοφίνοσ (*kophinos*) is used to describe the “baskets.” It describes one of the small baskets in which the Jews would have carried food so that they would not have to eat food which had been touched by Gentile hands.

But now a different word is used to describe the basket. This time we see the use of σπυρίδας (*spuridas*), a “large basket” which was used for a variety of purposes. It is the same word to describe the basket which was used to lower Paul over the city wall of Damascus in Acts 9:25.

Perhaps Jesus is showing the disciples something in addition to the obvious lesson of His power, His faithfulness, and His sufficiency. Perhaps He is teaching them that the ceremonial uncleanness with which the Jews were so preoccupied is not supposed to be an issue in the Kingdom.

They are going to gather up bread that has been touched by Gentile hands. This bread is no longer kosher. It is ceremonially unclean. What are they going to do with this bread? They are going to eat it!

Jesus is setting the stage for what is to come. In several years, the newborn church will be faced with the question of whether Gentiles can become Christians. And these disciples will remember the principles that Jesus is teaching them - with a little prodding from a heavenly vision.

Jesus is feeding a lot more than the 4000 Gentiles who had gathered from the Decapolis. He is also feeding you and me. He is preparing the way for us to become a part of His church. He is demonstrating His compassion toward us. He is showing that, even to unclean Gentiles, He is the accessible Jesus.

BLINDED EYES

Mark 8:11-26

I can think of fewer things more tragic than to be blind. To live in a world of darkness, never be able to read a book or see a sunset or watch the waves breaking at the crack of dawn. To never be able to watch a bird in flight or the smile of a baby or the royal colors of a rose garden.

But perhaps a greater tragedy would be to have the ability to see without actually seeing. To go through life with one's eyes tightly shut, refusing to ever open them and see the world. The Pharisees had adopted that sort of spiritual blindness. They had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and had heard His teachings and had resolved to deliberately close their eyes and stop their ears to the evidence that was so clearly manifested before them. Unable to deny His supernatural power, they attribute it to Satan. It is with this spirit that they come to Jesus now.

THE BLINDNESS OF UNBELIEF

The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him.

Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." (Mark 8:11-12).

The Pharisees come and ask Jesus to perform a miracle. But this is not a sincere request. It is made in the midst of an argument. They are making this request in order *to test Him*. If He does not perform it, then they will say that He has demonstrated His inability. If He does perform it, then they will say that He is receiving His power from Satan.

This is not the motive of an honest seeker. They have already made up their minds to reject Him. They want to put Him to the test and He will not play their game. Jesus refuses to grant a sign. This will mark a turning point in His ministry. Up to this time, there has been no shortage of signs. There have been an abundance of all sorts of miracles. But that is over. There will be very few public miracles performed from this time onward. None shall be performed in the presence of the Pharisees.

A CRYPTIC WARNING

Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them.

And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." (Mark 8:13-15).

This warning is unusual in that there were hardly two positions that were further apart than Herod versus the Pharisees. The Pharisees represented the conservative party. They were nationalistic patriots. They held to the Scriptures. They believed in angels and a literal resurrection.

Herod Antipas was not even Jewish. His father was an Idumean. His mother was a Samaritan. He held his authority from the hated Romans. But Jesus lumps them both together. What did they have in common? What could be both *the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod*?

Leaven always carries with it the idea of influence. You take a little piece of leaven and place it in a lump of dough which you are going to bake and that little piece influences the entire lump, causing it to rise.

Both the Pharisees and Herod were parties of influence. They had both seen and/or heard of Jesus. And they had come to some conclusions regarding Jesus. These conclusions are given to us in Mark's account.

- The Pharisees had gone on record in Mark 3:22 to say that Jesus performed His miracles by the will and the power of Satan. They identified Him as a demon-possessed man.
- Herod had gone on record in Mark 6:14 to say that Jesus was nothing more than the reincarnation of John the Baptist. He did this out of a sense of superstition and guilt over having murdered John in the first place.

Both of these parties had made false assumptions about Jesus. And He warns His disciples against following in their footsteps. When we get to Mark 8:29 Jesus will ask His disciples as to their own assumption of His identity - "*But who do you say that I am?*"

This is one of the most important questions you can ever be asked. Who is Jesus? It is a life or death question. If you look at Him and see only a Galilean rabbi or a good man or a profound teacher or a miracle-worker, then you have missed Him.

THE BLINDNESS OF THE DISCIPLES

They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread.

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?”

“Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember, ¹⁹ when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?” They said to Him, “Twelve.”

“When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?” And they said to Him, “Seven.” ²¹ And He was saying to them, “Do you not yet understand?” (Mark 8:16-21).

Instead of hearing and understanding the warning of Jesus, the disciples focused upon their lack of bread. Jesus was speaking of the spiritual. They were looking only to the physical. He was speaking of the spiritual leaven which characterized unbelief. They saw only the leaven which is used in a bakery. And this generates a discussion among the disciples. The discussion is over the fact that they have only a single basket of bread. Seven baskets had been collected the day before. Six had been left behind.

Jesus asks a rhetorical question. He will ask it twice. “*Do you not yet understand?*” What is it that they are supposed to be understanding? What is His point? It is that they are worried about bread and they have not yet come to terms with the fact that the Creator of all bread is in their midst. They are worried about lunch and they have missed the fact that the One who holds all things together by the word of His power is with them and able to provide for them.

He has already done it. They have seen Him do it. They saw Him feed 5000 people and they picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. They saw Him feed 4000 people and they picked up seven baskets of leftovers. They have seen so many miracles that it is starting to get monotonous. Yet with all of this, they have missed the central point to which these miracles have been pointing.

Jesus asks the double-barreled question: “*Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?*” They have just seen Him heal a deaf man of his deafness. In the next paragraph, He will heal a blind man of his blindness. Jesus is asking, “Are you also blind and deaf?”

Healing of deaf man (7:31-37)	Feeding 4000 bread and fish (8:1-10)	Unbelief of Pharisees & disciples - theme of bread (8:11-21)	Healing of blind man (8:22-26)
-------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--	--------------------------------

THE MIRACLE OF SIGHT

And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him.

Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?"

And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."

Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly.

And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village." (Mark 8:22-26).

Up to this point, we have been dealing with spiritual blindness. But now we are given an account of a man who was physically blind. The juxtaposition of these two accounts is no accident. This healing of the blind man will serve as an illustration of what Jesus must do to heal spiritual blindness.

This particular healing is unique. It is the only time that we ever see Jesus healing in stages. Normally when Jesus performed a miraculous healing, the effect was immediate. In this case, there is a process and a progress to the healing.

First Stage	Second Stage
Jesus: Spits onto the man's eyes and lays hands upon him.	Jesus: Lays His hands upon the man.
The Man: <i>"I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around."</i>	The Man: Began to see everything clearly.

After the initial work of Jesus, the man looked up and instead of darkness, he could actually make out images. They resembled trees. But

there was something wrong with these trees. They were walking. The man had only a partial restoration of his vision. The miracle was not yet completed. Jesus again laid His hands upon the man. And this time, the man's vision was completely restored.

This brings us to a question. Why did this healing happen in stages? Couldn't Jesus have healed the man all at once? Yes, He could have. But this healing is a parallel to the spiritual work which Jesus is going to do in the lives of the disciples. I think that is why the healing is accomplished in stages.

He had asked them in Mark 8:17, "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?" They had been more focused on the bread of His feeding of the 5000 than on the fact of the miracle and to what it pointed. They had been with Jesus, but they were still coming to terms with the real identity of Jesus. This would come to a head in just a few verses when Jesus would ask them in Mark 8:27, "Who do people say that I am?" It will be there that the spiritual blindness will be removed, at least on the part of Peter. It will be there that he will make his great confession that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

There is a lesson here. It is that spiritual blindness is not always removed in a single instant. Sometimes it is a gradual removal. When you first begin to see Jesus for who and what He is, you may not immediately have all knowledge concerning Him. Such knowledge is often gained bit by bit. Here a little, there a little. Line upon line and precept upon precept.

Have you seen Jesus? Have you recognized Him as the Messiah? The Christ? That is good. But don't stop there. There is more to see. Keep on looking at Jesus. And you will be amazed at how much more you shall see.

CONFESSING CHRIST

Mark 8:27-38

As you travel north from the Sea of Galilee, you will find the upper reaches of the Jordan River as it flows to the south. Moving upstream, you will find Lake Hula (which today has dried up). Moving even further northward, you would find yourself on the lower slopes of Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan River. Straddling these lower slopes was the Roman city of Caesarea Philippi.

The city was named after Julius Caesar. Indeed, there was even a temple in honor of Caesar and the Romans who lived there celebrated him as divine. It was an international metropolis with Syrians, Jews, Greeks, and Romans. At least 14 temples to false gods were to be found in the city of Caesarea Philippi. The city was dedicated to the Greek deity Pan, the god of nature. The temple dedicated to him was set into a great cliff that towered over the city. It was in this setting that a penniless, homeless Nazarene asked a question of His disciples.

A KEY QUESTION

Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27).

There comes a turning point in your life which brings a chain reaction that changes your entire life. Marriage is like that. It changes your whole life. Priorities change. You reorient your entire approach to life as you become one with another person.

The disciples had gone through such a change. They had come to know Jesus. They had followed Him and had heard Him and had ministered with Him. Now they are brought to a climactic conclusion. Things will never be the same after this. It all begins with a question.

Who is Jesus? I'm not talking about His address and social security number (Jesus of Nazareth, SS: 777-03-0001). Who is He really? There are a lot of varied opinions as to who Jesus is. But the important point today is

who you think He is.

Who is Jesus? Men in that day had come up with a number of theories to explain this miracle-working rabbi from Nazareth. Two such views are mentioned by the disciples.

They told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets." (Mark 8:28).

John the Baptist had come before Jesus. And as the ministry of Jesus had grown, the ministry of John the Baptist had waned until he was finally arrested by Herod Antipas and murdered. Driven by pangs of guilt, Herod Antipas had lately begun to wonder whether Jesus was really John the Baptist come back to life to haunt him.

Another theory was that Jesus was Elijah come back from heaven. After all, Elijah had not died and it had been promised that Elijah would return prior to the coming of the Lord.

These were favorable responses. Public opinion was favorable toward Jesus. But it fell short of eternal truth. And to fall short in such a manner is an insult to God.

PETER'S CONFESSION

And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." (Mark 8:29).

The first question was merely introductory. It was to get them thinking. But now He asks of them the key question. It matters not what other people think. What do you think?

Jesus does not allow them to sit on the fence. He forces them to a decision. Have you made that decision? There comes a time when you have to get off the fence. To make no decision is to make a decision.

That fact that Jesus asks this question of His disciples at this point in His ministry is significant. This was a time of growing rejection. The religious leaders were beginning to mobilize against Jesus. This would naturally cause His disciples to wonder whether they had made the right decision in following Him. After all, they were going against the religious experts of the day.

I think that I will scream the next time I hear some well-meaning saint say, "I don't think that we should focus on theology; we ought to just love

Jesus.” But which Jesus do you love? Peter loved Jesus and that was good. But what made it especially significant was the content of that love. When Peter says, “Thou art the Christ” he is using the Greek word for the Hebrew term “Messiah.”

Now this is significant, especially in light of the fact that for all of the miracles and for all of the teaching of Jesus that we have heard up to this point, He had never yet publicly announced Himself to be the promised Messiah of Israel.

Why not? It was because He determined not to be a self-proclaimed Messiah. It was His actions and His person that made this proclamation on His behalf. For three years, the disciples lived with Him, ate with Him, traveled with Him, and their conclusion at the end of that time is recorded here.

Christ - Messiah!!

There is a principle here. It is that intimacy and knowledge go together. If you can get people next to Jesus, then Jesus will get them to the truth. Intimacy and knowledge go together.

I have a friend who rubs people the wrong way. He can walk into a group and immediately make ten enemies. He is abrasive. He is like the fingernail scratching on the chalkboard. But I know him. It is because I know him and understand him that I can be a close friend to him. I used to spend a lot of time explaining him to others. But I found a better way. I found that, if others will just get to know him, they will usually come to like him, too.

A WARNING TO SILENCE

And He warned them to tell no one about Him. (Mark 8:30).

Why did Jesus give such a warning? After all, we today are in the business of telling people that Jesus is the Messiah. Why did Jesus tell His disciples to keep it quiet? I think that there are two reasons.

1. Jesus was not a self-proclaimed Messiah. This made it all the more significant when others recognized Him as Messiah.

Even at His trial before Caiaphas, it would be the high priest himself who would ask the unbidden question: “Are you the Christ,

the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61). Jesus would for the first time reply publicly in the affirmative, “I am.” The fact that the question was first posed publicly by others is in itself an evidence of His identity. He did not come announcing that He was the Messiah. Instead, people recognized His Messiahship when they saw His works and heard His teachings.

2. It was not yet time for Peter and the disciples to proclaim the Messiahship of Jesus because they had not yet learned what being “Messiah” was all about. Peter knew nothing about the cross. But he is about to find out.

A CLEAR REVELATION

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And He was stating the matter plainly. (Mark 8:31-32a).

Up to this point, Jesus has spoken of His impending death only in parables and veiled comments. For the first time, He now speaks plainly of what is going to happen. This is the first of three such revelations about which we shall read in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark 8:31	Mark 9:31	Mark 10:33-34
The Son of Man will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffer many things • Be rejected • Be killed • Rise again 	The Son of Man will be... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered into the hands of men • Killed • He will rise 	The Son of Man will be... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered • Condemned • Mocked, spit on, and scourged • They will kill Him • He will rise again

After each of these revelations, the disciples will demonstrate a lack of understanding. Each time, Jesus will summon them and teach them of how they should live in light of the cross.

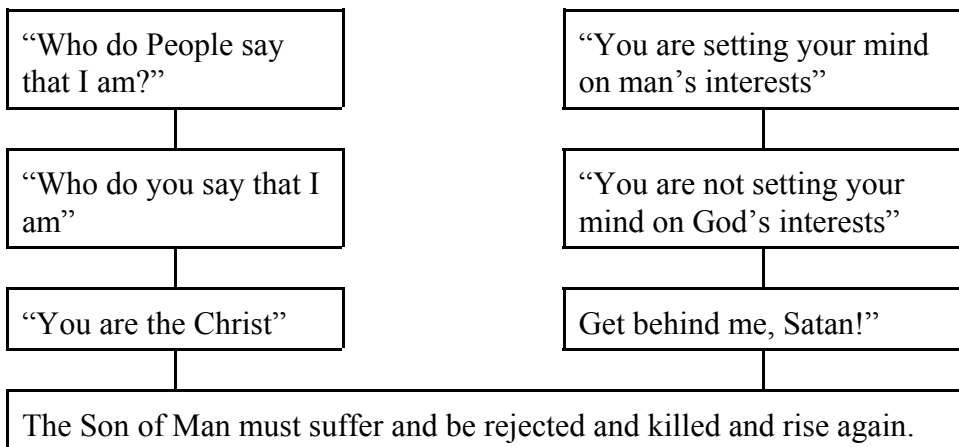
PETER'S DENIAL

And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Mark 8:32-33).

I believe that Peter was still on an emotional high from his confession of Jesus as the Christ. However, he now exposes what his idea of the Christ contains. Peter's Christ has no rejection, suffering, or death. Peter's Christ has no cross. A Christ without a cross is a savior who does not save.

Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ. But Peter did not know what Christ was. Peter had just identified Jesus as the Christ - the Messiah. Jesus also makes an identification. Jesus addresses Peter and calls him "Satan." He recognized that there is a power behind Peter who is speaking through Peter. That source is Satan. The same Peter who declared Jesus to be the Messiah is now speaking the message of Satan.



There was a supernatural force at work here. The disciples couldn't see it, but Jesus could. It was his majesty, the prince and power of the kingdom of darkness, Satan. He is the same one who had come to the woman in the Garden of Eden. She saw only a smooth-talking serpent, but the real power behind the snake in the grass was this fallen angel whom we know as Satan.

You remember the story. He came to the woman and questioned God's command. "I can't believe that God really said that!" And once the

woman had begun to also question, he blatantly denied - What? He denied death! "You shall not surely die!"

Do you see the pattern? He is doing exactly the same thing here! He is denying death. He is denying the judgment of God. He is saying, "You don't really have to worry about paying for sin or dying on the cross - get that out of your mind because you won't die!"

Do you see what is at stake here? You are! Your salvation. Your eternal life with God. If Jesus does not go to the cross, then He will not be a sacrifice for your sins. If He does not die for your sins, then you must pay the penalty for your own sins. The penalty for your sins is death. Not merely physical death. But spiritual death for all time and eternity. The good news is that Jesus did not fall prey to the temptation. He stood firm against it. And salvation has been provided.

Satan no longer tries to tempt Jesus. He no longer visits the garden of Eden. He has another target. It is you. And His lie is still the same.

"You don't really have to worry about sin's penalty."

"You can ignore the specter of death."

"What you don't know can't hurt you."

"I'm okay; you're okay."

"Be happy."

"You will not surely die."

And now, the question is what you will do. Will you listen to the lie of Satan? Or will you look to Jesus, the author and finisher of faith?

The story is told of a ship that was moving through the dark midnight sea when a light was seen on the horizon directly in their path of travel. The captain ordered his signalman to flash out a message. "Please change your course ten degrees to the north." An answering signal was flashed saying, "Please change your course ten degrees to the south." The captain was a little annoyed and flashed back, "Please change your course ten degrees to the north; I am a captain." Again the answering signal, "Please change your course ten degrees to the south; I am a seaman second class."

Now the captain was really angry and he flashed out, "Please change your course ten degrees to the north; this is a battleship." The reply came back, "Please change your course ten degrees to the south; this is a lighthouse."

God is a lighthouse. He doesn't change just because you want Him to do so. He is the God who is, not the God who you wish Him to be. He is the Light. Ignore His warning, and you will end up on the Rocks. Trust in Him, and He will bring you safely to the Rock.

THE CALL OF THE CHRIST

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?

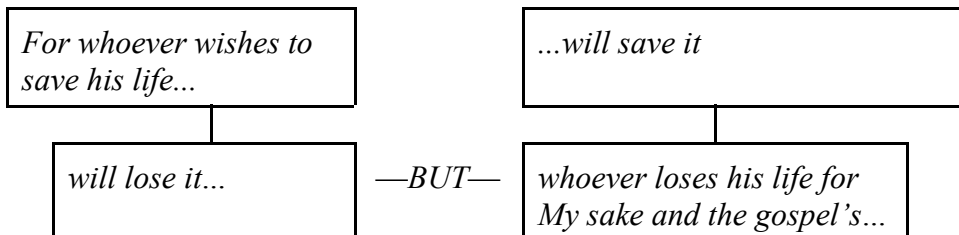
"For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:34-38).

Notice the recipients of this call. It is not made only to the disciples. It is also made to the crowd. How different from modern evangelistic messages! Jesus doesn't say, "God has a wonderful plan for your life." He doesn't say, "Trust in Me and all of your problems will be at an end." His message is startling in its blunt honesty. He says, "Follow me and you will be hated and despised and eventually crucified."

The good news is that, if you follow Jesus you will never walk alone. The fact that you are following Him indicates that He is with you. He is no armchair general. He never called men to go where He did not first go Himself. That call is to death. When Jesus calls a man, He calls for him to come and to die.

His words concerning a cross had no implications of salvation to the ears of the crowd that day. To them, a cross was simply the instrument of execution. It was like saying, "He who wishes to follow Me must bring his own hangman's noose." *He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose* (Elliot). Verse 35 is presented in the form of a chiasm.



The only way to save your life is to lose it for the sake of Jesus and

for the sake of His message. Does this mean that only martyrs are saved? In a sense, it does. It does not mean that you must be nailed to a literal cross. But it does mean that you must be willing to renounce all that was your former life to become all that God has called you to be.

There is a corollary here that deals with physical death. I haven't died yet, so I can't speak from experience, but I think that there is a truth here. The level of difficulty in dying is inversely proportional to how much you have already died.

Are you still trying to hold on to your life? There is a natural human tendency to do so. Give it up. And He will give you His life in return.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Mark 9:1-13

Many years after the coming of Christ, an old apostle sat back and reflected on the highlights of the ministry of the Galilean rabbi. One particular incident held a special place of prominence in those memories. It was the event of which we read in this passage.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. (2 Peter 1:16).

When Peter wanted to give assurance to his readers that Jesus was more than a clever speaker, he cited this event and the sights to which he had been an eyewitness. That event was foretold to both Peter and the rest of the disciples in a promise.

A KINGDOM PROMISE

And Jesus was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” (Mark 9:1).

It all started when Jesus told His disciples that they would see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. Some of them might have thought, “Yeah, right! You mean after 2000 years at the second coming.” But Jesus said, “No, it will happen in your lifetime. Indeed, some of you who are standing here will see it.”

Jesus uses a double negative -
“*There are some of those standing here who shall not [οὐ μὴ] taste death.*”

This tells me something about the Transfiguration. It is a manifestation of the kingdom of God and its arrival upon planet earth. All too often when Christians speak of the kingdom of God, they think of

something that is going to come in the future. But in this passage we see something different. The kingdom came 2000 years ago. And it came with power.

THREE FRIENDS

Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves (Mark 19:2a).

Why did Jesus pick these three men? James was to be the first apostle to die for the faith. He would have to be courageous. He would need this vision to sustain him through what was to come.

John would be the last apostle to die. He would write the gospels and epistles of John as well as Revelation. Perhaps Jesus wished to give him something that would endure for a long life.

Peter was to be the one on whom the church would be built. He would be the one to stand up on the Day of Pentecost and proclaim the significance of the gift of tongues. And he would open the doors of the kingdom to the Gentiles. He would need the lessons of this vision.

These three men are going to be with Jesus during the Gethsemane experience. They will be the pillars of the church. But perhaps there is another reason why Jesus took these men. Perhaps He needed someone to be with Him. He is getting ready to go to Jerusalem to die. The time is drawing closer. It will be the most awful time of His life. He needs a friend.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that you can go it alone. Jesus needed friends and He knows that we need a friend, too. And that is why He has given us the church.

A SPECTACULAR EVENT

Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; ³ and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. (Mark 19:2-3).

Four people climbing a high mountain. We are not told which mountain it was. There were several in northern Galilee from which to

choose. Perhaps it was Mount Hermon, whose snow-capped peak rises to a height of 10,000 feet above sea level. Or it might have been Mount Tabor, the traditional location of the Mount of Transfiguration which lies on the western edge of the Valley of Jezreel (though this isn't really a "high mountain"). It doesn't really matter which mountain it was. What matters is what happened when they got to the top.

Can you imagine it? The day has been long. The climb has been tiring. They finally reach the top and pause to catch their breath. In the silence of the breathtaking scenery, the Son speaks to His Father and the Father comes. The disciples are transfixed and the Son is transformed.

The Greek text uses a very special word to describe what happened to Jesus. The word is μεταμορφόομαι (*metamorphoomai*). From it we get our modern word "metamorphosis." It describes a change. Aside from the description of these particular event, this word is only used two other times in the New Testament.

- It is used in Romans 12:2 where we are to be *transformed*.
- It is used in 2 Corinthians 3:18 describing how we turn to the Lord and are *transformed* into His image.

This was a spectacular event. From another dimension, a light comes. It begins to grow in intensity. Jesus explodes with glory. A roaring radiance pours forth from Him. He becomes as He was before He came. For one, brief shining moment the veil of His humanity is lifted and the brilliance splashes out. He is home again. In that glorious homecoming, there are suddenly two other figures. They are the two most famous of the prophets of the Old Testament.

TWO WITNESSES

Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. (Mark 9:4).

Why the appearance of these two prophets? Because under Old Testament Law, the truth of a matter must always be established by witnesses. And a single witness was not enough. There must be at least two. And so, the two greatest possible witnesses are sent to testify of this little Galilean rabbi.

- Moses was the great Lawgiver.
- Elijah was the great prophet.

The Law and the Prophets - and they both bear witness of Jesus. Did you ever stop to think that Moses finally made it into the promised land? It only took him an extra 1400 years.

PETER'S SUGGESTION

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. (Mark 9:5-6).

Don't you just love Peter? The most solemn and wondrous and unique and holy occasion in the history of planet earth has just taken place and he has to put in his two cents worth.

"Lord, it's a good thing we happened to be here!"

"No one else would have believed this!"

"Those other disciples at the bottom of the hill wouldn't have had a clue what to do with such a revelation, but I've got a plan!"

"We'll build three tabernacles and we'll start our own church. We can call it Mount of Transfiguration Tabernacle. We can feed multitudes and You can take turns preaching with Moses and Elijah."

Peter is just getting started when suddenly there is an interruption. It doesn't come from the other two disciples. It doesn't even come from Jesus. It comes from the Father Himself.

Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"

All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. (Mark 9:7-8).

God interrupts Peter. He says, "Peter, shut up and listen!" He says the same thing to us sometimes. Sometimes He says, "Slow down! Be still! Listen to Me!" That is what the Sabbath is all about. Once every seven days we are to slow down and be still and listen for a still, small voice and the soft sound of sandaled feet. Have you heard Him today? Are you listening to Him now? Or is your mind on other matters? Is your attention divided?

God gets Peter's attention. He does this by overshadowing Peter with a cloud. This wasn't any old cloud. This cloud was special. In the Older Testament, Exodus 16:10 says how the whole congregation of the sons of Israel *"looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the CLOUD."*

And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I shall come to you in a THICK CLOUD, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe in you forever" (Exodus 19:9).

And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the CLOUD filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:10-11).

Why was there a cloud? Because mortal man cannot look upon the glory of God without being destroyed. The cloud was for their protection. The cloud was to keep them alive. The cloud was so that they might hear the voice of the Lord and live through the experience. Because there was an important message given to them that day - a message that has been entrusted to us. What is this message?

"This is My beloved Son!" You are impressed by prophets and visions and clouds and bright lights. And God says, "You're being impressed by the wrong things!" Moses is impressive. And Elijah is impressive. And a bright cloud overshadowing a high mountain is impressive. But if that is all you see here, then you've missed the most impressive thing of all. You've missed the fact that God became a fetus and was born to a Hebrew peasant girl. You've missed the fact that the splendor of heaven was poured into a human body. You've missed the One who was older than time and greater than death. You've missed the Son of God.

Peter speaks of building tabernacles. God says, "I've already prepared a tabernacle and His name is Jesus!" That is what the Bible says in John 1:14 - *"And the Word became flesh and TABERNACLED among us..."*

By the way, if you go to Israel today and climb Mount Tabor, the traditional location of the Transfiguration, when you get to the top you will find three shrines - three memorials.

One to Moses.
One to Elijah.
One to Jesus.

Religion has missed the lesson of this passage. Jesus is not just a good man or a godly teacher or a miracle worker or even a prophet. You cannot even compare Him to such lofty prophets as Moses and Elijah, for they are mere men. He is the unique Son of God.

And this brings us to the reason for this entire event. Why did it take place? What is the significance of the transfiguration? Why is it recorded in three out of four of the gospel accounts? Here is the reason. It is because the transfiguration underlines and proves the confession made by Peter the week before.

Do you remember Peter's confession? Jesus had asked, "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples had checked their latest copy of the Gallup Poll and cited the responses...

52% - John the Baptists

41% - Elijah

7% - Other

Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter replied, "You are the Christ." Since that time, a week has passed. I would bet that during that time Peter has asked himself, "Why did I say that? Am I really certain that He is the Messiah?" And so, he and these other two disciples are given the testimony of two witnesses and the very voice of God as evidence that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Many years later, Peter would look back on this event as the evidence for the claims of Jesus.

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" - 18 and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Peter 1:16-18).

This was not a vision or a dream. This was not merely a philosophical stance. Something happened in history. Heaven reached down and touched the earth. God came near. And nothing will ever again be the same.

There is an important truth here. It is that our metamorphosis depends upon His metamorphosis. We must understand that the

transfiguration is a sign for us to see and understand who Jesus really is. It is only when we come to terms with the identity of Jesus, seeing Him as the sinless Son of God who came to die as a sacrifice in our place, that we can see our own metamorphosis. It is only when we recognize Him as our Lord and our Savior that we can enter into what will be our great transfiguration. There is coming a day when we shall be changed. We shall see Him as He is and we shall be changed.

In the meantime, that change begins within us. It is called sanctification. As we trust in Christ as our Lord and Savior, and as His Spirit does a work within us, we are gradually being changed from the inside out.

Admittedly, there are times when I have a hard time believing it all. There are times when I look at my own life and I wonder if there is any change going on. It is at times like that I need a voice from heaven. Not an audible voice like the disciples heard that day, but the voice of God's Spirit speaking and comforting my heart.

RESURRECTION TRUTH

As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead.

They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. (Mark 9:9-10).

Jesus now gives them a warning. It is the same warning that He gave to them after Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ. But there is a subtle change.

Mark 8:27-31	Mark 9:9
Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ.	God declares Jesus to be His beloved Son.
The disciples are warned to silence.	
The Son of Man must suffer and be rejected and killed and rise again.	They are to be silent until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.

This time the focus is upon the resurrection. After all, they have just seen a glimpse of the glory of God. They have seen a manifestation of

resurrection power. But they did not understand. They got into a theological discussion of what “rising from the dead” really meant. Was Jesus speaking in spiritual terms? Was He speaking of some new type of spiritual vitality - being born again? Though He had spoken clearly, they did not understand. But they would.

THE ELIJAH QUESTION

They asked Him, saying, “Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

And He said to them, “Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

“But I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him.” (Mark 9:11-13).

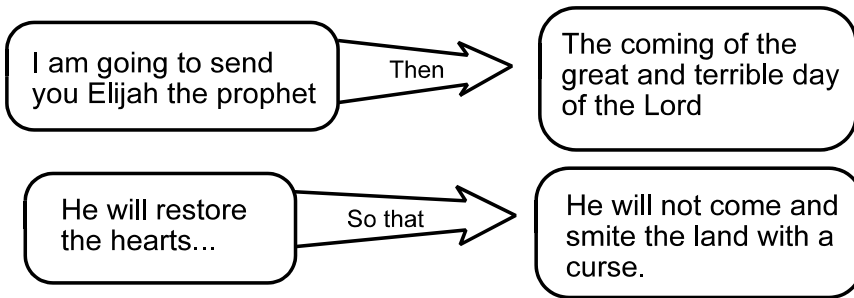
As the disciples discussed theology, they came up with a question. It involved their experience on the mountaintop and its correlation with the Scriptures.

The very last book of the Old Testament contained a promise. It was a promise that Elijah would come. They had just seen Elijah on the mountaintop with Jesus. But the timing was wrong.

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

“And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6).

The promise set forth a timetable. First Elijah would come. Then the day of the Lord would come. The answer is given by Jesus. Elijah did come. He came and he preached and he baptized and his message was rejected. He was arrested and *they did to him whatever they wished.*



Do you see the point? The promise of Elijah was fulfilled in John the Baptist. Like Elijah, he had his abode in the wilderness.

- His clothing was the same.
- His food was the same.
- His message was the same.
- He spoke out against the Ahab and Jezebel of his day and they did to him as the original Ahab and Jezebel sought to do.

There is a lesson here. It is that God's promises are always fulfilled. But they are not always fulfilled in the manner we expect. That is why we have to be careful when interpreting future prophecy. Those who draw up their timelines of future prophecy and who insist that things will take place just as they have predicted based upon their detail study of the Scriptures will be in for a rude awakening. God's promises will be fulfilled. But not necessarily in the manner in which we have expected.

The key thing will not be all of the surrounding events which surround the coming of Jesus. The key thing will be Jesus. We shall see Him as they saw Him upon the mountain — in all of His glory. And that will be enough.

FAITH FOR THE FAITHLESS

Mark 9:14-29

As our passage opens, Jesus and several of His disciples are just coming back down from a mountaintop experience. This was not any old experience. This was the Transfiguration. Three of the disciples of Jesus saw something they had never before seen. They saw Jesus transformed before their very eyes. They saw the glorified Christ and they heard the voice of God.

Now they are back and, to look at things, the experiences of the mountaintop might have never even taken place. It is as if they had never left. There are still the same old crowds and the same old critics and the same old arguments.

FAITH IN THE FACE OF THE FAMILIAR

And when they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and began running up to greet Him. (Mark 9:14-15).

The juxtaposition of this passage with the previous vision atop the Mount of Transfiguration could hardly be more striking. On the Mount they were high and lifted up; now they have come back down to earth. God was making a pronouncement from heaven and here these scribes are bickering with the disciples before a large crowd. We are not told what was the focus of their argument. We are not told because it is not important. That is the point. When you hear the words of God and when you see Jesus for who He really is, a great deal of our arguing and bickering become pointless and irrelevant.

This brings us to the question, how do you bring a bit of that mountaintop experience back down off the mountain? How do you keep your faith in the face of the familiar, the daily, and the humdrum of life? I think it is by remembering what you learned on the mountain.

It is interesting to note how often we are told in the Bible to remember. Why do we need to be told that? It is because of our tendency to forget. The world says, "Take a drink and forget." The Lord says, "Eat, drink and remember."

FAITH MEETS FAILURE

And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." (Mark 9:16-18).

Jesus arrives and asks about the subject under discussion. I mentioned that we are not told what it was they were arguing. But we do know what it was that had sparked the argument. It was started by the failure of the disciples to assist the father of a young man who was possessed of a spirit.

This spirit was destructive. It rendered the young man mute, it would throw him to the ground, and he would foam at the mouth and gnash his teeth. It must have been a terrible spectacle to behold.

This father had been beside himself. He had been unable to cure his son and he had turned to the only One able to assist him. He had turned to Jesus. There was only one problem. Jesus had not been available. He had been atop the Mount of Transfiguration with several of His disciples. In His absence, some of the other disciples had attempted to help. After all, this was not outside their realm of experience. They had already been given authority by Jesus to cast out demons (Mark 3:15) and they had already been successful in fulfilling this mandate on a number of occasions. Mark 6:13 tells us that *they were casting out many demons*. What was another demon to them?

Yet this time, they are faced with failure. They attempt to cast the demon out of this young man and they are not able. Why not? What made the difference? The words of Jesus suggest it was a problem with their faith.

This tells me something of the danger of unbelief. It suggests that it is possible to fall into the trap of unbelief without even realizing it. These disciples had a failure in their faith and had not even realized this had taken place. They attempted to do what they had always done and this time they are met with failure.

FAITH MEETS UNBELIEF

And He answered them and said, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!” (Mark 9:19).

Jesus points out the problem as He refers to this *unbelieving generation*. Who is He addressing? Is He speaking to the scribes and the Pharisees? Or to the crowd? Or to His disciples? It seems to me that He is speaking to all of them. Each had experienced to a varying degree a failure of faith.

Can you hear the exasperation in the voice of Jesus? There is an important lesson here. It is that your unbelief exasperates the Lord in a way that nothing else does.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6).

You cannot please God without faith. Not by being a good person. Not by church attendance. Not by anything that you do. And that tells me something of the nature of faith. Faith involves reliance upon someone other than yourself. Faith involves trusting in Christ instead of upon yourself.

You are involved in a spiritual battle and the battleground is your own soul. The issue of the day is what you will believe. Will you believe in the power of God?

FAITH AND THE POWER OF DARKNESS

20 And they brought the boy to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth.

21 And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. 22 And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” (Mark 9:20-22).

At the approach of Jesus, the demonic activity became all the more

frenzied, throwing the boy to the ground and inducing a series of convulsions. This was a continuing test of faith. The disciples had tried to heal the boy to no avail. Now Jesus comes up and the boy seems to get worse instead of better.

Jesus asks about the situation. It is not a new situation. This condition has been taking place on and off since the boy was a child. Furthermore, it has often manifested itself in destructive tendencies. He has thrown him from one extreme to the other -- from fire to water.

The boy's father is beside himself. He has been through a lifetime of concern and now he begs for the help of Jesus: "*But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!*" As we look at this request, we can see that there is not a lot of faith in it.

In Mark 1:40, a leper had come to Jesus and had said to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." By contrast, this father is saying, "You seem willing enough, but I don't know if you are able to heal my son."

FAITH AND POSSIBILITIES

And Jesus said to him, "If You can!' All things are possible to him who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:23-24).

Jesus repeats the condition of uncertainty, challenging the father to believe. The truth is that *all things are possible to him who believes*. This means this father has a choice to make. Will he believe the promises of God? Will he believe the possibilities of God? Or will he cling to his unbelief?

The father sees the issue of ability. Jesus sees the issue as one of faith. The father has as his main concern the healing of his son, Jesus has as his main concern bringing faith to those who have none. The world says: "Don't just stand there; do something!" The Lord says: "Don't just do something; stand there!"

There have been many a time when I have prayed the prayer this father prayed: "*I do believe; help my unbelief.*" It is both a commitment as well as a confession. He commits himself to the Lord's hands and he also confesses his need for a greater faith. How I have longed for a great faith! But it is not great faith that will see me through the tough times as much as it is real faith in a great God. I didn't say that. Jesus did. He said that if my faith were as large as a mustard seed that it would be able to move mountains. Mountain-moving faith is faith in the God who moves mountains.

From where do you get that kind of faith? You get it from the same source this man got his faith. You start by believing. Then you go to the Lord with whatever faith you have and you ask for more. And when you get it, you find that He was the One who gave you your faith from the beginning.

We live today in an age of doubt. Faith has always been difficult, but I believe that faith in our present age has rarely seen such a challenge. When we come to Christ, we can come with our doubts, bringing them to Him. We can confess our doubts and seek His face in faith.

FAITH AND THE AUTHORITY OF HEAVEN

And when Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." (Mark 9:25).

There is no hesitancy on the part of Jesus. He does not hedge His bets by saying, "I can perform this miracle if the rest of you have enough faith, but if I fail then it will be your fault." Faith healers of today play that game, but Jesus did not. He speaks with the authority of heaven as he commands the deaf and dumb spirit to leave the boy.

That points out an important principle. It is that faith is only as effective as the strength of the object in which it is based. A strong faith in a weak object is completely worthless.

Imagine that you see me packing up for a trip. You ask me, "Where are you going, John?" I reply, "I'm going on a trip to the desert. In fact, I'm getting ready to take a hike through the Sinai Desert."

You check over my provisions. You see that I have a tent and plenty of sun screen. There is a coat for the chilly nights and there is a compass so that I won't go around in circles. There is only one thing I seem to be missing. What about water? "I've thought of that," I reply, and I pull out a tin cup. There is only one problem. The cup is empty. There is no water in it. "But that is okay," I insist, "I have my cup."

Faith is like that empty cup. Faith alone will not accomplish anything. If faith is to be effective, it must be in a proper object. What goes into the cup is the important thing. Faith is only as effective as the strength of the object in which it is based.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith..." We commonly say that you are saved by faith, but that is not accurate. You are saved by grace through faith. Faith is the empty cup. Grace is that which is in the cup.

FAITH AND THE POWER OF GOD

And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. (Mark 9:26-27).

The removal of the demon was a violent affair. There were convulsions. There was a struggle. Then nothing. The boy became still, so still that he appeared to have died. Things looked as though they had gone from bad to worse. But there was One present who was able to raise the dead. Jesus took the boy by the hand and raised him up.

The old adage says, "Doubt knocked at the door, faith answered, and there was no one there." The father of this boy had come to the disciples in faith and had seen failure. But now he comes to Jesus and he sees the power of God. There is a lesson here. If you want to see the power of God, don't look for it in men. Look for it in Jesus. Look for it in the cross where a crucified carpenter carried upon Himself the sins of the world and then look for it in the resurrection of the One who defeated death.

FAITH AND THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

And when He had come into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:28-29).

Once the disciples had some private time with Jesus, they broached the question that had been uppermost in their minds. Why had they failed? They had been given power from God, why did it fail to work in this situation?

Jesus replies that the missing requirement is prayer. This tells me something about the Christian life. Prayer is a necessary ingredient. It is not for God's sake that we are to pray, but for our own sake. Prayer is necessary to faith. Where there is no prayer, there will be no faith. Prayer is to faith what breathing is to life. You might be able to hold your breath for a short period of time, but to do so for any length of time is asking for trouble.

FAITH AND THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

And from there they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it. (Mark 9:30).

In case you had not noticed it, a change had taken place in the ministry of Jesus. It had begun with Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ. Since that time, Jesus had gone up onto the Mount of Transfiguration with His disciples and then He had come back down to where His disciples had failed in their efforts to cast out a demon. Now we see Jesus deliberately taking His ministry out of the limelight. He continues to travel through Galilee, but now He is *unwilling for anyone to know about it*.

What is the reason for this change? It is seen in the subject of His message to His disciples. It has to do with the cross. It will be only a matter of months before Jesus will travel to Jerusalem to be arrested, convicted, and put to death. Jesus tells His disciples plainly that this is going to take place.

Jesus has already told them of the cross. He told them in Mark 8:31 following Peter's great confession. He tells them again now. It is the message that He is going to be arrested, convicted, killed, and that He shall also rise again. There is no reference here to the substitutionary atonement or to the meaning behind the events of the coming death and resurrection. That will come later. For now there is the simple statement of the facts.

Indeed, when we come to the actual description of those events, they will be lacking in any commentary as to their significance. It is not that Mark as the author did not see or understand that significance. He alluded to it in the opening of his gospel account and he will again mention that the coming of Jesus is to *give His life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45). At the close of his gospel he will record the command of Jesus to go and preach the gospel and the promise that *he who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved* (Mark 16:16).

Yet those references are absent here and they will be absent at the actual description of the crucifixion event. What accounts for this absence? It is because Mark wants you as the reader to walk in the sandals of those disciples. He wants you to see what they saw and hear what they heard. He wants you to see the historical evidence and come to the same conclusion to which they came, not as a result of a stated claim on the part of Jesus, but by looking at His power as it has been seen in the chapters up to this point and also by listening to His teaching and seeing His love that drove Him to the cross.

And from there they went out and began to go through

Galilee, and He was unwilling for anyone to know about it. (Mark 9:30).

We have read in the past of those times when Jesus sought to get away from the multitudes for a period of rest or of prayer. That now becomes the regular agenda of Jesus. His ministry enters a period of isolation in which the masses are kept in ignorance of His travel plans.

It is not that Jesus had no compassion for the masses. We have had ample demonstration of His compassion in both healing them, feeding them, and teaching them. But this period of isolation will be necessary to the future growth of the church. It will be during this time that Jesus begins to focus upon preparing His disciples for future ministry. He is looking to reproduce Himself in their lives and this takes one-on-one time.

This will be a time of slowing down. We remember how often Mark has used the word “immediately” throughout his account. It will not be used again throughout the remainder of this chapter and most of the next chapter. There was a time for the immediate and this is not it. Instead, this will be a time of training and of reflection.

For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.” ³² But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. (Mark 9:31-32).

They still did not get it. They did not understand. They had been told once already. They will be told again, but there is no understanding. After all, Jesus had been known to speak in parables. Perhaps this was one of those time.

Furthermore, *they were afraid to ask Him*. It is bad enough that they did not understand, but they were afraid to ask the One who could have given them understanding. What was the source of this fear? It was not that Jesus was so fearsome. We get the sense in other places that Jesus was very accepting. So why did they fear? I think the clue will be given in the next paragraph when we see the disciples discussing among themselves who will be the greatest in the kingdom. They are afraid that they will not appear very spiritual if they admit they do not understand Jesus’ words and that might affect their standing in the kingdom.

This tells me something about the nature of true faith. It is not true faith unless it is married to humility. You cannot know until you admit that you do not know. You cannot believe until you admit that you have no faith and you can pray with a faltering father, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

Mark 9:33-50

There have been a number of people in history who have been given the title, “The Great.” There was Herod the Great who measured his greatness through his vast building programs. I’ve had the opportunity to see some of his monuments and to stand beside the giant building blocks his workers moved into position. There was also Alexander the Great, infamous because he conquered the entire known world before his thirtieth birthday. Peter the Great is known for bringing Russia out of its medieval past to come into the modern world. Then there was the African American heavyweight boxer Muhammed Ali who entitled his autobiography, “The Greatest.”

How does the world count greatness? Great conquests. Great building projects. Great technological and cultural advances. Great riches. These are the marks of greatness in the eyes of the world. But as we shall see in this chapter, kingdom greatness is another matter entirely.

GREATNESS INVOLVES SERVANTHOOD

33 And they came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. 35 And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.” (Mark 9:33-35).

The words of Jesus in the previous paragraph generated some discussion along the way. Jesus had foretold his death. If Jesus died, then who would be the new leader of the group of disciples? As they arrive in Capernaum, Jesus asks them what had been the topic of their discussion and they are reluctant to answer. Why? Because they had been talking, not about His death, but how they could rise to the top of leadership over His dead

body. They had been discussing the issue of greatness and they had held their own popularity contest to see which of them was the greatest.

Jesus calls them together to state what will be a fundamental lesson within this passage: *If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.*

There is an “upside down” quality to the kingdom. Things are done in the kingdom in exactly the opposite manner one would expect. Everything in life tells you that if you want to be first, then you have to strive and to struggle and to endure and sometimes you have to step on people or get them to help you along the way. The kingdom key to greatness is just the opposite. The one who is first in the kingdom is the one who seeks to benefit the poor, the helpless, and the insignificant. Jesus uses the example of a child.

AN OBJECT LESSON IN GREATNESS

And taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.” (Mark 9:36-37).

The disciples had been hoping that one of them might be elevated to a position of prominence. Each wanted to have the status of being chosen and elevated by Jesus. Instead, He takes a child into His arms. This child was a nobody. He had no social status. He had no oratorical abilities. We do not even know his name. He is merely a child. The illustration points out to the fact that how we treat the humble and the helpless is a measure of our devotion to the Lord.

When we come to Mark 10:15, there will be another illustration regarding children and the receiving of Jesus. These two principles can be seen in contrast.

Mark 9:37	Mark 10:15
The call is to be like Jesus.	The call is to be like the child.
Whoever receives a child in Jesus’ name receives Jesus.	Whoever does not receive the kingdom like a child does not receive it at all.

Jesus is teaching that there is a correlation between receiving Jesus and receiving the helpless. Our tendency is to receive those who might give

us power and prestige. We associate with those who can advance our career. We do something nice for someone else so that they might do something nice for us in return. Even when we come to the Lord, we come in order to get something from Him. But when you receive a child, that child is unable to do anything for you. You don't receive a child because he gives you anything because he has nothing to give. A child is not going to leave you an inheritance or put you in his will. A child has nothing to commend himself to you.

Here is the point. Jesus came to help the helpless and we are to do the same. Kingdom greatness is achieved by doing good for those who are unable to reciprocate goodness in return.

We tend to look at the ministry of the popular preacher or the minister of the mega-church as doing great things for the kingdom, but perhaps Jesus is giving a special blessing to children's Sunday School teachers and nursery workers.

GREATNESS INVOLVES TOLERATION

John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us."

³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. ⁴⁰ For he who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward. (Mark 9:38-41).

This appears as though John is trying to change the subject. Perhaps he is. But the words of Jesus are still dealing with the same topic of greatness. The world looks upon greatness as having the ability to include or exclude others. The world says I am great if you have to come to me to be included; that I am great if I am able to exclude you from that which you desire.

Real greatness has nothing to do with such petty motives. Real greatness involves a certain level of toleration. There is no need to control or treat others with a perfectionist air.

Jesus had cited the example of a child who was to be received. By contrast, John tells of a man whom the disciples did not receive. To the contrary, they tried to prevent him from engaging in any further ministry:

Illustration of a Child	Illustration of a Man Casting out Demons
Jesus: <i>Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me</i>	John: <i>We saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us</i>
The child is to be accepted	The man was to be accepted and not hindered

Just as the child was to be accepted and received, so also the man was to be tolerated and not hindered. Jesus gives three reasons for this:

1. Jesus Calls for Toleration Because Actions Coincide with Words: *Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me (9:39).*

Do you want to know how someone feels about Christ? Watch how they live. Real faith will find a way to be manifested in real living. This is not to say that faith or doctrine is unimportant. But it does mean that real faith and right doctrine will be proven through right living.

2. Jesus Calls for Toleration Because Those Who Are Not Foes Are Friends: *For he who is not against us is for us (9:40).*

It is impossible to remain impartial to Jesus. The more you are confronted with His claims and with His person, the more you will be driven either to accept Him or to reject Him. The one thing you will not be able to do is to remain neutral to Him.

On the other hand, Christianity has long been splintered into a kaleidoscope of different denominations. That is not a good thing. Don't get me wrong; I am not speaking against participation in a denomination, nor am I saying that we must all go out and join a non-denominational church; these usually end up being their own denomination of one.

There are a lot of people who claim to love Jesus, but who do not get along other people who also claim to love Jesus. We are called to Christian unity and a part of such unity will be in the understanding that *he who is not against us is for us*.

3. Jesus Calls for Toleration Because Relationship Is Rewarded: *For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as*

followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (9:41).

When you serve those who are serving Jesus, then you are serving Jesus. This is true even if the one who is serving Jesus is not numbered among the Twelve Apostles. It is true even if he is not a part of your particular denomination. And it is true even if it does not outwardly appear to be a noteworthy service.

Giving someone a cup of water is not a big thing in and of itself. It is not the sort of action that will win you great praise or approbation. It is the sort of service you might perform for a child. That is what makes it so significant.

GREATNESS CALLS FOR PRIORITIES

“And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. ⁴³ And if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, ⁴⁴ where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

⁴⁵ “And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁶ where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

⁴⁷ “And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:42-48).

These are difficult words. They are meant to be. We must remember that Jesus has not changed His original subject. He began this discussion by taking up a little child as an example. We can imagine the child is still in the arms of Jesus as He speaks of “one of these little ones.”

Jesus gives a warning to those who might cause one of these little ones to stumble. It is a warning that also applies to John and the disciples who were eager to forbid a man from engaging in ministry without their express authorization. This tells me something about this warning. It tells me this warning has far-reaching applications.

The point of this passage is not to encourage us to engage in physical

self-mutilation. It is given to stress the importance of the priority of the next life over this one. What you do today has eternal consequences and those consequences should be a priority in your life, even to the point of such outrageous considerations as protecting a hand or a foot or an eye.

This is the first reference that Mark has used of the term translated here as “hell.” The Greek term used here is γέεννα (*ge'ena*) and is a transliteration of the Hebrew term *Gehenna*, literally, “Valley of Hinnom.” The Hinnom Valley was located on the southwest side of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times, this had been a place of idol worship until Josiah’s reformation had put a stop to such activities (2 Kings 23:10). Subsequently, this place had become the city garbage dump so that it was a constant place of burning. As such, it became a type and a figure for the idea of the punishment of hell.

Is hell a literal place? If you are speaking of a place with literal worms and literal fire, then we are forced to admit that these are not necessarily to be taken with rigid literalism. But that should in no way be used to minimize this warning. If worms and fire are the mere figures, then how much worse is the real experience?

GREATNESS WILL INFLUENCE OTHERS

“For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” (Mark 9:49-50).

Verse 49 is puzzling. It spans two different statements. The previous verses in the passage speak of the fires of hell as Jesus warns of being cast into the place *where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched* (9:48).

Verse 50 speaks of salt, a substance that was known for its preserving and healing influence. It is in this regard that disciples of Christ are called to *have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another*.

These two verses combine these two images. Salt is both a preservative as well as a destroyer. On the one hand, a city that was destroyed was often sown with salt so that nothing further would grow there. On the other hand, salt was placed upon certain foods in order to preserve them.

We are all tested. That test can result in our destruction or it can result in our preservation. Salt represents influence. It comes and it influences that with which it is salved. Will that influence result in your

preservation or in your condemnation? That is the question that must be faced in each person's life.

If you persevere in your faith, then your influence will be felt, both in your life and in the life of others. If you do not persevere, then your influence is like salt that has lost its saltiness. It is worthless.

Here is the point. If you remain faithful, then your influence will be felt in the lives of others. You will be able to *at peace with one another*. On the other hand, if Christians are seen to be quarreling and warring with one another, they quickly lose their influence in the world.

It is only in the person of Christ that we find the One who is truly great. He exemplifies servanthood as He came to save us from our sins. He accepted us when we had done nothing to commend ourselves to Him. He made the Father's work His ultimate priority and, as a result, His influence extends to all creation and for all eternity.

JESUS ON DIVORCE

Mark 10:1-12

It is difficult these days to find anyone who has not had some member of a family who has gone through a divorce. I've seen it in my own extended family and I've seen the hurtful effects that it has on people.

Divorce statistics have reached the point where one out of every two marriages are now said to end in divorce. To be fair, there are a number of people who inflate those statistics by multiple divorces. Sadly, the statistics do not seem to be all that different for those who are members in the Christian church. All too often, divorce seems to be accepted as an alternative to an unhappy marriage situation. Jesus deals with such issues in this chapter.

JESUS COMES TO JUDEA

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them. (Mark 10:1).

Throughout this chapter, we are going to see Jesus coming closer and closer to Jerusalem. He now comes to the regions of Judea and “beyond the Jordan.” The Greek word “beyond” is *πέραν* (*peran*). It had become known as the region of Perea. This was the official designation of the lands on the east bank of the Jordan.

In verse 32 they will be “on the road to Jerusalem.”

In verse 46 they will come to Jericho.

And in chapter 11 we shall see Jesus arriving in Jerusalem itself.

Jesus is following the traditional route from Galilee to Jerusalem, this time taking the normal detour around Samaria (though not for the same reasons). In this chapter, Jesus will be facing a rising opposition. It will be an opposition from both within and from without.

Opposition from the Pharisees - spiritually blind (10:1-12).

Opposition from the Disciples (10:13-16).

Man & Disciples: Entrance into Eternal Life (10:17-30).

Prophecy of Death & Resurrection (10:31-34).

James & John & Disciples: Seat in Kingdom (10:35-40).

Opposition from the Disciples (10:41-45).

Healing of a blind man (10:46-52).

When we read that Jesus came *from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan* we are reminded that, at the very beginning of Mark's account, there was a reference to ministry that was taking place among the people of Judea who were going down to the Jordan (Mark 1:5). You will remember that when John was beheaded, the issue that brought things to a head was that of divorce. John had made a public proclamation denouncing the adultery of Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Now Jesus is in the same place and dealing with the same question. It is almost as though He has come full circle.

A DECEPTIVE QUESTION

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. (Mark 10:2).

Notice the motive of the Pharisees. They were "testing" Jesus. Their purpose was not in learning answers to their questions, but to trap Him. They are posing a question in which Jesus will be shown in a bad light no matter how He answers.

When they ask whether a certain action was "lawful" (ἐἰ ἔξεστιν), the real question was whether it was "permitted" by Jesus. They were not concerned with right or wrong. Divorce had reached epic proportions among the Jews of this day. Josephus casually comments on how his wife displeased him and he therefore divorced her. Divorcing normally required a skilled Rabbi or expert in the law to write up a legal bill of divorce. It would be witnessed by a court of three rabbis and a copy lodged with the Sanhedrin.

There were two main schools of thought among the Jews regarding divorce. Both of these schools of thought looked at things only from the husband's point of view.

1. The School of Shammai.

Shammai was a well-known rabbi who lived a generation before Jesus. He stated that a man could divorce his wife if she was found to have been unfaithful.

2. The School of Hillel.

Hillel had died 20 years earlier. He stated that a man could divorce his wife for any type of indecency. Such indecencies might include any of the following:

- Infertility
- Overeating
- Spinning around in the street so that someone saw her knees
- Speaking to men
- Taking her hair down
- Putting too much salt on the food
- Burning his dinner
- Saying something unkind about her mother-in-law
- Being a brawling woman (this was defined as a woman whose voice was heard in the next house - and this was in the days prior to air-conditioning).

Rabbi Akiba went so far as to say that a woman might become undesirable in the eyes of her husband because he had found someone else who was prettier or more desirable

By the way, a woman did not have the same rights. Under Jewish law, she could not normally divorce her husband. At best, she could only request that he divorce her. The exceptions were if her husband...

Josephus tells us that Salome, the sister of Herod the Great, sent her husband a bill of divorce. He goes on to add, "This was not according to Jewish laws; for with us it is lawful for a husband to do so; but a wife, if she departs from her husband cannot of herself be married unless her former husband put her away." (Antiquities 15:7:10).

- Became a leper
- Engaged in an unclean

trade, such as that of a tanner

- Raped a virgin
- Falsely accused her of pre-nuptial sin.

The interpretation of Hillel tended to be the more popular, especially among those who wished to divorce their wives. The Pharisees ask this question, apparently hoping that Jesus will take a hard line against divorce and thereby alienate all among the Jews who are divorced.

Remember that John the Baptist had lost his head over this issue. John had been arrested by Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of both Galilee and Perea. John's crime had been in speaking out against the divorce and remarriage of Herod Antipas and Herodias. Furthermore, Herod had already gone on record with his belief that Jesus was a reincarnation of John. He is still in the same adulterous relationship that brought about the denunciation by John the Baptist. And this question is being posed at the very site of John's former ministry.

The Pharisees are hoping to trap Jesus. Either he will disagree with John the Baptist or else he will get into trouble with Herod Antipas. How will he reply? Jesus bypasses both schools of thought and He bypasses the situation with Herod Antipas. Instead, He directs their attention to Moses.

A SCRIPTURAL ANSWER

And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." (Mark 10:3-4).

Jesus asks them to give the command of Moses. Notice their reply. They do not tell what Moses commanded. They tell only what Moses permitted.

Jesus	<i>"What did Moses COMMAND?"</i>
Pharisees	<i>"This is what Moses PERMITTED."</i>

Do you see it? They were more concerned with what they could get away with than what the Scriptures actually commanded. They were looking for the "thou shalt not" and were ignoring the positive injunctions of Scripture. They were more concerned with what they could NOT do than with what they ought to have been doing.

There is a principle here. Christianity is not defined in what you do not do. If spirituality were defined in what you did not do, then our cat would be the most spiritual one in our household.

The reference to Moses permitting divorce is found in the book of Deuteronomy. This permission is seen in the context of a divorce that had already taken place.

“When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then the former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.”
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

This passage does not give permission for divorce. Rather, it regulates remarriage. It assumes that, because of sinful circumstances, divorces sometimes take place. It goes on to regulate remarriage in the case of divorce.

T. J. Campo likens the attitude of these Pharisees to a group of engineers who are following a tour guide through Arizona. They come to the Grand Canyon and, even though he has seen it hundreds of times, the tour guide is once again struck by the wonder and the majesty of the view of the canyon. He turns to the engineers to say, “Isn’t this a marvelous view?” But they are not even looking. Instead they are working at their calculators and figuring how many cubic yards of cement would be needed to fill the canyon. Similarly, the Pharisees face the wonder and the majesty of God’s design for marriage and their only concern was to ask: “How can I get out of it?”

A LEGITIMATE EXPLANATION

But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

7 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, 8 and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” (Mark 10:5-9).

Moses permitted divorce because of the existence of sin. There are times when divorce might be the lesser of two evils. But it is still an evil. It is contrary to the divine design. Jesus points this out by quoting from Genesis. If there had been divorce in the Garden of Eden, the Bible would have ended with Genesis 2. After all, there was no one else to marry.

God brought Adam and Eve together. Marriage was designed by God. It was designed for a male and a female (the same-sex “marriages” being advocated by some today are an abomination). Marriage is two people coming together to be merged into a single unity. This joining is of God’s design. And if God has joined two people, then they ought not to be separated.

Some people try to use this as an escape route. They quote Mark 10:9 - *“What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate,”* and they say, “Our marriage was a mistake. God didn’t put us together and we shouldn’t be together.” But this isn’t talking about how you view one another. It is talking about how God views marriage. God says, “I make marriages and you shouldn’t be taking them apart.”

Abortion is to childbirth what divorce is to marriage. It kills the creation of God.
--

A BINDING COVENANT

In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again.

And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; 12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.” (Mark 10:10-12).

Once they are alone, the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him to clarify His teaching concerning marriage and divorce. He does so. His teaching is that marriage is meant to be permanent. When a marriage ends in divorce, it is always the result of sin on someone’s behalf.

There are some interesting differences in the words of Jesus recorded

here in Mark’s account when compared with the parallel in Matthew.

Matthew 19:3-9	Mark 10:1-12
Includes the exception “ <i>except for immorality</i> ” (19:9).	Does not include this exception.
Speaks only to the case of the husband divorcing his wife.	Speaks to the case of both the husband as well as the wife being the instigator of the divorce.

To the first difference, we should note that the essence of the teaching of Jesus is the same — that marriage is to be permanent and the dissolution of marriage in order to remarry another always involves a situation of adultery.

The reason that both the husband as well as the wife are mentioned here in verses 11-12 is that Mark is writing to a Gentile audience and it was more commonplace among the Gentiles of either husbands or wives to be the ones who might initiate a divorce. In closing, I want to make the following observations:

1. Jesus spoke in much simpler and plainer terms when He answered His disciples. The principle is that God only gives truth to those who want truth.
2. Marriage is designed to be permanent. Anything less is a result of sin on the part of at least one of the marriage partners. Divorce is a painfully sad tearing apart of that which was meant to be together.
3. God’s grace allows for man’s weaknesses. The Mosaic law regulated divorce under certain circumstances, even though it was contrary to God’s principle of the permanence of marriage. That same grace is available to you.
4. There is a sense in which Jesus went through the pain of divorce for us. That was what the cross was all about. It was a time when the Son was separated and torn away from the Father. It was a time when there was a tearing apart of that which was meant to be together. It was a time when Jesus was divorced from the land of the living as He died the death we deserved.

He did this so that we could enter into an eternal marriage union. He did this so that He could be the ultimate bridegroom and so that He could purchase for Himself a bride that is without spot or wrinkle.

ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark 10:13-31

There can be no greater question posed than the one asked within this chapter. “What must one do to enter into the Kingdom of God?” We have already seen Jesus speaking at length about the kingdom, but now He comes to what for us is a crucial issue.

CHILDREN AND THE KINGDOM

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”

¹⁶ And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16).

There is a contrast to be seen in this paragraph with the preceding one. In both cases, there is a family emphasis.

Mark 10:1-12	Mark 10:13-16
Divorce and Remarriage	Children and the Kingdom
The Pharisees bring a question	The Disciple attempt to stop children
Sanctity of marriage	Sanctity of children

Children have a habit of crashing adult parties. That is what happened here. The story begins when some parents came to Jesus with their children, seeking simply that He might touch them. Their action is described

in the imperfect tense, indicating that they were continually bringing children.

The disciples intervened. After all, there was work to be done and miracles to be performed and sermons to be preached and demons to be cast out. They thought that only “important people” should see Jesus. Certainly there was no time for something as mundane and as useless as a bunch of soiled diapers and running noses.

The word for “children” in this passage (παῖδια, *paidia*) is generic and could be used to refer to children of all ages.

By the way, that is one of the lies of the feminist movement. It says to women, “You don’t want to limit your life to something as mundane and as insignificant as taking care of a child, do you? Not when you can have a career and independence and a life that really counts!” What it is saying is that the raising of children isn’t very important. I’ll bet you never thought of the disciples as being feminists. But in this regard, they were. And Jesus rebukes them for it.

Jesus was indignant. He became emotionally involved. Whereas the disciples had been rebuking the parents, now Jesus rebuked the disciples. Why? It is because *the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*.

This passage has been called the Magna Charta of children. It reflects their “bill of rights.” In this age where abortion is a common phenomenon, it teaches us the high value of children. But that is not all that it teaches. It also teaches us about the kingdom. And I believe that this is the primary reason that it occurs here in the book of Mark.

You see, a child has a certain quality which is necessary for anyone who would desire to enter into the Kingdom of God. That is what Jesus said. “*Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.*” In what way must we receive the kingdom like a child? What is it that draws the Lord to a child? I want to suggest several things:

1. A Quality of Trust.

Have you ever seen a child leap into his father’s arms? That child doesn’t say, “Are you certain that you have the right timing and motor control to catch me in a safe manner in accordance with OSHA Standards?” There is complete trust and abandonment.

2. A Quality of Powerlessness.

There is nothing so powerless as a baby. The smaller the

child, the more helpless that child is. And the more that parent takes an active role in feeding and changing and nursing and burping that child.

3. A Quality of Teachableness.

The mind and soul of a child is a sponge, ready to soak up knowledge. You know the familiar saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” We grow up, we become set in our ways, and we become unteachable. If we ever become unteachable, then we cease our spiritual growth.

Jesus looked at the disciples with their growing sophistication and their doctrinal knowledge and He pointed to these children and said, “You need to be like that.”

He had already tried to teach them this lesson. Back in Mark 9:36-37, He had taken a child and had told them how important it was to receive such a child. But they had missed it. Instead of receiving these children, they had been on the verge of turning them away.

A SINCERE QUESTION

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 11:17).

It is no accident that this event is given to us on the heels of the preceding paragraph. They are meant to be a study in contrasts.

Mark 10:13-16	Mark 10:17-23
Children are brought to Jesus	Rich man comes running to Jesus
Helpless and trusting	Depending upon his own good works
They are blessed by Jesus	He turns away from Jesus
<i>“The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these!”</i>	<i>“How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God!”</i>

Notice how this man addressed Jesus. “Good teacher!” That sounds good, but it reveals some erroneous thinking. This man thought that he was

a good man talking to another good man. He was wrong on both accounts.

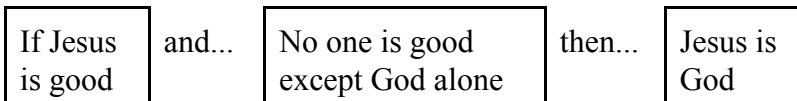
- He was wrong in thinking that he was a good person. He may have been good in the eyes of his community, but God doesn't grade on the curve. He had not recognized the depth of his need.
- He was also wrong in thinking that Jesus was merely a good teacher. He had not yet seen Jesus as Savior or Lord.

Jesus will move to correct both of these misconceptions. First, He will deal with the man's conception of Jesus, showing the man that Jesus cannot merely be a good man. He is either the perfect God-man or else He is a liar. Then, He will deal with the man's conception of his own worthiness.

A THEOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION

*And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good?
No one is good except God alone. (Mark 11:18).*

Some have taken the words of Jesus to be a denial of His divinity. But I would suggest just the opposite. He is taking the man's opening presupposition and moving him to its obvious conclusion.



Do you see what He is doing? He is probing this young man to see whether he is teachable. He is pushing his faith, his teachableness, and his sense of his own powerlessness. He is checking to see if this man will come the way a child comes.

A LAWFUL ANSWER

"You know the commandments, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." "

And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." (Mark 11:19-20).

Jesus quotes the Law to this man. But He doesn't quote all of the Law. There are some of the Laws which He does not mention. He says nothing of coveting or of worshiping God above all other things.

As a result, the young man claims to have kept all these things. Do you see what he is doing? Jesus said that there is none who is good but God alone and the man is claiming to be good in the eyes of the Law.

Jesus	Young Man
"There is none who is good but God alone"	"I have been good according to God's Law"

In spite of this, Jesus does not call the man out or question his sincerity. To the contrary, Jesus feels love for him. In that moment of love, He calls for this young man to demonstrate His professed love of God through a sacrificial call.

A SACRIFICIAL CALL

Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Mark 11:21).

We do not often read in the Scriptures of Jesus feeling love for a particular individual. But he did here. Why?

- He had shown a humility and a proper respect by coming and kneeling (10:17).
- He had shown a sincere desire by the fact that he ran to Jesus (10:17).
- He seems to have been desperate with an inner nervousness over his eternal state.

Do you know people like that? People who seem close to the Kingdom? Can you empathize with this man's lost and lonely condition? You need to know that what Jesus says next, He says out of a heart of love for this man. He is speaking the truth in love. That does not always mean that what is said is what we want to hear.

This brings us to a key question. Why didn't Jesus simply say, "Give

up your quest for personal goodness and believe only in Me”? He did. Following Jesus is what faith is all about. Rest and receive. An essential element of this kind of faith is surrender. If something is standing in the way of following Jesus, then I must choose.

I am told that hunters used to trap monkeys with a simple, yet effective trap. They would take a hollowed-out gourd and drill into it a hole. Inside the gourd they would place an orange. The monkey would come along and reach inside to get the orange. But once he had the orange in his hand, he was unable to withdraw it from the hole. The monkey had a choice to make. He could let the orange go, withdraw his hand, and be free. Or he could hold onto the orange and remain a captive.

Many people today are holding on to that which has trapped them. And it is not until they let go that they can experience the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. Here is the principle. What you own owns you. And you cannot own Christ unless you have renounced your ownership of all else that owns you.

A SORROWFUL DEPARTURE

*But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.
(Mark 11:22).*

This man made his choice. He was saddened. He even grieved. But his choice was still to hold onto his possessions rather than to hold onto Christ.

Jesus did not chase after the man. He does not say, “I didn’t mean to make things too difficult to you. Come on back and give me just a little bit of faith and it will be enough and then you can go and live as you please.” By the same token, the solution to Christian problems is not for the church to preach a cheap grace. When the church begins to preach cheap grace, then people stop surrendering to Christ. They become merely unconverted professors.

A DIFFICULT LESSON

*And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples,
“How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the
kingdom of God!”*

24 The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 11:23-25).

Jesus uses the retreat of the rich man to teach a lesson to his disciples. He has already used a child to show them what kind of man does enter into the kingdom. Now he uses the rich man as an example of the kind of man that does not enter into the kingdom.

The disciples were amazed at this teaching. It went completely contrary to the popular theology of the day. The theology of the day was prosperity theology. They reasoned that rich people are rich because God has blessed them. Therefore someone

Notice how Jesus addresses His disciples. He calls them “children” (τεκνα, *tekna*). This is significant in light of what He has recently said about the necessity of coming as a child.

who was rich was a demonstration of the blessings of God. There was a saying, “God loves the poor, but He helps the rich.”

But Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Paul says the same thing in 1 Corinthians - that there are not many wise or mighty or noble who enter the kingdom (1:26).

Jesus compares it with a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle. I have a hard enough time trying to get a piece of thread through the eye of a needle. But a camel! It is not only difficult. It is impossible. And that is okay, because God delights in doing the impossible.

THE GOD OF IMPOSSIBILITIES

They were even more astonished and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?”

Looking at them, Jesus said, “With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.” Mark 10:26-27).

The disciples understood what Jesus was saying. They understood he was saying that salvation is impossible in human terms. There is nothing that a man can do to save himself, be he rich, poor or middle class. That is the bad news. But the good news is that God is the God of the impossible.

A REWARDING PROMISE

Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.”

29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, 30 but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.” (Mark 10:28-31).

Don’t you just love Peter? He picks this opportunity to open mouth and insert foot. Watching this sincere man turn away from Jesus makes Peter uncomfortable. He grows even more uncomfortable as he listens to the teaching of Jesus on how impossible it is for a rich man to be saved. Finally, he can be silent no longer. He declares that he and the other disciples are not like the rich man who refused to give up his riches.

- Peter and Andrew gave up their boat and their nets.
- James and John did the same.
- Matthew gave up his tax collecting business.
- Simon the zealot gave up his rebellion.
- Every one of the disciples gave up something to follow Jesus.

Jesus replies that they shall not go unrewarded. Not only in this life, but in the life to come. The promised rewards are both in the now and the not yet. Notice the things that are promised: “...*houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms...*”

In what manner are these things promised? Let me suggest that they are fulfilled in the church. It is there that we enter into the house of God. It is there that we find a spiritual family made up of *brothers and sisters and mothers and children*. It is there that we are able to bear fruit for the kingdom. But notice what is also promised.

“...houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with PERSECUTIONS”

Jesus never promised that the Christian life would be easy. He promised a cross before the crown. He called men to count the cost of becoming a Christian. It costs everything that you have and everything that

you are.

*“But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”
(Mark 10:31).*

Jesus is describing Servanthood. To become a member of the Kingdom, one must become a servant. To become a servant is to take on the character of the King.

Did you notice who was included in this group? Judas Iscariot! The same promise was given to him. If he would follow Jesus to the exclusion of all else, he would be blessed along with the other disciples. There is a lesson here. It is the lesson of the long haul. The reward is not given to the one who starts the race, but to the one who finishes it.

We are called to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. The problem with a living sacrifice is that it has a tendency to crawl off the altar. Judas made an initial commitment to follow Jesus. But something got in the way. Somewhere along the line, he began to treasure things more than he treasured the Lord. How about you? Perhaps you made a good start, but where is your heart now? What is first place in your heart?

SERVANTHOOD

Mark 10:32-45

One of the themes of the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament is that of the Suffering Servant. Isaiah in particular explores the motif of the Servant of the Lord who would “*justify the many*” and “*bear their iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:11). This Servant would be....

- Chosen by God from the womb (Isaiah 49:5).
- A recipient of the Spirit of God (Isaiah 42:1)
- Unimpressive in the eyes of men (Isaiah 52:14).
- A bringer of justice to the earth (Isaiah 42:4).
- A light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6).
- High and lifted up and greatly exalted (Isaiah 52:13).

As we come to this section of the Gospel of Mark, we see this same motif coming to the forefront as Jesus sets forth His teaching concerning servanthood in the Kingdom. He had the heart of a servant. He did not come on the scene demanding that men worship Him. He did not build a palace for Himself or sit on a royal throne. He did not enjoy all of the comforts that this world has to offer. He could have done that, but He did not. He did not because He came to serve.

A PROPHETIC PORTRAYAL

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, ³³ saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.” (Mark 10:32-34).

This is not the first time that Jesus had predicted His own death. Twice before, we have seen Jesus give a detailed prophecy of His impending death, burial, and resurrection.

Mark 8:31	Mark 9:31	Mark 10:33-34
The Son of Man will... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suffer many things • Be rejected • Be killed • Rise again 	The Son of Man will be... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered into the hands of men • Killed • He will rise 	The Son of Man will be... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered • Condemned • Mocked and spit on and scourged • They will kill Him • He will rise again

With each prediction, a little more information has been given. First there was the message that the Son of Man would be killed and rise again. Then, it is told that He would suffer at the hands of men. Finally, the disciples are told about the mocking and scourging that would accompany His death.

There is a principle here. It is that God's revelation is never given merely to satisfy curiosity. It is always given in terms of need and capacity. This means that God will only tell you what you need to know and what you are able to bear.

This means that you can take your prophecy chart down and burn it. God isn't telling you things that you don't need to know. As a result, you can begin to trust Him on a day by day basis. Jesus is doing that. He is going to Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been foretold as the place of betrayal and arrest. There is a cross awaiting Him in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is that place of scourging, beating, and mocking. Messiahs are put to death in Jerusalem and Jesus is going there.

I would have been headed in the other direction. But Jesus continued on His route to Jerusalem. Not only that, but He was up ahead of the disciples. While they were lagging behind, He took the lead. He was out in front, setting an ever-quickening pace to arrive there. Why? Because He loved us.

Verse 34 mentioned three groups of people that would be involved in putting Jesus to death.

- The Chief Priests
- The Scribes
- The Gentiles

That was just about everybody. It included religious leaders, theologians, and pagans. The world was universal in its rejection of Jesus.

Are you surprised at the growing hostility to Christianity? Are you surprised when you see our faith mocked and ridiculed by the media? Are you surprised when you see legislature outlawing prayer in the schools, legalizing abortion, and the IRS closing down churches? You shouldn't be. You have been warned. The world is out to get Christ and, if you are one of His, then the world is out to get you, too.

There is a battle going on. It is a battle between good and evil. Bad things happen in a battle. People get hurt and Messiahs get crucified. But we also have good news. Our King has won the battle. On Friday evil won. But on Sunday evil died. And you are on the side that came out victorious.

AN AMBITIOUS REQUEST

James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."

³⁶ And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

³⁷ They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory." (Mark 10:35-37).

James and John come to Jesus with a request. It is a request that shows that they had not been listening to the prophecy of Jesus. It looks as though they actually attempt to get a carte blanche agreement from Jesus: "...we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." But He does not fall for it. Instead, He asks them for the specifics of their request. It is that they might have the positions of honor on His left and on His right when He would come in His glory.

The other disciples did not ask for this. I think that they would have if they had thought of it. But they did not even think of asking. With the exception of Peter, they hadn't seen the glory of God. But James and John had.

They had been with Jesus up on the mountain when He was transfigured. And that had set them to thinking.

For the first time, they had their minds set on the future. They realized that Jesus was more than He appeared. And they realized that there

Matthew's account indicates that they also involved their mother in this request (Matthew 20:20).

was coming a day when the real Jesus would be unveiled. They had seen some of that unveiling. And now they wanted to make the most of it.

A RESERVED REFUSAL

But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

³⁹ They said to Him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. ⁴⁰ But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” (Mark 10:38-40).

Jesus points out a lack of understanding on the part of the Zebedee brothers. What they are asking is a good thing, but they do not realize the scope of that which they are requesting. And so Jesus asks them about their willingness...

- To drink of the cup.
- To be baptized with the baptism.

What are the cup and the baptism of which Jesus speaks? I believe that both the cup and the baptism refer to the death which Jesus faces.

1. The Cup.

Jesus will have His disciples drink from a cup at the Last Supper. This cup will signify the blood which Jesus will shed upon the cross. The Scriptures teach that it is the blood of Jesus which is the price of our redemption. Therefore, the cup signifies the death of Jesus through which we are redeemed. When Jesus comes to the garden of Gethsemane, He will pray that this cup might pass from Him (Mark 14:36).

2. The Baptism.

The word “baptism” always carries with it the idea of “identification.” When one is baptized into a religion, that act of baptism identifies the one who is being baptized with that religion. When Jesus went to the cross, He was identified with our sin and our

guilt. God judged Him as though He were a guilty sinner. All of the wrath of God against sinful humanity was poured out upon Him.

A CALL TO SERVANTHOOD

Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. 43 But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:41-45).

When the other ten disciples heard of the request of James and John, they became angry. They were angry with James and John. And perhaps they were a little angry at themselves over not having thought of asking the same question first.

10:35	10:38	10:41	10:42
James & John		Ten Disciples	
Ambitious Request	Reply of Jesus	Envious Response	Reply of Jesus

Jealousy is poison to a church. It can split a church faster than anything. The disciples were ready to split off and start their own denomination. And so, Jesus called them together.

1. A Lordly Example: *“You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.” (Mark 10:42).*

The church was never called to model the world. They are to have two separate and opposing styles of leadership. The world looks at leadership as the exercising of authority. But leadership in the church is identified as servanthood.

Francis of Assisi is said to have visited St Peter’s Cathedral

in Rome where his guide showed him the wondrous architecture and the priceless treasures, noting, “The church can no longer say, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’” Francis agreed, adding, “The church is also unable to say, ‘In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk.’”

2. The Principle of Servanthood: “...*whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all*” (Mark 10:43-44).

Our church leaders should never allow themselves to forget that they are to consider themselves as servants of God and of His church. It is notable how often Paul described himself as a “slave of God.”

3. Servanthood Exemplified: “...*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus is the leader who leads. He never called His disciples to do anything that He was not willing to do Himself. He was the Servant of God. And He calls His followers to be servants, too.

Jesus came to serve. But that is not all. He also came to give His life as a ransom for many. The Greek text is worthy of notice. The word “ransom” is the Greek word *λυτρον* (*lutron*). It is one of three words used in the New Testament to describe “redemption.”

- *Agorazo* (ἀγοράζω): “To purchase.”

When we think of making a purchase, we think of buying groceries or a car or a house or some other inanimate object. We don’t normally talk about purchasing people. We are not accustomed to the idea of slavery in today’s enlightened society, but slavery was commonplace in Paul’s day. You would commonly go into the marketplace - the Agora - to purchase a slave.

- *Exagorazo* (ἐξαγοράζω): “To purchase out.”

This is the same word with a prefix placed in front of it meaning “out.” The picture is that you go into the slave market and you purchase a slave and then you bring him out of the market.

- *Lutrow* (λυτρω): “To release or set free.”

This is the word used here. It takes the picture one step further as you bring the slave out of the slave market and then set him free. This is what Christ has done for us. He came into this world of sin. He paid the ultimate price for us, His own blood shed on our behalf. He became our ransom, our releasing price.

The preposition used here is also significant. Verse 45 says that Jesus came to “give His life a ransom FOR many.” The preposition is the Greek word *ἀντι* (*anti*). It is the language of substitution. It tells us that Jesus came to “give His life a ransom **in the place** of many.”

Finally, notice that while Jesus called His disciples to a life of service, He Himself had resolved to go much further – to a death of service. Jesus came to die. He came to die that we might live.

RESTORING BLINDED EYES

Mark 10:46-52

Blindness is a terrible thing. To go through life and never to be able to see a golden sunset or to watch a baby's cheery smile or an ocean wave crashing down on a sandy beach. Blindness was an especially terrible ailment in the days of Jesus. A blind man had no hope. There were no operations that could take place. There were no books or tapes for the vision impaired. There were no jobs available for the sightless. The only thing that a blind man could do was to beg. And as this story opens, there is a blind beggar doing exactly that.

AN INDICATIVE NAME

Then they came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road. (Mark 10:46).

In verse 42, Mark told us that Jesus and His disciples were on the road going up to Jerusalem. Accordingly, they now find themselves coming through Jericho. They evidently were following the normal Jewish road from Galilee to Jerusalem which took a detour around Samaria.

There was accompanying Jesus and His disciples a large crowd. This is no surprise. It was the season of the Passover and the roads to Jerusalem would have been thronged with pilgrims coming to observe the Feast. There are some major differences between the account as it is recorded here in Mark and the way in which it is given to us in the other two Synoptics.

Matthew 20:20-28	Mark 10:46-52	Luke 18:35-43
Two blind men	Only one blind man is mentioned	
No name is given for either of the men	Blind man's name is given as Bartimaeus	No name given

Takes place “as He was leaving Jericho.”	Described as prior to coming to Jericho (see Luke 19:1).
--	--

- In all three cases, the blind are sitting beside the road.
- In all three cases, the crowd relates that Jesus is coming.
- In all three cases, the blind asks for mercy from “the Son of David.”

The fact the Luke places the healing prior to their entry into Jericho can possibly be understood in light of the fact that there were two Jerichos - one the ancient ruin and the other the present palace of the Herodian family. The two towns were located about a mile apart.

The fact that only one blind man is mentioned here in Mark’s account is not significant. Mark does not say that there was only one blind man. He merely wishes to focus upon the healing of a single man. I think that there is a reason for this. It is by way of a series of contrasts.

Rich Man	James and John	Bartimaeus
Mark 10:17-22	Mark 10:35-41	Mark 10:46-52
Self-satisfied	Ambitious	Wishing to see
Addresses Jesus as “Good Teacher”	Addresses Jesus as “Teacher.”	Addresses Jesus as “Jesus, Son of David.”
Asks for approval	Asks for exalted position	Asks for mercy
His riches caused him to remain lost	Their ambition caused a division	His faith made him whole

This is all a part of the continuing theme expressed in Mark 9:35 — *“If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.”* The principles was restated in Mark 10:42-45. Now it is being further illustrated in the case of this blind beggar. His name is given in verse 46 as Bartimaeus.

- The Hebrew “*Bar*” (בַּר) means “son.”
- This name means, “Son of Timaeus.”

Just in case you didn’t know that, the passage goes on to say that this

man was “*the son of Timaeus.*” Why this repetition? There are two possibilities.

1. It is possible that at least some of the readers to whom Mark writes knew this man whose name was Timaeus. Perhaps as a result of his son’s healing, this man became a Christian. Unfortunately, he is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scriptures, so we have no way of knowing that this is the case.
2. The name Timaeus is a Greek name and comes from the Greek word τιμάω (*timao*), “to honor or reverence.”

Jesus asks the same question of both Bartimaeus as well of James and John: “What do you want me to do for you?”

This man’s name meant “Son of honor.” However, he did not come seeking honor for himself in the way that James and John had done. He did not exalt his own goodness (like the rich man) or attempt to utilize his influence as an apostle to achieve an honorable position (like James and John), but simply asked for mercy.

This man’s name was in contrast to his position. He was a beggar. This was not a very honorable estate. That is what we all were. This is why we can never put on airs. The Christian ought to be the most humble of all men. We are simply beggars who were sitting beside the road and who have been given a great gift.

A PERSISTENT REQUEST

When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

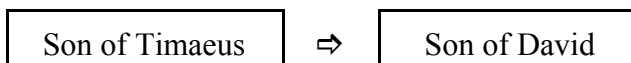
⁴⁸ Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. (Mark 10:47-50).

Bartimaeus heard a commotion. He asked what was its origin. After

all, he didn't want to get trampled in a stampede. He was told that it was Jesus. Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus. Blind people can't do much, but they can listen. This man had listened. He had heard the repeated accounts of this miracle-worker from Galilee. As he heard that Jesus was nearby, he began calling out to Him.

The specifics of his words are striking: "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*" This request is given in verse 47 and it is repeated again in verse 48. This repetition is given for a reason. It is given by way of contrast:



The phrase "Son of David" is a Messianic title. It was understood as such by the scribes in that day (Mark 12:35). It points to the true identity of Jesus. It points to Jesus as the Messiah. This is striking because this blind beggar is able to see something that the entire seeing crowd has not been able to see. He is able to see that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David and that he has the power to give mercy.

This focus upon Jesus as the Son of David is suggestive. It reminds us that David had other sons. They were also "sons of David." They tell us a bit of what it means to be the Son of David.

- Solomon was the son of David. Solomon was the great king who followed David and who built the temple and who ruled over Israel. Jesus is described here with a procession of followers — a great multitude. He is on His way up to Jerusalem, the city of the great king. He is acting the part of a king. Jesus is such a king. He has the wisdom that is greater than Solomon and He has a glory that is greater than that of Solomon. He is the king who calls for us to follow.
- David had another son named Absalom. He was a different sort of son. He was a rebellious son who tried to overthrow his own father and put himself upon the throne. He met his end when, having suffered defeat in battle, he was fleeing the scene and his hair was caught in the branches of a tree. He was caught and held there until enemy soldiers came along and saw him and ran him through with a spear.

The story of Absalom is echoed in the story of Jesus. Absalom's name meant, "Peace with my Father," but Jesus came to bring true peace with His Father. Absalom was rebellious, but Jesus was obedient to the point of death. Absalom had his hair caught in the branches of a tree and Jesus also met His death upon a tree.

Absalom was run through with a spear and Jesus was shown to be dead when a Roman centurion ran a spear through His body.

I don't know how much of this was understood by Bartimaeus, but I do know he recognized something because he cried out to the Son of David. Notice the reaction of the crowd. They were *sternly telling him to be quiet*. Of what does that remind you? It reminds me of twelve stuffy disciples saying, "You can't bring those children to Jesus! Don't you know that He is much too busy to be bothered by a bunch of runny-nosed children?"

Christianity has nothing to say to the casual man.
— A. W. Tozer

Bartimaeus would not be put off. When the crowd said, "Shhhhh!!!" he cried out all the more. There is something in his persistence of which I think Jesus approved. I think that Jesus smiled at his persistence. I believe that the reason we do not have more of our prayers answered is that we do not persist in our prayers.

Bartimaeus persisted until his call was answered. And when Jesus called him, he came without reservation. Notice the description of his coming...

1. He threw aside his cloak.

When a blind man throws something aside, there is no guarantee that he is going to find it again. Bartimaeus did not care about that. He came to Jesus, casting aside anything that was a hindrance.

2. He jumped up.

You don't normally jump up if you can't see what might be in your way. The cautious thing to do would be to get up slowly and carefully.

This man threw caution to the winds when he came to Jesus. There is no reservation here. Instead, there is faith. He may have been physically blind, but there is an incredible spiritual perception at work.

God does not reveal Himself to the curiosity seeker. He shows himself only to the desperate. You need to come to Him, not merely as a casual exercise in religion, but with the desperation of one who has no other hope. Bartimaeus exhibited that kind of desperation. He comes and he asks for that which only Jesus can give.

AN INSIGHTFUL QUESTION

And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” (Mark 10:51).

Notice the question that Jesus asks the blind man. It is the identical question which He had asked of James and John when they came to Him with their request. “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” A rather silly question to ask of a blind man. But Jesus asks it nonetheless. He asks it to bring the man face to face with his need.

This man was physically blind and he knew it. He stands in contrast to the Pharisees, the rich man, and perhaps even the disciples who were spiritually blind and did not know it. The first step in healing is diagnosis. Too often the reason we cannot see is because we think that we can.

There are two kinds of people that Jesus will not help. The first kind is those who do not want His help. The second kind is those who do not know that they need help.

If you are blind, then you know that you have a problem. You know that you are lacking in something. You know that you cannot help yourself. You know that you have to depend upon someone else. There is a corollary here. The greater the problem, the greater is the perceived need.

Have you ever noticed that when things are going well you aren’t so fervent in your prayer life? I don’t know about you, but when things are going well, I have a tendency to forget that I have needs. And when the focus upon my needs is dimmed, it is not long before my focus upon my Lord is also dimmed.

What am I saying? I am saying that affliction is important. I am saying that affliction is designed by God to keep me from straying. At the end of every road of adversity, you will find Jesus.

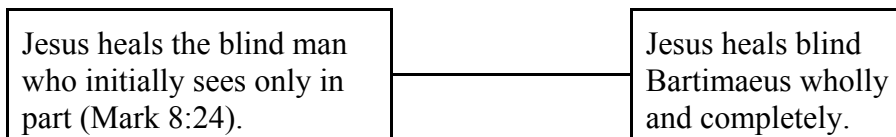
AN ANSWERED PRAYER

And Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road. (Mark 10:52).

Mark tells us that he immediately regained his sight. This is not always the case in the book of Mark. Back in chapter 8 of Mark, we saw Jesus heal a blind man, but that healing did not take place immediately. In

chapter 8, the healing came in stages. When Jesus began the healing process, the man said, “I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around” (Mark 8:24).

The healing of that man becomes a paradigm for the central section of the Gospel of Mark. The man began to see, but the healing was in stages and it was progressive. He had partial sight, but it was not complete. Similarly, we go on to read of Peter’s great confession a few verses later. Peter sees that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, but neither Peter nor the other apostles realize the full implications of that confession. When Jesus speaks of going to the cross, they do not believe. When Jesus manifests His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, they fail to fully believe. They see, but they don’t see completely. When Jesus asks them, “What do you want me to do for you?” James and John reply that they want to sit at the right and left hands of Jesus. They are showing their limited understanding. They see, but they do not see completely.



The need of the man was answered. He was healed. But his need for Jesus did not end. Indeed, his healing was only the first step in a long journey. At this point, Bartimaeus began to follow Jesus.

- To Jerusalem.
- To a cross
- To an empty tomb
- To an infant church.

Bartimaeus never did go back to begging. He never again sat by the side of a road to ask for alms. Instead he followed after Jesus. Are you following Jesus? You are if you have been truly healed by Him. You are if you now have spiritual sight.

THE TRIUMPHANT ENTRY

Mark 11:1-11

It is the week of the Passover. There is a holiday season in the air. The city of Jerusalem is crowded with pilgrims who have traveled from all over the world to be here. Every inn is filled to capacity and even the open ground around the city is covered with tents of Jewish pilgrims who have come to join in the celebration.

It is in this setting that Jesus arrives. Josephus says that 250,000 lambs were slain for the Passover. Before the week is out, the blood of those lambs will stain the cobblestones of the Temple. Before the week is out, the blood of the Lamb of God will be shed.

Jewish Law said that anyone within twenty miles must come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The actual practice was that Jews would come from much greater distances.

PREPARATION FOR THE ENTRY

As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, ² and said to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it here. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ you say, ‘The Lord has need of it’; and immediately he will send it back here.”

⁴ They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they untied it. ⁵ Some of the bystanders were saying to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?”

⁶ They spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they gave them permission. (Mark 11:1-6).

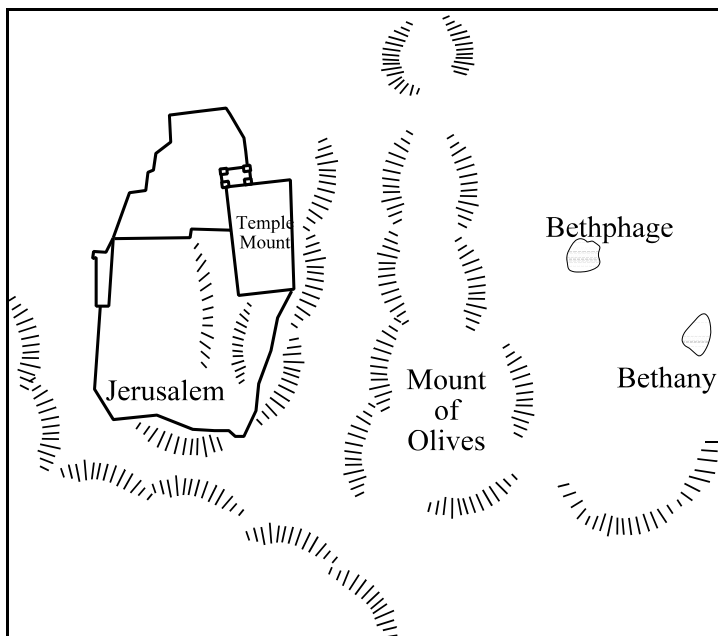
When Paula and I were in Bible College, it was announced that President Gerald Ford was going to be visiting the city where we lived. Not only would he be coming to the city of Hollywood, but also he would be

stopping by our Bible College for a very brief visit. Once the news was announced, there were all sorts of preparations for his visit. The school was scrubbed both inside and out. The Secret Service arrived to make certain of the security. And when the day finally came, a great crowd gathered to meet him. As Jesus came to Jerusalem for what would be His last Passover, there were also preparations. The King was coming!

Mark has not dealt with any of the other visits of Jesus to Jerusalem. If it were not for John's Gospel, we could not even know of them. That is because this visit is unique. This will be His last visit. This is the official coming of the King to His city.

Mark 11:1-6	Mark 11:7-10	Mark 11:11
Preparations for the Entry	The Triumphal Entry	A Quiet Departure

There were two villages which lay on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Bethphage was near the summit, actually located on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives. The name is Hebrew (בֵּית פִּגְמָה) and means "house of unripe figs." The Talmud speaks of Bethphage as a suburb of Jerusalem. The rabbis said that you could walk from Jerusalem to Bethphage on the Sabbath.



Bethany was located further down the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. The meaning of its name is not so certain, but it seems to be similar

to its sister village - house of dates or figs. This was the home of Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. It seems as though Jesus stops here and sends some of His disciples on ahead to Bethphage with some careful instructions.

1. Instructions to the Disciples.

They are going to go into a nearby village and they are going to get a donkey. The problem is that it is not their donkey. It is someone else's donkey. That is okay because if they are challenged by anyone, they are told what to say.

"If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." (Mark 11:3).

This was the language of a royal levy. It was an ancient law which required a citizen to render to his king or any of His representatives any item of service which he or one of his emissaries might request.

Up to this point, we have seen Jesus as the Servant of God. He has been careful not to take for Himself any honor or glory. But now there will be a change. He is coming to Jerusalem. This is the city of God. As the Servant of God, Jesus has authority over the city of God. This is important. Servanthood is not at odds with authority. The Servant of God has authority in the kingdom of God.

2. The Instructions Obeyed.

Sure enough, the disciples were challenged in the midst of what would have appeared to be a case of horse thieving. When they gave the response which Jesus had commanded, they were permitted to go.

Was this a miracle? The passage doesn't say. I don't believe that it is. Although Mark does not mention the fact, Jesus had made a number of trips to Jerusalem. Many people had heard Him preach there. Some had believed. I think that one of those who had believed was a man with a donkey. I think that Jesus had made arrangements with this man, telling him that one of these days He would be coming to Jerusalem and that He would have need of his donkey.

COLT, COATS AND BRANCHES

They brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it.

And many spread their coats in the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. (Mark 11:7-8).

When you think of a coming Messiah, you think of him riding into the city on a white horse. But there is no white horse for Jesus. He rides into the city seated upon a donkey.

1. A prophecy fulfilled.

The first thing that I want you to see is that this was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9).*

Christianity is not a new religion. It didn't begin with a Galilean rabbi. It goes back through a long line of Old Testament prophets. At the very beginning of the nation of Israel, there was a promise about One who would come as a King from the tribe of Judah.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes. (Genesis 49:10-11).*

Do you see it? There was a promise that a King would come from the tribe of Judah. He would be recognized by the donkey's

colt. And when He came, there would be a washing that would take place that would bring obedience.

If you are a Christian, then you are a part of something that has been around since the beginning of time. It has stood the test of time. You can depend upon it.

2. Significance of the donkey.

When a king was coming to conquer, he would often ride upon a white horse. But when he came in peace, he would ride in upon a donkey. Jesus is coming to Jerusalem in peace. It is a sign of His humility. A sign of His servanthood.

There is coming a day when the King shall return. And He will not be riding on a donkey. Revelation 19:11 pictures Him riding upon a white horse. He does not come in peace. He is waging war. Zechariah 14 describes Him standing upon the Mount of Olives and the Mountain splitting in two. Here is the lesson. Don't wait for the war to begin. Make your peace with the King today.

The instructions of Jesus had been very clear. The colt which the disciples had been sent to obtain was one on which no one had ever sat. What was the significance of this? It was sanctified - set apart for a special use. It had never been ridden. This allowed it to be used for sacred purposes. When the Lord called for a sacrifice of a heifer, it was to be one *"on which a yoke had never been placed"* (Numbers 19:2 and Deuteronomy 21:3).

This donkey had never before been ridden. This means that it had never been broken. I've tried to ride an unbroken horse and it doesn't work very well. The fact that Jesus was not thrown from this unbroken donkey is something of a minor miracle.

3. The Coats and Branches.

The spreading of garments and palm branches on the road was rooted in the Old Testament. It had been done for King Jehu (2 Kings 9:12-13). It was the equivalent of rolling out the red carpet.

Palm branches have always grown down in Jericho, on the route to Jerusalem. Indeed, that city is also called "the city of the Palm Trees." 2 Maccabees 10:7 notes that palm branches were used in the rededication of the temple in 164 B.C. They were used as a symbol of national victory when Simon Maccabeus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in 141 B.C. To wave the palm branch

was the equivalent of the waving of a national flag.

THE REJOICING CROWD

Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:9-10).

The word “Hosanna!” is Hebrew and means, “Save now!” or “Help!” (it is translated that way in 2 Samuel 14:4). It is a prayer. They were praying for physical salvation from the Roman Empire.

The other gospel accounts tell us that the crowd was referring to Jesus as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Mark’s emphasis is different. He continues with the theme of the Servant. It is the Servant of God who comes in the name of the Lord. It is the Servant who brings in the kingdom of David.

Within a week, this same crowd will have rejected the Servant of God. Within a week, they will crucify Him. On the surface, the people seem ready to become servants of the kingdom. They greet the coming of the Lord’s servant. They pave the road with their robes. They wave palm branches in the air. They praise God with loud voices.

A week later, these same people will be yelling, “Crucify Him!” How could they change so quickly? I think that it was because they had false expectations.



They were looking for a king, a military conqueror, one who would overthrow Rome. They think that Jesus can supply this desire. Instead they will find a servant. They will hear His call to servanthood and will reject it. They are like fair-weather football fans, waving their banners and cheering. But when their “team” loses, they aren’t fans anymore. They are only fair-weather fans. These Jews were fair-weather fans. Within five days, they will be screaming for the death of Jesus.

There were a lot of people singing that day. Some were singing because they recognized Jesus as the Messiah (the disciples, for instance, or a retired beggar by the name of Bartimaeus). Others were singing out of a sense of patriotism and because of the Feast. Still others probably didn’t

know why they were singing; they just got caught up in the emotions of the hour. Here is the principle. If you don't know why you're singing, then you will sing for any tune.

SCOPING THE TEMPLE

And He entered Jerusalem and came into the temple, and after looking all around, He departed for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late. (Mark 11:11).

The visit into the Temple is almost anticlimactic. The Lord takes a quick tour and is gone. This is not a friendly visit. It is an official inspection. He comes to make an inspection of the heart of the nation. He walks into the Temple and He looks around. What does He see?

He sees Anna's Bazaar. He sees buying and selling going on. He sees the moneychangers. He sees injustice, pride, jealousy, indifference, covetousness, and greed. He sees religion without reality. He sees sacrifice without salvation. He does not say anything. He does not do anything. He merely comes and He looks and He sees and He leaves.

The people who were in the Temple did not realize that anything had even happened. They missed it. They did not know that God had come and they did not know that He had left.. They were caught up in their rituals.

This brings us to a question. What would happen if Jesus came to your church? Would He be pleased or would He be grieved if He...

- Sat in on a Sunday School class?
- Stood next to you as you worshiped?
- Read your thoughts as you listened to the sermon?

What would happen if Jesus came to your church? He does, you know. When the people of God gather, the King comes. He is in the midst of His church and you might not even have noticed. But He shall return and when He does, there will be work to be done. On the following day, He will be overturning tables and driving out animals.

The King is here today, but He is also coming tomorrow. When He comes, He is going to be overturning tables and He is going to be throwing people out of His Temple. His coming is certain. Prepare today for tomorrow's coming!

A BARREN FIG TREE AND A DIRTY TEMPLE

Mark 11:12-19

It was Monday morning on the 10th of Nisan in the way the Jews reckoned time. On this day, the Mosaic law commanded that the lambs were to be chosen for the Passover meal (Exodus 12:3). Thousands of lambs were being brought to the temple to be approved as being spotless and without blemish. It is on this day that the Lamb of God also comes to the temple. On the way, He has an encounter with a tree.

THE BARREN FIG TREE

And on the next day, when they had departed from Bethany, He became hungry. 13 And seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went to see if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 And He answered and said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening. (Mark 11:12-20).

Have you ever noticed how often Jesus drew spiritual lessons from the world of nature? One reason for this was that the people to whom He spoke lived in an agricultural economy. Jesus was a master of relevance. He used familiar terms and illustrations. He talked where people lived, whether it be a renegade tax collector or a Samaritan woman.

I think that there was another purpose that Jesus had in using nature to illustrate spiritual truths. It was because natural laws and spiritual laws are so close. Of course, there is a reason for this. The reason that natural laws and spiritual laws often run in parallel is that they both have the same author. And so, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, we are taught a lesson from a barren fig tree.

1. The Hunger of Jesus.

And on the next day, when they had departed from Bethany, He became hungry. (Mark 11:12).

Notice the humanity of Jesus. He became hungry. He lived in a mortal body. He felt pain. He grew tired. He experienced hunger.

Light is light in direct proportion to how much you have known the darkness. If you were blind and then you received your sight, you would value that sight much more than the person who has never been blind. The reverse is also true. Darkness is darkness in direct proportion to how much you have known the light. This was especially true of Jesus. He is the light and, to Him, darkness was terribly dark. The next time you think how bad things are in this world, remember that they were a lot worse for Jesus.

Why did He do it? What could have motivated Him to leave heaven and come to earth? There is only one answer - love.

2. The Fig Tree.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is using this fig tree as a living parable of the nation of Israel. This was not a new concept. Hosea had also likened the nation of Israel to a fig tree.

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

Jesus had also told a parable of a fig tree as He spoke of the nation of Israel.

And He began telling this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any.

“And he said to the vineyard keeper, ‘Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’

"And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sire, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;

"And if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9).

Jesus was telling a parable about the nation of Israel. It was a warning. It was a parable that was designed to show that the patience of God has a limit.

The warning is still appropriate for the church of God today. The warning is that we cannot rest on yesterday's fruit. God wants fruit for today.

3. The Season for Figs: *He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13).*

Mark is the only one of the synoptic writers to add this extra bit of information that it was not the season for figs. The fact that Jesus curses the fig tree even though it was not the season for figs has puzzled commentators. Why would the fig tree be cursed if it was not the season for figs? You would expect the curse if it was the season and it did not produce figs, but how can a tree be held responsible when it is not the season for figs in the first place? Mark reports the words and actions of Jesus, but does not explain them, so we are left with something of a puzzle on our hands.

What shall we say to this puzzling question? Why does God pass judgment upon unbelief when it is not the season for belief? The question has no easy answer. That is because the sovereign counsels of God are never easy. Trying to determine the mind of God is not an easy thing. His ways are not our ways.

Israel, like the fig tree, was not in a fruitful season. Like the fig tree, there were signs of life, but there was no real fruit. There were signs of spiritual life; there were activities in the temple and there were people who read and studied the Scriptures, but these activities did not translate into a changed life.

I cannot help but wonder whether Mark points out that it was not the season for figs because there is a season coming that will be the season for figs. Perhaps he means to suggest that there will come a day when the person of Jesus will be met with true faith and true fruit. Perhaps there will come a day when Israel who once condemned the Son of God will turn to the Son of God. Paul alludes to such a possibility in Romans 11:23 where he says, speaking of

Israel, *“And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again.”* Will it happen? Will Jewish people turn to Christ? I don’t know. But I do know that *if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (Romans 11:15).*

4. The Cursing of the Fig Tree.

And He answered and said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” (Mark 11:14a).

Israel was condemned for the very reason that the fig tree was condemned, because she was barren. She had all of the leaves. She looked very nice. She put on a good show. She boasted a Temple and a priesthood and a ministry. But when you got up close, you could see that it was really barren and that there was no fruit.

Have you ever noticed that the things that impress us are not the same things that impress God? We are impressed by the leaves. We look at the size of the church organ, we feel the padding of the church pews, we count how many are in attendance, and we are impressed.

But God is not so easily impressed. He is not interested in leaves. Fig leaves have not impressed Him since they were used in the Garden of Eden. He wants to see fruit. He is right in demanding fruit from His people. Just as He designed fig trees to produce figs, so also He designed people to produce fruit after their kind.

Jesus spoke against the fig tree because it did not produce what it was supposed to produce. He is also going to speak against His people if they do not produce the fruit that they are supposed to produce. What we are going to see in the next section is that the cursing of the fig tree is a paradigm and a living parable of the temple in Jerusalem and the ritual worship that was performed there.

Fig Tree	Temple
It was full of leaves, but there were no figs.	It was full of religious activity, but there was no spiritual life.
Jesus curses the fig tree.	Jesus overturns the tables in the temple.

As Jesus had gone to the fig tree to see whether it contained

figs, now He is going to come to the temple to see whether there is any spiritual fruit in evidence. He comes to what is supposed to be the place of prayer, the place where you are supposed to go to meet God. Instead, He finds that God had left the building and the people have not even noticed. It is a reminder of the time when the Son of God was born in Bethlehem and when there was no room in the inn. Jesus comes to the temple, but there will be no room for Him in the temple.

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

And they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves; ¹⁶ and He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple.

And He began to teach and say to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a robbers’ den.”

And the chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for all the multitude was astonished at His teaching. (Mark 11:15-18).

One of the most powerful politicians in all of Jerusalem was Annas. Annas had served as the high priest many years before, but had been deposed by the Romans who thought that he was growing too powerful. However, he continued to be a kingpin in Temple politics, maneuvering first his son and then his grandson into the position of high priest. By this time, Annas had run out of sons and it was Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who was now high priest in Jerusalem. Annas had become a wealthy man, particularly due to his establishment of the Temple Bazaar. The Temple Bazaar was located in the Court of the Gentiles. It involved two separate ventures.

- Doves sellers.

The first venture was the animal sacrifices. The most common sacrifice in the Temple was the dove. It was the poor man's sacrifice and there were a lot of poor people in that day. The Mosaic Law dictated that sacrifices must be without spot or blemish. To this

end, there were certified Temple Inspectors whose job it was to check out each animal that was brought to be sacrificed. Annas sold franchises to men who sold guaranteed animals in the outer court of the Temple grounds for escalated prices.

You could buy the very same animal down in the city, but because it did not have Annas' Official Seal of Approval, it would probably be rejected by the Temple Inspectors, especially since the Inspectors had been appointed by Annas.

- Money changing.

The second venture in the Temple Bazaar involved the type of money that was donated to the Temple Treasury. The Jews taught that foreign coins could not be donated to the Temple because they carried images of pagan gods. Only a special type of coin minted in Jerusalem could be given to the Temple, although the coins of Tyre were also considered acceptable.

Since many of the pilgrims who came to the Temple lived in distant lands, they did not have Jerusalem coins. Therefore they were required to change their money at the tables of the moneychangers. There was a considerable charge for this service.

There is a lesson here. It is that there have always been hucksters in the house of God. There is a story of a rather pious storekeeper who was always quoting Scripture. A stranger came into his country store one day and said, "I have bought a fine horse and I wish to purchase a saddle for him." The Bible-quoting store owner went into the back and came out with a saddle. "I will sell you this saddle for \$25.00."

"You don't understand," said the stranger. "The horse that I have bought is a very good horse and I want a very good saddle for him." The store owner walked into the rear of his shop and then came back with the very same saddle, saying, "I will sell you this saddle for \$150.00."

"No," replied the stranger. "I want the very best saddle that you have." And so, the store owner walked once more into the rear of his shop and then came back with the very same saddle, saying, "This is my very best saddle. It goes for \$500.00 but I will let you have it for \$450.00." The stranger agreed, paid the money, and left with the saddle.

The local men who were sitting around the old potbellied stove asked him what Scripture he was going to quote. He said, "Matthew 25:35 - He was a stranger and I took him in."

There is a principle here. It is that the verbiage of Christianity is not the guarantee of the integrity of Christianity. There are people out there who

say all of the right words and who dress very nicely, but they are con artists. This is nothing new. They have been around ever since a serpent conned Eve into biting off more than she could chew.

1. Cleansing the Temple.

...He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves;

And He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. (Mark 11:15-16).

There was a commotion. Tables were overturned. Coins clattered. Doves scattered. The temple was a big place, but one little Galilean rabbi made a big impact, rerouting the traffic that had come to use the temple as a short-cut into the city. Max Lucado points out the deliberate nature of Jesus' actions on that day:

This was not an act of impulse. This was not a temper tantrum. It was a deliberate act with an intentional message. Jesus had seen the money changers the day before. He went to sleep with pictures of this midway and its barkers in his memory. And when he woke up the next morning, knowing his days were drawing to a close, he chose to make a point: "You cash in on my people and you've got me to answer to." God will never hold guiltless those who exploit the privilege of worship (1993:61-62).

Jesus had come into the Temple the day before. He had seen what was going on and now He is back to do something about it. The cleansing of the Temple was directed against two groups.

a. The profiteers.

We have already looked at this first group. They were the "professionals." They were the money changers and the sellers of kosher animals.

b. Those passing through.

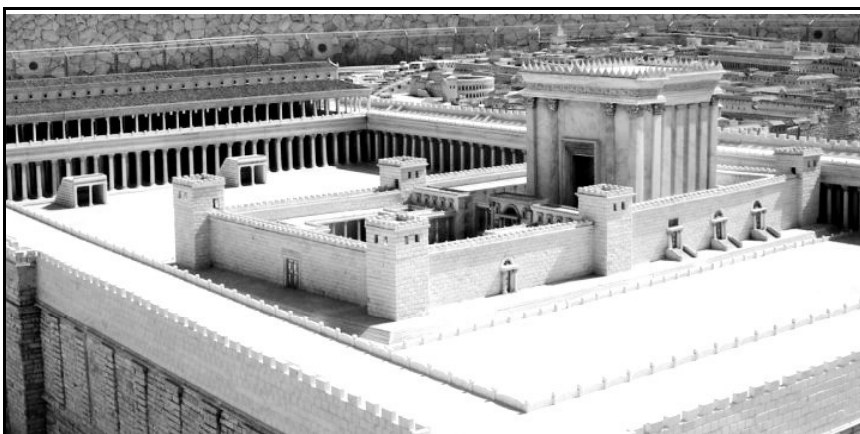
There was another group against whom Jesus moved that day. These were the people who used the Temple as a shortcut to get to the marketplace. It wasn't that they were using religion to cheat people. In fact, they were not even taking notice of religion. The Temple was merely a convenient place for them to come through. They might even have some "warm fuzzies" as they passed by.

It makes me wonder if some people who come to church occasionally are not among this crowd. Perhaps those who only attend on Christmas and Easter. Or if it not too inconvenient. What would Jesus say to such people? He might tell them not to bother, to stay home or to "take another route."

2. A House for the Nations.

The area which Jesus had just cleared was known as the Court of the Gentiles. It was called this because it was the one area within the Temple precincts in which Gentiles were permitted to enter. It was the outermost court of the Temple. It was barricaded from the inner courts by a low wall which was punctuated with signs at each opening. These signs warned all Gentiles not to enter upon pain of death.

The Jews had divided the Temple into segregated courts for Gentiles and women, but the Old Testament did not mandate these divisions.



Apparently, the Jews had come to look upon this area as not being quite as holy as the rest of the Temple. They conducted affairs in this portion of the Temple which they would not have dreamed of

doing within the inner courts. In so doing, it defeated the very purpose of the outer court. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach the people about the true purpose of the Temple of God.

And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den." (Mark 11:17).

Jesus quotes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. It is a prophecy of a time when the Lord will open the doors of His Temple to foreigners.

"Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant;

*"Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and the sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for **My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.**"*

The Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others I will gather to them, to those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:6-8).

Isaiah told of a day when the Temple of the Lord would be open to all the peoples. Not just Jews, but all the races would have access to God. In the days of Jesus, Gentiles were only permitted into the outer court. They were not allowed access into the inner courts where the burnt offerings and sacrifices took place. But the words of Isaiah foretold of a day when that would change.

When did this take place? It happened when Jesus died upon the cross. As He breathed His last, the veil in the innermost part of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. This indicated more than access for the Jews. It showed that the way was open for all men to come to God, no matter what their nationality.

3. The Plot Against Jesus.

And the chief priests and the scribes heard

this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for all the multitude was astonished at His teaching. (Mark 11:18).

The response of the Temple leaders was a plot to destroy Jesus. Why? Because they feared Jesus. He had gotten out of hand. They could not control Him. Some people have a tendency to fear what they cannot control. Religion is like that.

This is the first time that Mark has spoken of the chief priests and the scribes in a combined way. These were two different groups of people.

- The chief priests tended to be from the Sadducees. They were the liberals of the day and had adopted Hellenistic ideas.
- The scribes were entrusted with the copying of the Scriptures. They tended to come more from the ranks of the Pharisees since they held to the preeminence of the Scriptures.

Now these two groups have joined ranks. We will see them together until their coalition ends in the death of Jesus (Mark 11:27; 14:1,43,53). Here is the principle. The only time that the world unites is when they get together to attack the truth.

RETREAT FROM THE CITY

And whenever evening came, they would go out of the city. (Mark 11:19).

The coalition of scribes and Pharisees were looking to destroy Jesus. They were eager to catch Him, but were afraid of the crowd. Because He was not spending the night in the city, it was even more difficult to catch Him.

There is an interesting point here. The first night that Jesus shall ever spend in Jerusalem shall be His last. The city will refuse to house its King. The promised bride will reject her husband-to-be. The city of the prophets will condemn and kill the One who is the Prophet. But there comes a day when this rejection is no more. Instead of the King coming to the city, John tells us of a vision of the city coming to her King.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for

her husband. (Revelation 21:2).

And one of the seven angels... came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. (Revelation 21:9-11a).

Here is the end of the story. It is when the bride comes to her husband. Who is this bride? Who is the bride of Christ? You are! That means you can look at this glorious vision and see yourself.

THE WITHERED FIG TREE

Mark 11:20-26

I love the story of the college basketball coach who was shaving one morning when his wife called him from the other room to tell him that Sports Illustrated was on the phone asking for him. With visions of an interview and the national recognition that it would bring, he hurried through the rest of his shaving, managing to nick himself three or four times. With his face bearing the minor wounds of this episode, he rushed to the phone, tripping over the dog and banging his shin against a chair. At last, he had the receiver in hand and asked, “This is Sports Illustrated?” The voice came back, “Yes it is, and for \$39.95 we can offer you a special subscription price...”

Have you ever suffered through disillusionment, expecting one thing and then getting another? Jesus did. On the day that He came to Jerusalem on His triumphal entry, He came to a fig tree in full bloom. Even though it was not the season for figs, it gave every appearance of having them. But when Jesus turned aside to partake of its fruit, there was none. The leaves were a lie. Jesus pronounced a curse upon the tree, stating that it would never bear fruit again. As we come to this section, Jesus is returning to that same tree.

A FULFILLED CURSE

And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up.

And being reminded, Peter said to Him, “Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered.” (Mark 11:20-21).

The fig tree which Jesus had cursed on the previous day had withered in a single evening. Before this day ends, He will speak a similar word of woe against the nation of Israel. Within the time span of a single generation, the nation will be destroyed.

The curse of the fig tree is not about trees and fruit. It is about faith and fakery. When Jesus cursed the fig tree, he was acting out a spiritual lesson. He was on His way to a Temple and to a religious system that had all

of the leaves of piety, but which was dead and fruitless on the inside.

Jesus was disappointed in the tree. But He was a lot more disappointed in the people in the Temple who were going through all of the motions of religion without bearing any spiritual fruit. He is just as disappointed in us when we do the same thing. Do you ever wonder why churches wither up and die? Perhaps it is because the Lord of the Church comes looking for fruit and doesn't find any.

A LESSON IN FAITH.

And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. 23 Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him." (Mark 11:22-23).

Jesus is going to teach the disciples about faith and that lesson will have an application in how they pray. But before we look at that, notice the context of the barren fig tree. This missing ingredient in Israel which led to her barren condition was a lack of faith.

Remember that Jesus had cursed the fig tree for not having figs, even though it was not the season for figs (Mark 11:13). You might argue, "That's unfair to curse a tree for not having figs when it isn't even the season for figs!" You also might argue, "It's unfair for God to judge Israel for a lack of faith when they did not have the completed Scriptures!" The truth is that the unbeliever can always find a reason not to believe.

- "How can I believe all of the promises of the prophets for a coming Messiah? It has been hundreds of years and He still hasn't come!"
- "How can I believe this Galilean Rabbi when He has so recently come on the scene? He hasn't stood the test of time!"
- "How can I believe in the message of these Christians when its leaders are simple, uneducated fishermen?"
- "How can I believe in Jesus when I haven't seen Him? All I have to go by is the Bible and that isn't enough!"

Here is the principle. God has supernatural power available to you to do whatever it is that He has called you to do. Where has God put you? In an office? You have been given the power to meet the challenges of that

office. In your home? God promises you resources to be faithful to Him in that home. In a school? The power of God is sufficient for you in that school.

That means you do not have resources that you do not need. You do not have the resources to stand before the cannibals of Africa if God has not sent you to the cannibals of Africa.

It is like the man who was working in his house and smashed his hand with a hammer. He went to the doctor's office and found that all the bones had been broken. When the doctor had set the bones and then placed the injured hand into a cast, the man asked, "Doc, will I be able to play the piano when I get this cast off?" "Yes," replied the doctor, "I guarantee that you will be able to play the piano."

"That's just great!" said the man, "I could never play before."

One of the reasons that we get into trouble is that we try to do something that God hasn't called us to do.

I am like that. I have a tendency to try to be everything to everyone. Whenever I try to do it, I get into trouble.

Jesus is talking to the disciples about moving mountains. What is your mountain?

- A job?
- A marriage partner?
- The lack of a marriage partner?
- Poor finances?

Whatever of those things you think it is, it probably isn't. Your mountain is you. When you ask the Lord in faith to move that mountain, it will be moved. Then perhaps you will be able to move the other one.

Many years ago, a missionary couple who were friends of ours had gone to Turkey. They had been there only a few months when there was a knock at the door. The husband went to answer it and he was shot and killed. He left a wife and an infant child. We saw her when she arrived back in the States and Paula remarked, "I don't know how she can handle it so well! She is handling it better than I am." A woman in our church turned to us and replied, "That's because God didn't give you the grace to go through that situation."

AN APPLICATION IN PRAYER

"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall

be granted you. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” (Mark 11:24-26).

Common sense says that you believe only after you have seen the evidence to substantiate that belief. But Jesus said to believe before you see. There are two principles taught here with regards to prayer.

Principle #1: There is a correlation between believing and receiving.

Notice that Jesus says to believe that you have already received that for which you are to ask. You are to claim it as a present reality. This is true of everything that we are and everything that we have in Christ. Christianity always involves believing before seeing. It is only when you believe that you receive.

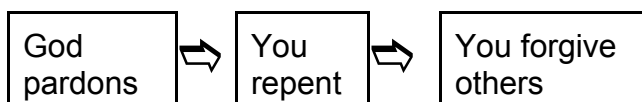
The writer to the Hebrews put it a different way when he said: *“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6).*

Principle #2: There is a correlation between forgiving and being forgiven.

Here is the principle. Forgiven people forgive. People who have not been forgiven hold grudges.

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:13).

You might argue, “This makes forgiveness to be the condition of God’s pardon. I thought that we received God’s pardon as a result of the work of Christ.” That is true. However, the pardon of God never comes without repentance. Indeed, repentance is the outward sign that you have been pardoned. God does not pardon us merely because we have repented. He pardons us on the basis of the cross. But that pardon does not come apart from repentance. Your repentance is the outward sign that you have been pardoned. In the same way, your forgiveness of others is a sign of your true repentance.



If you do not forgive others, it is a sign that you have not repented and non-repentance is a sign that you are still in your sins. Christ did not come only to reconcile you with God. He also came to reconcile you with your fellow man. It is for this reason that we call Him the Prince of Peace.

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Mark 11:27 - 12:37

One of the distinctive things about Jesus was that He spoke with a calm but unshakable authority. This set him apart from the rabbinical teachers of that day who were always having to quote the opinion of some earlier rabbi or expert. Jesus spoke from God. He was able to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” And He even went further to say, “Thus saith Me.”

He did not only speak with authority; He also acted with authority. He acted with authority when He commanded demons to leave those whom they had possessed. He acted with authority when He told a storm to be silent. He acted with authority when He told a lame man to walk, when He rebuked disease and it departed, and when He commanded a dead girl to get up. He acted with authority when He came in and cleansed the Temple, driving out those who had come to make a profit instead of to listen to the Prophet.

Imagine what would be the reaction if an out-of-town carpenter showed up this Sunday in your church and began overturning pews and tossing around the offering plates. What would be your reaction? It would probably be the same as was seen by the Temple leaders.

“What gives you the right to do these things?”

“Just who do you think you are?”

“Who left you in charge?”

“From where do you get your authority?”

That is the question asked by the leaders of the temple in verses 27-33. They come to Him in an official delegation and ask Him point-blank concerning His authority by which He has done these acts.

But that is not all. The question does not go away. This will be the underlying question behind everything presented in chapter 12. This is reflected in the form of a chiasm.

Priests, scribes & elders question the Authority of Jesus.
He responds with a parable (11:27 - 12:9).

Quote from the Psalms points to Jesus as Christ (12:10-12).

Attack of Pharisees & Herodians: Legal question on taxes
(12:13-17).

Attack from Sadducees: Resurrection (12:18-27).

Attack of scribes: Legal question on foremost commandment
(12:28-34).

Quote from the Psalms points to Jesus as Christ (12:35-37).

Jesus warns of the scribes and their false authority which
they use to prey on widows.
Living illustration of widow's two coins (12:38-44).

It is evident from this chart that the pivotal point in this section shall take place when Jesus speaks of the resurrection. Jesus is moving to the cross. The question of His authority shall ultimately be answered when we see His authority manifested over death.

THE QUESTION ASKED

1. The Question.

They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him, and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:27-28).

The delegation who comes to Jesus is made up of the most important men in the nation of Israel. Three groups are mentioned:

- The chief priests: There were 24 courses of priests who took turns serving in the Temple. At Passover, all of the priests were in attendance. Everyone who was anyone in the priesthood was here. And so, it was the upper echelon from among the priests

who were a part of this delegation.

- The scribes: These were the scholars and the experts in the Scriptures. It was their duty to correctly hand copy the Scriptures.
- The elders: These were the representatives of the major tribes and families of Israel.

Together, these three groups comprised the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel. There were 70 members of that August body. Their president was the high priest himself.

Notice that they do not ask Jesus why He cleansed the Temple. They knew why He had done what He had done. They knew that they had turned the Temple into a den of robbers. They knew that they were guilty of fleecing the flock instead of feeding the flock. And so, the question is not, “Why?” but rather, “By what authority?”

Jesus has not been ordained by any reputable denomination. He has no seminary degrees hanging on His wall. He goes by not title such as “reverend” or “rabbi.” So what gives Him the right to overturn moneychangers’ tables or to drive out animals being bought and sold? What gives Him the right to stop the “business as usual” within the Temple?

If Jesus answered	He was acting on His own authority	His enemies could say	He is a megalomaniac
	He was acting on the authority of God		He is blaspheming God

2. The Answer.

And Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

“Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me.” (Mark 11:29-30).

Jesus turns the question over to them. He does this by asking about the baptism of John. Notice that it is specifically the baptism of John about which He asks, not the ministry of John or even about the character of the man John. The question regards the source and

the authority of the baptism of John. It came from one of two locations:

- From heaven.
- From men.

The baptism of John was something new and different in the religious life of Israel. They were used to ceremonial washings. At several of the main entrances of the Temple there were large pools dedicated to ceremonial washings. The priests were constantly having to wash themselves before serving in the Temple.

But John's baptism was different. It was in rivers and streams. It was part of a call to repentance. It was accompanied by the promise of One who was to come to establish a Kingdom.

3. The Reasoning.

They began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?'"

"But shall we say, 'From men'? -- they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. (Mark 11:31-32).

I enjoy playing chess. There sometimes comes a point in a chess game where, no matter what you do, you are going to lose a piece. That is what happened here. They pondered their possible range of answers and came to the conclusion that, no matter what they said, it would be wrong.

If we say...	
"From heaven"	"From men"
Jesus: "Why did you not believe him?"	They will lose popularity with the people

Here is the point. They are more interested in fighting Jesus and in holding onto their popularity than they are in learning the truth. Do you ever find yourself falling into a similar trap? It is only when you are willing to be wrong that you can come to the place of repentance.

4. The Response.

Answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Mark 11:33).

There is a lesson here. It is that when you refuse to believe the teachings of Jesus, then no further teachings are given. The criteria for receiving further spiritual truth is receiving and believing that which you have been given.

"A person's epistemology is determined by his theology."
- Hendricksen

PARABLE OF THE VINE-GROWERS

Jesus now proceeds to relate a parable. This parable must be seen in the context of this confrontation with the leaders of the Temple. It is still an issue of authority.

1. The Story.

And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and put a wall around it, and dug a vat under the wine press and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. ² At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. ³ They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others.

⁶ "He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' ⁸ They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy

*the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others.
(Mark 12:1-9).*

The man in the story was a landowner. As a landowner, he owned a vineyard. In the course of time, he leased the land to a group of vine-growers with the agreement that, at the time of the harvest, he would be given a share of the produce.

When the harvest came, the unfaithful vine-growers treated the landowner with disdain, even going so far as to beat and kill those of his servants which were sent to represent the master. When the master sent his own son, the vine-growers murdered him, hoping to steal the son's inheritance for themselves.

Josephus describes the statue of a golden vine which adorned the temple gate.

"...but that gate which was at this end of the first part of the house was, as we have already observed, all covered with gold, as was its whole wall about it; it also had golden vines above it, from which clusters of grapes hung as tall as a man's height." (Wars 5:5:4).

What you must understand is that Jesus is borrowing from an Old Testament parable. The parable is from the pages of Isaiah.

*Let me sing now for my well-beloved
A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard.
My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill.
And He dug it all around, removed its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
And He built a tower in the middle of it,
And hewed out a wine vat in it;
Then He expected it to produce good grapes,
But it produced only worthless ones. (Isaiah 5:1-2).*

Sound familiar? It sounds very much like the cursing of the fig tree which took place in the last chapter. That was a judgment against the nation of Israel. This is a similar judgment. Verse 7 indicates the identity of the vineyard.

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of
Israel,
And the men of Judah His delightful plant.
Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed;*

*For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.
(Isaiah 5:7).*

Jesus begins His parable in the same way. Again there is a vineyard. Again there is a wall and a wine-vat and a tower. But this time, the focus is not merely upon the nation, but upon the leaders of the nation.

Character in Story	What it Represented
Vineyard	God's kingdom
Owner of the Vineyard	God
Vine-growers to whom the Vineyard was leased	Leaders of the nation
Servants of the Owner	Prophets
Son of the Owner	Jesus

It is not the vineyard that is being condemned, but the vine-growers who hold control over the vineyard. Remember the initial issue which gave rise to this parable? It was when the Jews asked Jesus what was His authority. This parable answers that question. His authority comes from the Father. He has authority because He is the Son - He is the heir to the vineyard. They are the sharecroppers who were charged with the job of raising fruit, a portion of which was to be returned to the Master. But they have been unfaithful in their duties. They have taken up the mantle of a false authority. In their pseudo-authority, they are rebelling against God Himself. The following lessons come to us from the story.

- a. The Generosity of God: The Landowner provided not only the vineyard, but also a wall and a wine vat and a tower. He was not a slum landlord, but rather graciously provided for those into whose hands the vineyard was entrusted.
- b. The Trust of God: The owner went away and left his prized vineyard in the hands of the keepers. He gave them the freedom to either follow or to rebel against him.
- c. The Patience of God: The owner sends a number of servants,

even after they are rejected and mistreated and even killed.

We tend to read this story out of long years of association and, as a result, we do not feel the emotional impact. But to anyone reading the story for the first time, it seems incredible that the master could be so longsuffering in the matter of the cruel treatment of His servants. When was the last time that you were startled by the love, the patience, and the forgiveness of God?

- d. The Eventual Justice of God: Although the patience of God is longsuffering, there will come a time when the landowner will no longer hold his wrath in check.

Did you ever stop to wonder what happens if, at the end of it all, the rebellious farmers repent of their sinful actions and receive the landowner? He forgives them. He welcomes them into his family to take the place of the Son who they murdered and he gives them the vineyard as their inheritance. This parable reveals some basic truths about Jesus.

- (1) It reveals that Jesus is the Son of God.
He had described Himself to the populace as the “Son of Man.” Mark has shown Him to be the Servant of God. He is both of those things. But He is also the beloved Son of God.
- (2) It reveals that Jesus will be rejected by the Jews and killed by them. Jesus knows that there is a cross awaiting Him.
- (3) It reveals the ultimate triumph of Jesus.
There is coming a day when the Lord shall return to take His vineyard and to render judgment upon those unfaithful stewards. Forty years from the date that Jesus stands talking in the temple, the Roman general Titus will surround Jerusalem, capture the city, burn that same temple to the ground, and carry the surviving inhabitants away into captivity.

The powers that be will soon be the powers that have been.

- 2. The Scriptures.

“Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘The

stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; ¹¹ this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? (Mark 12:10-11).

The Scripture to which Jesus refers is Psalm 118:22-23. This Psalm speaks in its context of the nation of Israel. As the nations of the world sought to build their empires, they regarded the nation of Israel as a rock that was merely in the way - a rock that was to be set aside from the important affairs of men. But this tiny nation was to play a key role in God's economy.

Do you see what is happening? Jesus takes this passage which refers to the nation of Israel and He applies it to Himself. There is a lesson here. It is that Jesus is the personification of the nation of Israel. He is everything that the nation of Israel was supposed to be.

Israel	Jesus
Descendants of Abraham	Descendant of Abraham
Nation of priests	The High Priest of God
A witness to the nations	Word of God & light of the world
Keeper of the law of God	Righteousness of God

What does that mean to us? It means that we have been called to be everything that Jesus is.

- Spiritual descendants of Abraham.
- A nation of priests coming boldly before the throne of grace
- Salt and light as we take the gospel to a world in darkness
- Living holy and righteous lives

Jesus gives the Psalm a new meaning. He points out that, in the same way Israel has been rejected in the past, so now the leaders of the nation are themselves going to pass a similar judgment upon the Messiah of Israel. They look at this little Galilean rabbi and they think that He is merely in the way. A stone to be rejected and cast aside. What they cannot realize is that this stone is to become the foundation stone for God's covenant people.

3. The Response.

And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away. (Mark 12:12).

I don't know if they understood all of the implications of the parable. But they understood enough to know that it was directed against themselves. They saw themselves as the unfaithful vine-growers. Their attitude was murderous.

GOD AND CAESAR

This murderous attitude found quick expression in a hasty coalition between two unlikely groups - the Pharisees and the Herodians.

1. An Unlikely Coalition.

Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. (Mark 12:13).

There were no two groups who were more opposed to one another than the Pharisees and the Herodians. They stood at the two opposite ends of the political spectrum. It was like the Klu Klux Klan joining forces with the ACLU.

- The Pharisees were the political and religious conservatives of the day. They held to all of the Old Testament Scriptures as well as to the oral traditions of the rabbis.
- The Herodians were the pro-Herod party. They were the religious liberals of the day and more interested in Roman politics than in Scriptures or spirituality.

There is a principle here. It is that the world will hardly agree about anything. But they will agree that they don't like you if you stand for Jesus.

2. A Politically Incorrect Question.

They came and said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? ¹⁵ Shall we pay or shall we not pay?” (Mark 12:14-15a).

The Romans had ruled over Jerusalem in one form or another since 63 B.C. Since that time, there had been a gradual increase in taxes, all going to fund the Roman Empire. To be fair, it must be admitted that the Romans also provided certain services such as their system of roads. However, it is always true that government takes away more than it gives and Rome was certainly no exception to this rule.

Earlier in this century a rebellion had taken place under the banner of “no tribute to the Romans.” It was claimed by these rebels that taxation was tantamount to slavery. There were three taxes which were collected:

- Ground Tax: Made up of 10% of all the grain and 20% of all the wine and fruit produced.
- Income Tax: 1% of a man’s income.
- Poll Tax: A flat tax of one denarius (a day’s wage) was paid by all men from 14 to 65 years of age and on all women between the ages of 12 to 65.

The enemies of Jesus have come up with a trick question. They feel that He will be wrong, no matter how He answers.

If Jesus answers	<i>Pay the Tax</i>	Then...	Jesus will lose popularity with the people by advocating an unpopular tax
	<i>Don't Pay the Tax</i>		Jesus can be accused of inciting a rebellion against Rome

Notice how they approach Jesus. It is with flattery. They are lying through their teeth, hoping to disarm Jesus. Their words are a restless evil and full of deadly poison (James 3:8). They are laying a trap and covering over with a compliment.

3. An Answer.



...But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at."

They brought one. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's."

And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him. (Mark 12:15b-17).

Jesus calls for a denarius. The fact that He had to call for one seems to indicate that He did not have a single denarius to His name. A denarius was a silver coin. It was one day's wages for a Roman soldier. On one side of the coin would have been an image of the Roman emperor, Tiberius Caesar. On the other side would have been an image of the goddess of peace. Around the image was an inscription which read, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus, Chief Priest."

It was the practice of all new emperors to issue new coins with their own likeness stamped on the face. There is a sense in which the coin was considered to be the personal property of the king. It bore testimony to the rule of the king whose likeness it carried. The first thing that a rebel or a conqueror would do would be to issue new coins with a new face.

Things with Caesar's image		(Coins)		Give them to Caesar
Things with God's image		(Man)		Give them to God

There is a principle here. It is that the state is ordained by God. The state brings valuable services to the people of God. As we share in the benefits of the state, so also we are to share in the responsibilities of the state.

But what about paying taxes to a government that has set itself up against God? Is it right to pay your good, hard-earned money to a government that wastes it, or puts it to a purpose that you adamantly oppose? Jesus says that it is. He calls us to give to Caesar

that which belongs to Caesar. But notice that there is a limit as to what belongs to Caesar. Our ultimate allegiance is to belong to God. Caesar may own our money. But God owns us.

This has a direct impact upon the underlying issue in this chapter. That issue is one of authority. Legal and political authority is real, but it is only of limited scope and duration. Final and lasting authority is in the hands of God.

Jewish Leaders	Jesus
Had a limited and finite authority over the nation of Israel.	Has been given authority over a eternal kingdom.
Required to pay taxes to Rome in coins bearing the image of the Emperor.	The recipient of that which is in the image of God.
An earthly authority.	A heavenly authority.
This authority shall end.	This authority shall never end.

Both of these types of authority are ordained by God. Jesus was not advocating an abolition of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Neither was He advocating a rebellion against Rome. Rather, He was establishing His claims to a higher authority - one that would be eternal both in scope and in nature.

THE RESURRECTION QUESTION

The next question coming to Jesus also follows this theme of authority. In this case, it is a question of the authority of rationalism. The rationalists of that day were known as the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were made up of the aristocracy. They were the advocates of Hellenization. They held the Law of Moses in high regard, but did not hold that the rest of the Scriptures were inspired. They did not believe in angels or miracles. They were not looking for any future Messiah and they rejected any notion of a future bodily resurrection. They tended to represent the upper class, the royalty and the priesthood. They were the intelligentsia.

Have you ever noticed that when people achieve a certain social strata, they often stop believing in certain things? Politicians are like that and so were the Sadducees. They did not believe in the supernatural. They

did not believe in miracles and Jesus had the effrontery to have performed miracles. Therefore they decided on a plan that would put Him in His place.

1. Their Question.

Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, ¹⁹ “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves behind a wife and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother. ²⁰ There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. ²¹ The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; ²² and so all seven left no children. Last of all the woman died also. ²³ In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had married her.” (Mark 12:18-23).

The question is meant as a trick. It is not a sincere question. It is one of those “can God make a rock so big that He cannot move it” questions. It is a question designed to disprove the doctrine of the resurrection.

The question revolves around the laws of the levirate marriage as set forth in the book of Deuteronomy. Remember, the Sadducees only believed in the books of Moses.

There were seven brothers. The oldest is married, but before his marriage can produce any children, he dies. According to Jewish Law, it is now the responsibility of the second brother to have a child by that wife and to raise the child as the heir of the first brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). And so, he marries her, but dies before there are any children. And so it goes with the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh. By this time, I think that I would be a bit suspicious of the woman. But she eventually dies, too. Now is the question. Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

Do you see what the Sadducees are doing? They are not asking this question because they are actually worried about this situation. They are asking it because they think that the question shows a flaw in the whole teaching about the resurrection. They expect Jesus to stutter, stammer, and get red in the face so that they can laugh at Him. But he does nothing of the sort.

2. The Answer.

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? (Mark 12:24).

Jesus was not intimidated. He had honest answers to their questions. But before He answers their question, He comments upon their reason for their lack of understanding. Sometimes we get the idea that unbelievers are well-educated and that they have reasonable and thought-out reasons as to why they have chosen to reject Christ.

Back in the 1970's, Paula and I used to go up to Florida Atlantic University to share the gospel with students on campus. When I first started doing that, I thought I was going to hear all sorts of deep, intellectual arguments about why they did not hold to the teachings of Christianity. Do you know what I found out? I found out that they were as confused as anyone else.

It has been said that when a hundred pagans jump off a sinking ship, a hundred Christians will hit the water. It is like saying that there are no atheists in foxholes. Why is that? It is because foxholes are real. They cannot be explained away in a comfortable intellectual discussion.

Jesus always takes serious people seriously. But these Sadducees were not asking a serious question. They were merely trying to win an argument.

There was a time when I used to try to give the gospel to everyone that I met, whether they wanted to listen or not. I don't do that now. I have learned that God only takes serious people seriously. He gives those who seriously seek for Him a promise:

"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13).

Are you an honest questioner? Are you sincere in your search for God? I have good news for you. You will find Him. When you do, you will learn that He has found you. The answer of Jesus comes in two parts:

- a. The manner of the resurrection: *"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Mark 12:25).*

The resurrection does not constitute a continuation of life as it is on earth. The old physical laws will no longer apply. The old physical and social relationships will pale to insignificance in the presence of our relationship with the Lord.

- b. The fact of the resurrection: *“But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.” (Mark 12:26-27).*

The Sadducees rejected the resurrection because they did not think that it was taught in the Torah - the first five books of Moses. But Jesus points out that this is not the case. He does this by quoting the words of the Lord to Moses when He spoke to Him out of the burning bush (Exodus 3:6). In that passage, God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then it stands to reason that they must still be alive. If they are alive, then there is life after death.

THE QUESTION OF THE LAW

Jesus was in the critic’s den. He had answered trick questions from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and even the Herodians. He had answered them correctly and He had answered them in a way that showed that His authority was supernatural. He had put them all to silence. It is in the midst of this situation that one of the scribes comes forward and asks a legitimate question.

We don’t know much about this man. Mark says that he was a scribe. A scribe was a man whose profession it was to make copies of the Scriptures. As a scribe, he knew the Bible forwards and back. The scribes and the Pharisees were known for adding things to the Law - for building a fence of ordinances around the Law to protect the Law. But they were also known for trying to sum up the entire law into a single sentence - a general statement that would summarize the entire Law. Hillel was once challenged to expound the entire Law while standing upon one leg. He replied:

Matthew calls him a lawyer - an expert in the Mosaic Law.

*“What you hate for yourself, do not to your neighbor.
This is the whole Law, the rest is commentary.”*

When asked a similar question, Rabbi Akiba had answered: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

There were others who believed that all of the laws of the Old Testament carried an equal weight. As a result, there was an ongoing debate among the Jews on this matter.

1. The Question.

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” (Mark 12:28).

I have to admit that on first glance I questioned this man's motives. He is in bad company asking a question where every question up to this time has been asked under false pretenses. If that were not bad enough, Matthew's parallel account says that he asked this question to “test” Jesus.

But the comments of Jesus to this man suggest that his heart was in the right place. The test was not so much to trip Jesus up as it was a test of orthodoxy and hence, a test of authority.

2. The Answer.

Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one lord; ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31).

Notice that the issue here is one of obedience to the law. This is seen in the question which the scribe first asked, *“What **commandment** is the foremost of all?” (Mark 12:28).* After Jesus answers the man's question, He will conclude by saying:

*“There is no other **COMMANDMENT** greater*

than these.” (Mark 12:31b).

The scribe was asking a question about the law. When you say the word “law” and then look for a corresponding verb to go with it, that word is “obedience.” We would all agree that obeying God is important. That is not at issue here. What this scribe is asking is this: “What is the number one way of obeying God?” The answer is love.

When asked about the secret to the Christian life, Augustine replied, “Love God and live as you please.” He wasn’t advocating sin and he wasn’t saying that we can ignore the commandments of God. He was saying that when you love, obedience comes naturally. Think about it. If you really love God, you don’t have to be told not to set up any other gods or idols or not to take His name in vain or to set aside a day to worship Him. If you really love your parents whom God has given to be an authority over you, then you do not have to be told to honor your father and mother. If you really love your neighbor who is created in God’s image, then you don’t have to be told not to bear false witness against him. You don’t have to be told not to steal from him or murder him or commit adultery with his wife or covet his possessions. Love is tested by obedience. When you love, obedience comes naturally.

Jesus did not say that all of the commandments were equally important. He could have. He could have said, “When God talks, you listen and you obey with equal vigor everything He says.” But Jesus didn’t do that. He recognized that there are some commandments which are foundational to all the rest. And the most foundational is love.

LESSONS ON LOVE

As our passage continues, Jesus is still speaking to the scribe who asked Him a question about the law, but He uses this opportunity to speak about love.

1. Love Begins with God.

Do you see it? Before Jesus talks about loving man or even about loving God, He begins by talking about who God is.

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord'" (Mark 12:29).

What has that got to do with love? It has everything to do with love. The reason that we love is because God is who He is and because He has done what He has done. Love is defined by God because God is love.

Do you want to know what real love is all about? Look at God. Look at the Creator who carefully and tenderly fashioned man in His own image and placed him into a beautiful garden that was specially designed for him. When man sinned in rebellion against God and brought death to the world, look at the promise that God gave of one who would one day restore it all.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at God bringing His people out of slavery in Egypt and watching over them in the wilderness. Look at His accepting their repentance after they had deserted Him to worship an idol. See His faithfulness in feeding them each day and in watching over them each night.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at God sending His own Son to be born to a humble family with a lowly stable as a delivery room and a feeding trough for a cradle.

Do you want to know what love is? Look at the cross as the Son of God hangs spread-eagle on rough, wooden beams, His body afire with all of hell's agonies and His ears ringing with the taunting mockery of His enemies. Listen to Him whisper a prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." You have been loved with an infinite love. You are called to love with that kind of measure.

Steve Brown tells the story is told of a young married couple who were going through some difficult times. He was working two jobs and she came to the point where she just couldn't cook another meal or wash another dish or change another diaper.

One day she packed her bags and walked out. A day passed. Then two. The days turned into weeks. He struggled to bring some order to the shattered family. She had left no forwarding address and, on the rare occasions she would call, he would beg her to come home. "Honey, the kids miss you and I miss you and we all love you. Won't you please come back to us?" Instead of answering, she would hang up the phone.

Finally in desperation, he took the money from their meager savings account and hired a private investigator. The next day he

was given the address of a motel in a small town in another state. Leaving the kids with their grandparents, he drove all night, arriving at the seedy motel early the next morning. Fearing the worst, he went to the room and knocked at the door. She opened it. No words were spoken, but none needed to be as they embraced.

After they had returned home and several days had passed and things had returned to normal, they were sitting in the living room one evening and he gathered the courage to ask a question that had been heavy on his heart for some time. "Honey, when you were gone and would call on the telephone, I told you that I loved you and missed you, why didn't you come home?" She replied, "Before it was just words; but then you came."

God spoke to the Fathers by the prophets of His love for His people. But then He came and that made all the difference.

2. Love for God Is Tested by Love for Others.

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
(Mark 12:31).*

Jesus told His disciples that at His second coming with all of His angels, He would sit upon a glorious throne and that the nations would be gathered for judgment and that the people would be separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. What is fascinating to me is the criteria which Jesus said would be used in that judgment.

*"Then the King will say to those on His right,
'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the
kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the
world.*

*"'For I was hungry, and you gave Me
something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me
drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;*

*"'Naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and
you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'*

*"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,
'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or
thirsty, and give You drink?*

*"'And when did we see You a stranger, and
invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?*

"'And when did we see You sick, or in prison,

and come to You?’

“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:34-40).

Jesus goes on to say that the opposite is also true.

“Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

“‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’

“Then they themselves also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or You sick, or in prison, and not take care of You?’

“And He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:41-45).

The unbelievers are quick to protest, “Lord, if we had known that it was You, then we would have rolled out the red carpet!” And Jesus answers, “That’s the whole point. If you had known it was Me, then your actions wouldn’t have been done out of love. They would have been done out of selfishness in order to receive something back.”

Bill Cosby talks about the change that came over his parents when they became grandparents. They would come to visit and they would dole out food and clothes and money to the grandchildren and Bill would say, “These are not the same people who raised me. These are old people who are trying to get into heaven.”

If Jesus was hungry, would you feed Him? If He was thirsty, would you give Him something to drink? If He came to your doorstep, would you invite Him in? Jesus says, “You do it, because it is Me.”

3. Love Is the Test of Orthodoxy.

“...to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mark 12:33).

There was nothing more orthodox to the Jewish mind than the observing of burnt offerings and sacrifices. These rituals had been passed down from Sinai. They were the means by which God had made Himself known to His people. And yet, they paled to insignificance beside the importance of love.

What is the test of your Christianity? Jesus never said that people would know that you are a Christian because you are...

- Presbyterian.
- Calvinist.
- Hold to the right prophetic scheme.

He did say, “They shall know you are My disciples when they see your love.” Now, I don’t mean to say that love is the only test of orthodoxy. There are a lot of people who claim to love who want nothing to do with Christ. There are things that we Christians believe which are important to be believed. But you can hold all of the right teachings and all of the correct doctrines and if you do not have love, it is all in vain. To borrow a line from the Apostle Paul, you can...

- Speak with the tongues of men and of angels.
- Have all of the gifts of prophecy.
- Know all mysteries.
- Have all knowledge.
- Have all faith, so as to remove mountains.
- Give all your possessions to feed the poor.
- And suffer a martyr’s death.

And if you do not have love, it doesn’t impress God one bit. It impresses me. If you did just one of those things, I would be impressed. But that is because I am too easily impressed. God is harder to impress. He isn’t impressed by any of those things. But He is impressed by love.

That is what impressed Jesus about this man. It wasn’t the fact that he was a Pharisee. It wasn’t even the fact that he asked a good question. It was that he had a comprehension and an understanding of the centrality of love.

4. Love Is the Test of Proximity to the Kingdom.

And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. (Mark 12:34).

Those of us who have participated in Evangelism Explosion might have interrupted and said, "Jesus, You're messing it up! You haven't asked him the two diagnostic questions and you haven't spoken to him about faith and repentance and you haven't even mentioned the cross!" And Jesus would have smiled and said, "Those things are important. Faith in Me and hope in the cross - faith and hope; but the greatest of these is love."

DAVID'S SON / DAVID'S LORD

And Jesus answering began to say, as He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'The Lord said to my LORD, "Sit at My right hand, Until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet."' ³⁷ David himself calls Him 'Lord'; and so in what sense is He his son?" And the great crowd enjoyed listening to Him. (Mark 12:35-37).

Up to this point, various people have been asking questions of Jesus and He has been answering. After the last rebuttal, we read that *no one would venture to ask Him any more questions. (Mark 12:34).* Now Jesus takes the opportunity to ask a question of His own. It is a question that is still connected to the overarching issue of authority that permeates this entire chapter. The question regards the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Lord of David. It is taken from Psalm 110. The superscription ascribes this Psalm to David.

*A Psalm of David.
The LORD says to my Lord:
"Sit at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet." (Psalm 110:1).*

As we approach this Psalm, we see at the outset that there are three people mentioned. This cast of characters is seen in the first verse.

- King David. The superscription calls this a Psalm of David. He is the king of Israel. Yet David seems to be overshadowed by the other two characters in the Psalm. This is unique. Kings are normally the most important people around. Kings are not used to taking second place to anyone. David does not even rank second in the Psalm. He ranks a distant third.
- The Lord. This is God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is called here by His divine name - Yahweh.. He is the God who led His people through the Red Sea. He is the covenant keeping God.
- David's Lord. This is the third character of this first verse. He is really the main character of this Psalm. The entire Psalm is addressed to Him. He is seen here as David's lord and He is seek in verse for as a Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord (Yahweh)	David's Lord	David the King
Yahweh said...	To my lord...	
“Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”		

Here is the problem. How can David have another lord besides God? Kings do not have lords. That is what makes one a king. He is sovereign. There is David and then there is God. Furthermore, a son was not seen in that culture as being greater than his father. A son refers to his father as "lord," not the other way around. Yet this passage was understood by the Jews to be a Messianic Psalm and they also understood the Messiah to be the promised Son of David. How could He be both David's son and also be David's lord?

Jesus presents this question as a riddle that must be answered and a puzzle that must be unraveled. The question is meant to make His hearers ponder the identity of the Messiah. How can He be both David's lord and David's son? The answer lies in the deity of Christ. It is only when we recognize the nature of who the Messiah really is that we will be able to unravel the puzzle. He is both the descendant of David and He is also the eternal Son of God.

THE CONDEMNED AND THE COMMENDED

Mark 12:38-44

Two examples will be given in this passage. They are meant to be a study in opposites. The first is a negative example; the second is a positive example.

The Example of the Scribes	The Example of the Widow
They put on an appearance of piety while devouring widows' houses	She gave all she had, seemingly without any fanfare
They will receive greater condemnation	She is commended by Jesus

Both of these examples are meant to teach the same lesson. It is a lesson in humility. The principle of humility is not a new concept. It had been taught in the Old Testament that God delights in the humility of His people.

*For thus says the high and exalted One
Who lives forever, whose name is Holy,
"I dwell on a high and holy place,
And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit
In order to revive the spirit of the lowly
And to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57:15).*

Mark has been presenting Jesus as the Servant of God. There is nothing more humble than a servant. The point has already been made that the followers of Jesus are to be servants, too. Now we are given the example of the scribes who failed to show a serving spirit. Rather than being servants, they demanded that others serve them.

AN EXAMPLE TO BE AVOIDED

³⁸ And in His teaching He was saying: “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:38-40).

The scribes were an elite group. They were able to read and write. This was not a skill that everyone enjoyed. Even among those who were able to read, it was customary to utilize a scribe to do any actual writing. Moreover, the scribes spoken of in this passage were religious scribes. They were trained in the law of God. They had a knowledge of the scriptures that far surpassed that of the normal rank and file. They were an honored and revered class of people among the Jews.

Jesus had been speaking to a scribe earlier in the chapter. It was a scribe who had come to him and who had asked about the great commandment of the law and Jesus had told him that he was not far from the kingdom. But now he has a warning about the scribes in general.

1. A Demeanor of Pride: *Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, ³⁹ and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets (12:38-39).*

The religion of that day had lost sight of God and degenerated into a man-centered system. Its leaders were more concerned with impressing one another than in what God might think.

2. A Devouring of the Poor: *Who devour widows’ houses (12:40).*

Some modern televangelists have exemplified this aspect in their advertisements that call for sacrificial giving while they themselves live an extravagant lifestyle.

3. A Deceptive Pretense: *For appearance’s sake offer long prayers (12:40).*

Remember that the critics of Jesus tried to judge Him on the basis of outward appearances. They accused Him of eating with

sinner. They were more interested in the pretense than in the reality.

Jesus takes note of their long prayers. It is not wrong to have a long prayer, but it is wrong if you are praying a long prayer just for the sake of appearances. When you pray, you are not supposed to be trying to impress others.

4. A Destructive End: *These will receive greater condemnation (12:40)*

It was not merely that the scribes were going to be condemned. Rather, Jesus says that they would receive a greater condemnation. They are held to a higher standard because they should have known better. They were able to read and write the Word of God. They had been given God's truth and that made them all the more responsible.

There is a liability to leadership. Leaders are more responsible because they impact, not only themselves, but others. It is for this reason that James gives a warning — *Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment* (James 3:1).

There is a checklist here that form a series of questions every pastor should ask himself. It is a checklist that will help determine whether your leadership is focused upon yourself or upon the Lord.

- Are you drawn to religious garb? It might be a clerical robe or it might be a three piece suit, but do you seek to draw attention to yourself and to your office?
- Do you prefer a formal salutation that recognizes your religious standing? Do you like to be called “doctor” or “pastor” or “reverend?”
- Do you have a special seat in the church?
- Do you enjoy being the guest of honor at gatherings?
- Are you more concerned with the needs of your church budget or the needs of the poor within your church?
- Are your prayers designed to impress?

Throughout the early part of Mark 12, we saw Jesus dealing with the question of authority. Jesus is still dealing with that issue. In particular, He deals with the scribes who have set themselves up as authorities of God's word. They have misused that authority. Instead of using that authority to bring honor to the Lord, they have used it to bring honor to themselves. This

is the worst sort of idolatry, for it involves putting themselves in the place of God.

AN EXAMPLE TO BE COPIED

And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the multitude were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. ⁴³ And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.” (Mark 12:41-44).

The treasury of the temple was located in the Court of the Women. It was known by that designation because this was as close to the inner sanctuary as women were permitted to approach. Around the court of the treasury there were located a number of vials. They were called trumpets because of their shape. These trumpets were the receptacles of the various sorts of offerings given to the temple. People coming into this court would deposit their coins into the various trumpets.



As Jesus came to the temple, He found a place to sit. He was seated opposite the treasury in a place where He could observe the people giving their offerings. That is a rather unsettling thought. How would you like to be seated next to Jesus as the offering plate was passed? Would you feel the need to give more of your money? After all, Jesus IS watching. He sees that which takes place in the church today, just as He was watching those who came to worship in that day.

1. The Offerings of the Rich: *Many rich people were putting in large sums (12:41).*

The treasury of the temple was a place of great wealth. There was a great deal of prosperity in the land during this era and a good portion of it went into the temple treasury.

2. The Offering of the Widow: *And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent (12:42).*

In contrast to the scribes who looked spiritual and the wealthy who wore rich finery, there came a widow woman. She looked neither spiritual nor rich. Amidst all that was going on in the temple that day, it would have been easy to miss her.

She came with her offering. It consisted of two tiny copper coins. They were not of the more valuable gold or even of silver. They were the smallest possible denomination.

3. The Evaluation of Jesus: *“Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on” (12:43-44).*

Jesus called His disciples. He was going to utilize this instance as a teaching opportunity. It was a kingdom lesson in giving. The rich had brought some very large sums of money. By comparison, the gift of the widow would seem to be inconsequential. But the truth was that, when viewed from a heavenly perspective, her gift far outweighed any of the others in true significance.

What made her gift so significant? It was that she gave it all while the others gave out of their surplus. She gave at the cost of great personal sacrifice while they gave out of a mere convenience. Tim Keller has a book entitled, “The Prodigal God” in which he points out the word “prodigal” really means to be recklessly

extravagant. That is the character of this widow's gift and that is also the nature of God's grace to us.

Mark presents the comments of Jesus regarding this woman and her offering in contrast to the judgment made by Jesus against the scribes in the previous paragraph.

Mark 12:38-40	Mark 12:41-44
Scribes	A poor widow
The devour widow's houses	She was a widow who had lost everything
They sacrifice the well-being of others	She sacrificed her own well-being
They are out to take what they can get	She gave everything she had

There is an interesting contrast to be seen in the example of this woman with the attitude of the other givers as pictured in the parable with which Mark's account opened this chapter.

The Parable of the Landowner	The Lesson at the Treasury
Mark 12:1-12	Mark 12:41-44
The Landowner in the parable of Jesus seeks to receive some of the produce of his vineyard.	The multitudes were bringing of their produce to the treasury of the temple
The vine growers want to keep the profit to themselves and therefore put the son to death.	Most of those who came to the temple were giving out of their surplus; they will put Jesus to death.

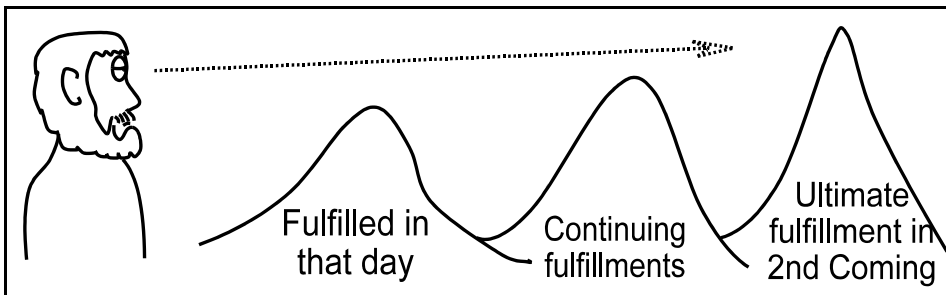
The giving of this woman was of the same kind that was given by God when He gave His only begotten Son. God's gift was not a gift of convenience. It was a gift that gave of Himself. It was a gift that humbled and divested of heavenly prerogatives. It was a gift that substituted the glories of heaven for the humility of a stable and, ultimately, the gory and morbid death upon a cross.

SIGNS OF THE END

Mark 13:1-31

This chapter contains predictive prophecy. That sounds a little like calling something “wet water” or “hot fire,” but I say this because sometimes prophecy tells us what God is doing in the present. On the other hand, this prophecy speaks of what God is going to do in the future. We are going to see prophecies of the destruction of the temple, of wars and rumors of wars, of tribulations and famines and false messiahs. Finally, we are going to see a promise of the second coming of the Son.

Some of the prophecies in this chapter have already come to pass. Some of them are being fulfilled today. Some are yet to be fulfilled. It is not always easy to tell which is which.



It has been likened to looking at a series of mountain peaks in the distance without being able to see the valleys of time which lie in between.

THE TEMPLE’S END

As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”

And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.” (Mark 13:1-2).

The Temple was built on the top of Mount Moriah. The mountain

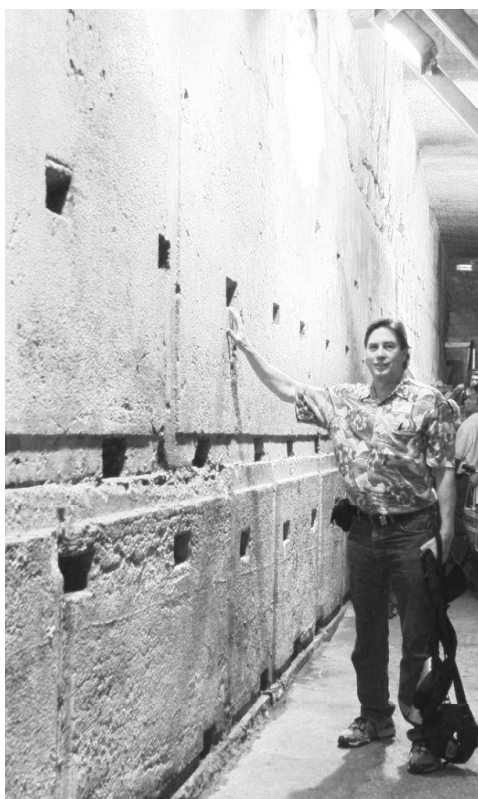
was a part of a natural ridge running north and south. On its east side was the Kidron Valley. On its west side was another valley. Instead of leveling the top of the mountain, its builders had incorporated the peak of the mountain into the very structure of the Temple so that it was a series of raised terraces, culminating at the peak on which stood the holies of holies. Josephus gives the following description:

Now the outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of very great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for as to those parts of it which were not gilt, they were exceeding white (Antiquities).

Jesus is going to prophesy the destruction of the temple. This was a significant event. This temple was not made of pebbles. It was a tremendous edifice. There is a single stone at its foundation which measures forty feet in length. There are many large stones. This was considered to be by many the most magnificent structure in the world.

Why is this so important for us to know? How does this prophecy and its fulfillment relate to us today? It relates to us because of the prophecies which follow. Jesus is speaking here about an event which took place within 40 years of His speaking. But later in this chapter He will be speaking about an event that has not happened yet.

In speaking about prophecy, Steve Brown points out several key aspects of the Bible's use of prophecy. I've borrowed them here:



The author stands beside one of the original foundation stones of the Temple

- Prophecy points: *“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” (Mark 13:26).*

I taught the book of Revelation for the first time at St. Andrews In 1988. I started out thinking that it would be a lot of fun. It was. But it was also hard. I got into those bowls and trumpets and seals and the 144,000 and the witnesses and the beast and the other beast. But the thing that I saw the most of in Revelation was Jesus. The book of Revelation points to Jesus and the rest of prophecy does, too.

- Prophecy prepares: *And Jesus began to say to them, “See to it that no one misleads you.” (Mark 13:5).*

When I was in the fire department, we used to have a book of preplans. These were written plans containing information on how we had planned to fight a fire in a particular area. Prophecy is like that. It tells you things about the future to prepare you.

“But these things I have spoken to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them...” (John 16:4).

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

The point is that, if you are ready for the “tribulation” which Christ says we have in this world, then it will not take you be surprise.

- Prophecy is paradoxical.

To talk about a paradox makes some Christians squirm uncomfortably. That is because we like to have everything in nice, neat little packages. But God doesn't fit into our packages and neither do His prophecies. We still see through a glass darkly. We still await the day when we shall see face to face. The means that we should not let prophecy divide us.

- Prophecy persuades: *“But when you see the abomination of*

desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand)...” (Mark 13:15).

The thing that you need to know about this passage is that it is a prophecy originally given in the book of Daniel which had been fulfilled to the letter. In 166 B.C. the “King of the North,” a Seleucid ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes, had come into Jerusalem and had set up an idol of himself in the Temple and had passed a law that he be worshiped. Now Jesus is saying that it is going to happen again.

It did, you know. Within forty years, the Roman general Titus would come up against Jerusalem, break through with his armies, and once again a pagan would enter into the Temple.

When an archer hits a bull’s eye a hundred times out of a hundred, you don’t want to stand in front of the target when he shoots the hundred and first time. The Lord is the archer who never misses. When you see that His prophecies always come to pass, you are warned that He has said some things about the future and you can bank on them.

Jesus makes a prophecy about the destruction of the Temple which came about. It was fulfilled in two phases:

- (1) The upper structure of the Temple was destroyed by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. It was never again rebuilt as a place of worship for the Jews.
 - (2) During the Bar Kochba Revolt (132-135) the Roman Emperor Hadrian burned the Temple area so that gold melted and flowed down into the surrounding valleys.
- Prophecy pleas: *“What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’” (Mark 13:37).*

Prophecy is not given to satisfy our curiosity. It is always given with a plea to live differently in light of that prophecy.

Jesus and His disciples are in the temple. This is the same temple out of which they drove the money changers and the sellers of animals just the day before. Now they are back. Jesus has just finished fielding a series of subtle attacks at the hands of the religious leaders of Jerusalem. It is in this context that the disciples come to Jesus to show Him the buildings of the house of the Lord.

They had been listening to Jesus and the religious leaders, but they hadn’t gotten it. With all that was going on, they were more impressed with

the architecture of the temple than with the building of the Kingdom. As such, they were failing to see the true value of things. This was a process that had carried over from the previous chapter.

Mark 12:38-40	Mark 12:41-44	Mark 13:1-2
The appearance of the scribes was deceiving	The appearance of the widow's offering was deceiving	The appearance of the temple building was deceiving

And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." (Mark 13:2).

To understand the significance of what Jesus is saying, you have to understand something of the Jewish mentality. When the Jews looked at the Temple, they saw the symbol of their identity. When they looked at the magnificence of its structure, they thought of the magnificence of their heritage.

There is a lesson here. It is that you should never place your source of prestige in that which is temporal. From where do you get your self-worth? What is the basis of your identity? It is your job? The car that you drive? Your house? Your wife or your husband? Your good looks? All of these are insufficient. All of these are subject to change. The real source of identity for the Christian is Jesus Christ living inside him. That is the one thing that you cannot lose. It is unchangeable.

QUESTIONS OF THE FUTURE

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:3-4).

The disciples mulled over the prediction of the destruction of the Temple all the way out of the city. Finally, as they were on the Mount of Olives at the end of the day, several of them worked up the nerve to come to Jesus and ask Him about it. Notice the questions:

- When will these things be?
- What will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?

It is evident by this question that the disciples were looking for one specific event which would fulfill all of the prophecies of Jesus. What they did not expect was that the prophecies would have multiple fulfillments and that some of those fulfillments would initially be of a partial nature.

Keep in mind as you hear the answers to these questions that Jesus and His disciples are looking down on the city of Jerusalem, spread out beneath them. I have stood on the Mount of Olives and looked down on Jerusalem. It is a glorious scene and one has a complete panoramic view of the city. In much the same way, Jesus is going to give to His disciples a panorama of history.

BIRTH PANGS

As Jesus begins to unfold this panorama of history, He does so with a series of warnings. Each of these warnings is followed by a reason for that warning:

13:5 13:6	Warning: Reason:	Don't be misled. Many will try to mislead you
13:7 13:8	Warning: Reason:	Don't be frightened You will hear of wars, earthquakes, famines
13:9 13:9	Warning: Reason:	Be on guard You will be delivered up, arrested, hated

1. Warning Against Being Misled.

And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 6 Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!'" and will mislead many. (Mark 13:5-6).

I worked for a lot of years with the fire department. When we were responding to an emergency, we would be given an address or a general location, but as we approached the scene, we would be looking not only for the smoke, but for the people who would be standing out in the street and pointing in a particular direction. In

doing so, we were assuming that they were pointing in the direction of the emergency.

It is hard enough to find the truth without being misled. And so, Jesus warns that not all the people who point are pointing in the right direction. Why are there so many different cults and religions? Many of these name the name of Christ. But they are all pointing in different directions.

2. The Beginning of Birth Pangs.

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end.

“For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Mark 13:7-8).

If you look at all of the things that Jesus is describing and feel that He is describing your generation, you aren't alone. The disciples felt that He was talking about their generation, too. Indeed, every generation has been able to identify with these words. When did these birth pangs begin? It started at the Fall.

To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children...” (Genesis 3:16).

The world has been experiencing them since the time of the fall. The word translated “*birth-pangs*” is only found four times in the New Testament. One of those is a parallel passage in Matthew, the second is a passage speaking of a woman suffering birth-pangs (I Thessalonians 5:3), and the third refers to the birth-pangs of death.

“And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the AGONY of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” (Acts 2:24).

Since the fall, men have been suffering the birth-pangs of death. From the day you are born, you begin to die. That is the result of the curse. Jesus came to do away with those birth-pangs. But in

the meantime, they will continue.

The point that Jesus is making is not that you should think the Second Coming is near when you hear of wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famines. His point is just the opposite. When you hear of these things, the end is not near. You will be hearing of these things for a long time before the end finally comes.

Between the day in which Jesus spoke these words and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. there were four major earthquakes in the Roman world.

- Crete (A.D. 46-47).
- Rome (A.D. 51).
- Apamaia in Phrygia (A.D. 60).
- Campania (A.D. 63).

There were also a number of famines, some of which affected the entire known world (Acts 11:28). The temptation of the early church would be to see these events as a sign that the world was about to end at any moment. And so, Jesus gives this prophecy so that it will be known that these signs are only the beginning.

When Paula, my wife, was pregnant with our daughter, she began having labor pains. We jumped up and drove to the hospital and she went in to see the doctor. Do you know what he did? He sent her back home! He said that these were only beginning pains and that the birth would not take place for some time. He was right! It was not until the next evening that Sky was actually born. The same is true of these signs. They are only the beginning signs and they suggest other signs to follow.

3. Delivered up to Persecution.

“But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.

¹⁰“The gospel must first be preached to all the nations.

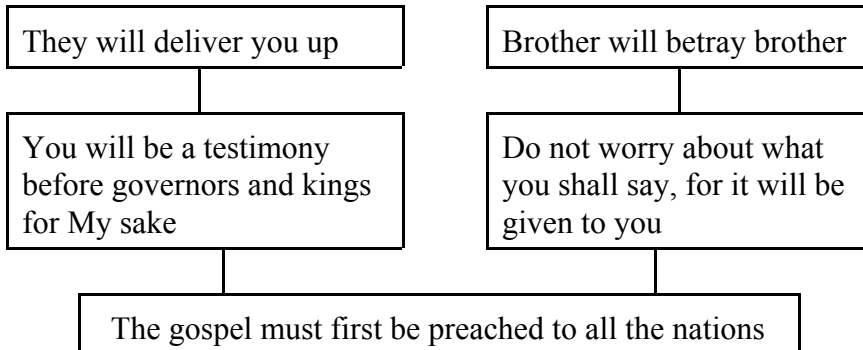
¹¹“When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.

¹²“Brother will betray brother to death, and a

father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.

¹³“You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. (Mark 13:9-13).

This section is presented in chiasmic form. The central thought is that they are going to be delivered up to their enemies, but in the midst of that betrayal, the gospel will be proclaimed.



The worse things get for Christians, the better they get for the preaching of the gospel. That is good news because things can get very bad. If you don't believe that, then you have not been reading the newspapers.

When was the gospel “*preached to all the nations?*” It happened at Pentecost when representatives of all of the major nations on earth were gathered in Jerusalem to observe the feast. It also happened when the gospel went out to the nations in the book of Acts. It has happened in every generation since as the gospel has gone out to the whole world.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Romans 1:8).

...you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, just as in ALL THE WORLD also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.” (Colossians 1:5-6).

The gospel was preached throughout the whole world in the early days of the church. It is still being preached throughout the whole world.

Verse 14 has troubled many as it speaks of “*the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*” For that reason, many have attempted to explain it away. What does it mean?

- a. What is involved in “enduring”?

The answer is found in the context. Look at the previous verses. It is enduring in the presence of persecution. The one who endures will continue to proclaim the gospel.

- b. What kind of salvation is this?

It is not mere physical salvation. Indeed, the Scriptures record many who endured to the death in preaching the gospel who were persecuted and put to death. This is spiritual salvation. It is the salvation that we speak of when we say that someone is saved from their sins and from the curse of eternal death.

The godly that remain faithful through all persecution will be saved from the ultimate destruction of God’s judgment. Those who survive God’s judgment will be called holy.

- c. The question of eternal security.

Does it mean that if you come to Christ and then turn away from Him that you are not saved? That is exactly what it means.

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour.

They went out from us, but they were not really of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:18-19).

Does this mean that you can lose your salvation? No. But it does mean that when a person who has declared himself to be a Christian leaves, it is because he was never one to begin with. True Christianity is defined by endurance. A Christian is one who continues to be a Christian. He is one who loves God and who keeps on loving God. He is one who holds to the gospel, confessing it with his mouth and believing it with his heart and who continues to confess it and continues to believe it.

Now it is important that you realize that this is not based upon self-effort. The reason that a Christian loves the Lord is because the Holy Spirit has placed that love in his heart.

THE GREAT FLIGHT

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, ¹⁵ the one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; ¹⁶ and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat.

¹⁷ “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ But pray that it may not happen in the winter. ¹⁹ For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. ²⁰ Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

²¹ “And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, He is there’; do not believe him; ²² for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. (Mark 13:14-23)

Is this a prophecy which is yet to be fulfilled? There has been much speculation over this question. On the one hand, there was a fulfillment that took place in the first century. This does not rule out the possibility of another future fulfillment. But if we fail to recognize the manner in which

the prophecy has already been fulfilled, then we do it an injustice.

This section begins with a reference to *the abomination of desolation*. This was a familiar phrase to His disciples. It was familiar because it was taken from the Old Testament.

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains (Mark 13:14).

Jesus quotes from the book of Daniel. There are two places where Daniel makes mention of an “abomination of desolation.”

- The destruction of the city and the temple.

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; DESOLATIONS are determined.” (Daniel 9:26).

There was coming a prince who would effect the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Because it is mentioned just prior to this coming prince, it appears that the Messiah would first be cut off. What we must realize is that the passage does not specifically say this. The problem is that there are two separate historical events which relate to this prophecy.

DANIEL 9		
Passage	Events of 166 B.C.	Events of 70 A.D.
<i>"The prince who is to come..."</i>	Antiochus Epiphanes, ruler of the Seleucid Empire.	Titus, Roman general and son of Emperor Vespasian.
<i>"Will destroy the city and the sanctuary..."</i>	Polluted the Temple, but did not destroy it.	Destroyed the Temple and the city.
<i>"He will make a firm covenant with the many for one week..."</i>	Hellenistic Jews made a treaty with Antiochus (1 Maccabees 1:11-13).	No covenant made.

<i>"He will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering..."</i>	Antiochus halted the Temple sacrifices.	Temple sacrifices stopped at its destruction.
--	---	---

The first of these events took place in 166 B.C. A Seleucid ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes had come into Jerusalem and had set up an idol of himself in the Temple and had passed a law that he be worshiped.

Now Jesus is saying that it is going to happen again. Within forty years, the Roman general Titus would come up against Jerusalem, break through with his armies. Both the city and the Temple would be burned to the ground.

- Setting up of the abomination of desolation.

"And forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION." (Daniel 11:31).

The context of this prophecy is the actions of the godless "King of the North." This is an obvious reference to Antiochus Epiphanes.

For the king had sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Juda that they should follow the strange laws of the land, ⁴⁵ and forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in the temple; and that they should profane the Sabbaths and festival days: ⁴⁶ and pollute the sanctuary and holy people: ⁴⁷ set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean beasts (1 Maccabees 1:44-47).

Now the fifteenth day of the month Casleu, in the hundred forty and fifth year, they set up the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Juda on every side (1 Maccabees 1:54).

Notice that the same phrase *abomination of desolation* is used in the book of Maccabees which is used both in Daniel's original

prophecy as well as by Jesus here in Mark's Gospel. The prophecy of an abomination which renders desolate has long-reaching effects. The Temple was rendered desolate and it is still desolate today with the presence of an abomination - the Muslim Mosque of Omar with its golden Dome of the Rock. The existence of that mosque in Jerusalem today is mute testimony to the words of Jesus.

With all of this in mind, we can move on to see what Jesus actually says concerning this period. He begins with a command to flee.

...then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains (Mark 13:14b).

This is a localized prophecy. It speaks to those who lived in Judea. It doesn't refer specifically to those who live in Florida. I am tired of hearing about Christians who want to run to the mountains of North Carolina to escape the Great Tribulation. The Jewish Christians of the first century applied this prophecy to their own circumstances so that, when the Jews went to war against the Romans, they departed from Jerusalem and fled into the wilderness to escape the Roman onslaught. They were also warned against the coming of false messiahs.

"And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, He is there'; do not believe him; 22 for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. (Mark 13:21-22).

This is a warning against deception. It is a warning against Christian gullibility. Christians are people of faith - but we need to take care that our faith not be turned into gullibility. We need to check things out. This applies to preachers and it applies to congregations. The reason that there are so many cults today is because people have been far too gullible.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN

Up to this point, Jesus has been describing the coming destruction of Jerusalem which was to occur within a generation. But now, although it is not obvious from the text, there is a change. He now describes His Second Coming in terms which seem to go far beyond the events of 70 A.D.

1. Sun, Moon and Stars.

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. (Mark 13:24-25).

The amazing thing about this prophecy is that Peter indicated a partial fulfillment taking place on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2 relates the account of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the New Testament church, followed by the tongues experience. In the midst of it, Peter stood up and addressed the onlookers. He quoted Joel 2:28-32 which described the sun being turned to darkness and the moon into blood. And he indicated that it had happened!

When did this take place? It happened when Christ hung on the cross. The sun was darkened. There was a great earthquake. Graves were opened and people came out of them. Now Jesus says that it is going to happen again. Once again the sun will be darkened. Once again the powers of heaven will be shaken. Although He does not mention it here, the graves will once again be opened.

2. The Coming of the Son of Man.

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. (Mark 13:26).

The mention of “clouds” seems to be significant, especially as it is repeated in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 where “*we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the **clouds** of the air*” to meet the Lord. It is mentioned again in Revelation 1:7 where we read that “*He is coming with the clouds.*”

This had an Old Testament significance. It looked back to the time when the Children of Israel were in the wilderness and the presence of the Lord guided them by means of a cloud. When the time came to dedicate the Tabernacle to the Lord, the cloud came and settled upon the Tabernacle.

The same thing happened in the days of Solomon. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Temple, “*the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*” (1 Kings 8:10-11). However, the most striking parallel

between the words of Jesus and of the Old Testament are to be found in Daniel's vision of the "Ancient of Days."

*"I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the CLOUDS of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days,
And was presented before Him." (Daniel 7:13).*

The cloud served as a mantle for the glory of God. It was not for God's benefit; it was for our benefit. It protected men from the terrible glory of God.

3. The Gathering of the Elect.

*"And then He will send forth the angels, and
will gather together His elect from the four winds,
from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end
of heaven. (Mark 13:27).*

The culmination of the coming of the Son is when He gathers together His elect - His chosen people. The Greek can be literally translated, "from the tip of earth to the tip of heaven." This gathering seems to be the same one described by Paul in his epistle to the Thessalonians when he said that *"the dead in Christ shall rise first"* and that *"we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The Dispensationalist holds this to be two separate events: A secret "rapture" followed by the Second Coming of Christ. However, the Scriptures never make any distinction between two separate future comings.

THE PROXIMITY OF HIS COMING

Back in verses 3-4, the original question of the disciples had been twofold: They had asked when these things would take place. They had also asked what the sign would be. Jesus has given the signs. Now He deals with the first question. This is the question of when these things would take place. He answers the question, but He does not set a date. Instead He says that it will be near.

13:28	What You Know	Parable of the Fig Tree	
13:29		He is near	
13:30		This Generation shall not	Pass Away
		Heaven and Earth shall	
	My words shall not		
13:32	What You Don't Know	No one knows the day or the hour <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep on the Alert<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Parable• Keep on the Alert<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Application• Keep on the Alert	

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree.

“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.

“Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. (Mark 13:28-29).

This is the second time that we have seen Jesus using a fig tree as an illustration. The first time had been when He had cursed the fig tree for not producing fruit. Do you remember what it had produced? Leaves! Jesus takes the same tree to illustrate this next point.

When you look at a fig tree and see leaves, you know that winter is past and that summer is soon approaching. Leaves don't bloom in the winter. They are a sign of coming summer. When you look at the signs which He has given and see them come to pass, then you know that Jesus' return is closer than it was.

2. Things that Pass.

“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (Mark 13:30-31).

Verse 30 presents us with a problem. Jesus said that *“this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* To make the language even stronger, we see a double negative used in the Greek text. When we use a double negative in English, it cancels the force of the negative, but when you do it in Greek, it makes the negative even stronger. Thus, Jesus is saying that this generation will not in any way pass away until all these things take place. And yet, it is evident that a number of generations have taken place since the days of Jesus and not all of these prophecies have taken place. There are several possible ways to understand this prophecy.

a. The Preterist view.

The preterists view every prophecy in this chapter as having been completely fulfilled in the first century. That means the reference to the “Son of Man coming in the clouds” speaks of God’s hand of judgment against the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In the same way, the preterist takes every other prophecy about the Second Coming and also claims that it was fulfilled in the first century.

There are a number of problems with this view. First of all, it means that the entire church missed the Second Coming because no one in A.D. 70 recognized that it had taken place. What makes this problematic is that both Jesus and the rest of the New Testament specifically say that, *He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him (Revelation 1:7).*

In the same way, Jesus said to the disciples, *“The days shall come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look there! Look here!’ Do not go away, and do not run after them. For just as the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day.” (Luke 17:22-24).*

The Preterist is one who is pointing to the A.D. 70 event and saying, “Look there! Look here!” But there is going to be no mistaking the coming of the Son of Man when He finally returns. By contrast, none of the believers of the early church viewed the 70 A.D. fall of Jerusalem as fulfilling the promise of the return of Christ.

b. The future generation view.

Another possibility is that all of the prophecies will take place within the space of a single generation, but that generation has not yet come. “The promise is that the end-time crisis will not be of indefinite duration” (Hiebert).

c. The Semitic view.

Hendricksen and Ryle teach that Jesus is referring to the Jewish people who will not have passed away before the time of the Second Coming. Lenski suggests that Jesus is speaking with the type of Jews with whom He had contended.

Which one of these views is right? Perhaps there is a sense in which there are some true elements in all of them. Admittedly, all of the signs of this chapter were fulfilled in the first century with the sole exception of the Second Coming. That event which is still future does not mandate a long, drawn-out process. God’s people will still be around when He returns.

At the same time, I feel that the destruction of Jerusalem served as a type and a shadow of the future destruction and judgment that face all men and that this process began to take place within the lifetime of those who were present in that day. The early church seems to have understood this point, for their treatment of the events of Matthew 24 was to look for a future cumulative fulfillment. Such an interpretation should not surprise us. We see this take place regularly in Biblical prophecy.

Prophecy	Initial Fulfillment	Ultimate Fulfillment
<i>And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:3).</i>	Points to Israel as a blessing	Jesus is the ultimate blessing
<i>A star shall come forth from Jacob, And a scepter shall rise from Israel, And shall crush through the forehead of Moab, And tear down all the sons of Sheth (Numbers 24:17).</i>	References to Edom and Moab indicate it is fulfilled initially in David	Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment who is announced by a Star

<i>Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).</i>	Context of the passage points to a child in that day	Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the virgin born child.
---	--	---

3. The Great Unknown.

“But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Mark 13:32).

All attempts to determine the time of the Lord’s return are doomed to failure, for this information is known only to the Father. This means you can put away your future prophecy charts. We simply don’t have all of the information. If Jesus Himself did not know the date of His return, then we are not likely to come up with such a date through our own calculations.

The fact that the Son did not know the day or hour of His return indicates the limitation of the incarnation. Jesus was confined to a human body. He was fully God, but He was also fully man. Because He was man, He underwent a limitation of His knowledge.

4. Keep on the Alert.

³³ *“Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come.*

³⁴ *“It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert.*

³⁵ *“Therefore, be on the alert -- for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows in the morning -- ³⁶ in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’” (Mark 13:33-37).*

Jesus ends this discourse in the same way He started it — with a warning. The warning is that of watchfulness. Be on the alert! This is the point on which the passage ends. It is the lesson that we, the readers, are to take away from this sermon. In verses 35, Jesus

lists all four watches of the night. He is listing the possibilities of His return. It might be soon or it might be far off.

- Evening.
- Midnight.
- Cock crow.
- Morning.

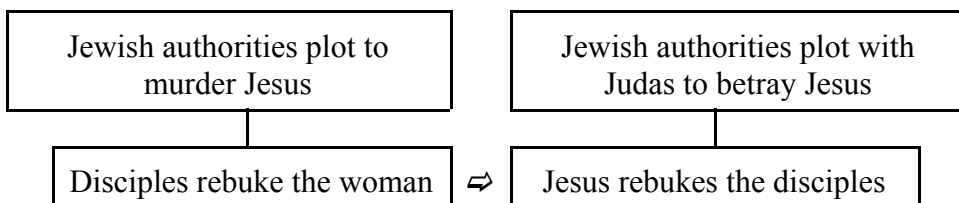
The point is that you do not know when Christ is going to come and so we should be watchful in every age and at all times. What does it mean to be watchful? It means that we should be constantly faithful, serving the Lord at all times.

LOVE AND BETRAYAL

Mark 14:1-11

All four of the Gospel accounts tell the story of the anointing of Jesus. It took place at His baptism when the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove and the Father spoke His benediction upon Him. All four of the Gospels also record a second anointing. It was not done by the Holy Spirit, but at the hands of a woman. This was an act of love.

A number of years ago, a supreme court justice said about pornography, “I can’t define it, but whenever I see it, I know what it is.” Love is like that. You may not be able to give a textbook definition of love. But as you see this woman’s actions, you will know that you have seen an extravagant love in action. The passage is presented in chiasmic parallel.



The contrast is between those who love Jesus versus those who hate Him. You will always fall into one of these two categories. It is impossible to stay neutral toward Jesus.

THE PASSOVER PLOT

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; 2 for they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.” (Mark 14:1-2).

The Festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread took place one right after the other. The Passover took place on the 14th of the first month - the month known as Nisan. It was immediately followed by an entire week of feasting known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On the day after the

Sabbath during this week, a sheaf of grain was brought to the Temple, taken by the priest, and waved before the presence of the Lord as a grain offering.

Passover	Unleavened Bread
14th of Nisan (single day)	15th-22nd of Nisan (full week)
Began at sundown on previous day and observed for one day.	Observed for entire week with Waving Ceremony on the day after the Sabbath (Sunday).
Commemorated the Exodus from Egypt.	Symbolized the promise of a harvest which was blessed by the Lord.
Looked to Redemption	Looked to Resurrection
Looked back to the Exodus	Looked forward to future promises

This was to be a time of dedication, praise, and prayers. But in the hearts of some, there was only murder. Within the ranks of the chief priests and the scribes, there was a plot to have Jesus arrested. After all, He had been messing up their religion. He had cleaned out the temple and He had overturned tables and He had driven out the people selling animals. It was their temple and their tables and their animals with which He had been interfering. And so, they have decided to get rid of Him.

There is only one problem. Jesus has become very popular and it would not be politically correct to arrest Him right now. And so, if they are to arrest Him, it must be done secretly.

AN EXTRAVAGANT GIFT

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. (Mark 14:3).

As we see Jesus, He has left Jerusalem and crossed to the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives to come to the little town of Bethany.

1. Supper in the Home of Simon: *He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper.*

Jesus was staying in the home of Simon the leper. He wasn't called that anymore. Now he was plain old Simon. The only time previous where Mark has mentioned the healing of a leper was at the outset of the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:40-45). That man's name had not been given. Jesus had simply healed him and had told him to go and show himself to the priest and offer the prescribed offering. Was this that same man? Was he one of hundreds that Jesus had helped in Galilee? We don't know when Jesus had healed him, but we can imagine what his life would have been like prior to the healing.

Fingerless stubs which had worn away. Scabbed arms, infected, and draped with rags. A tattered wrap which covered his pocket marked face in shame. But that was before he met Jesus. That made all of the difference.

2. The Woman: *There came a woman with an alabaster vial.*

Mark does not tell us this woman's name. From the parallel account in John's Gospel, we learn that she was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The thing that Mark wants us to note is that she is merely a woman who loved Jesus. By describing her this way, he invites you to identify with her.

3. Perfume of Pure Nard: *There came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard.*

Nard is mentioned three times in the book of Song of Solomon (1:12; 4:13-14).

This is a transliteration of the Greek word *nardos*. It was a perfume which came from a plant that grew in the Himalayas between China and Tibet. This perfume had to be imported over a thousand miles in specially sealed alabaster jars.

This was not a spontaneous act. This woman brought the jar with her to the house of Simon for this purpose. This was not a gesture of spontaneity, but it was an extravagant one. The contents of the jar were worth a year's wages.

This gift wasn't logical. But love isn't always logical either. Touching a leper to make him clean isn't logical. Telling a man who is dead and buried to get up and walk isn't logical. But it is loving. This was an act of sacrifice. Love is always sacrificial. It always costs. You don't give God that which doesn't cost you anything.

AN INDIGNANT REMARK

*But some were indignantly remarking to one another,
“Why has this perfume been wasted?”*

*“For this perfume might have been sold for over three
hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they
were scolding her. (Mark 14:4-5).*

In the last chapter, the disciples had been impressed with the beauty of the temple architecture. But now they fail to see beauty in this woman's sacrificial act. All they can see is the cost.

1. Over Three Hundred Denarii.

A denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer. One of the disciples took out his pocket calculator and figured that this gift was valued at nearly a year's wages. There is a principle here. It is the principle of sacrifice. The giving of worship takes on a sacrificial nature when it costs you something. If your giving doesn't cost you anything, then it really doesn't mean much.

That is what David said. When he was preparing to make a sacrifice to God, he asked to buy the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite to make a sacrifice to God. Araunah said, “Just take the property as a gift.” Araunah offered to provide the property, the altar and the sacrifice. But David refused. He insisted on paying a proper price for the property.

*However, the king said to Araunah, “No, but
I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not
offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost
me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24a).*

David recognized, and we should too, that for an offering to be meaningful, it must cost us something.

2. They were Scolding Her.

The motives of these disciples were mixed. Judas was a thief and was displeased that he would not be able to cash in on this gift. But it was not just Judas who was involved in this scolding. The other disciples also involved themselves in this activity.

Criticism often is contagious. It is started by one but then

picked up by others. There is a lesson here. It is that you need to immunize yourself against critical people.

A PROTECTIVE REBUKE

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. ⁹ Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." (Mark 14:6-9).

Jesus moves to this woman's defense. Both Judas and the other disciples who have followed him are rebuked.

1. You Always have the Poor with You.

This verse has sometimes been used to ignore the poor. That is a misuse of this verse. What Jesus is emphasizing is a matter of priorities. Poor people are important. But the Son of God is more important. This does not mean that we ignore poor people. But we never let our poverty program outshine our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

2. Anointed for Burial.

It was part of the Jewish custom to anoint one who had died and who was about to be buried. Do you see the contrast? It is a contrast between this woman and Judas.

The Woman	Judas
She was preparing for the burial of Jesus.	He is going to prepare for the betrayal of Jesus.
Displays love and sacrifice.	Displays covetousness and hate.

Perhaps the most difficult issue with regard to this passage is the reconciling of the similar accounts in all four gospels.

Matthew 26:6-13	Mark 14:3-9	Luke 7:36-50	John 12:1-8
The supper is said to take place in the home of Simon.			Home not mentioned.
Simon is identified as "the leper."		Simon is a Pharisee.	Simon not mentioned.
Location is mentioned as being at Bethany.		Location not mentioned.	Location at Bethany.
The woman remains unnamed, but Jesus says her deed shall not be forgotten.		Unnamed woman was a sinner.	Mary is mentioned by name.
An alabaster vial.			A pound.
Very costly perfume.	Costly perfume of pure nard.	Perfume (cost not mentioned).	Very costly perfume of pure nard.
She poured it on the head of Jesus.		She anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes them with her hair.	
The disciples were indignant.	Unnamed people were scolding her.	No scolding directed toward the woman.	Judas Iscariot questions the actions.
The incident is described as following the Olivet Discourse.		During central ministry of Jesus.	Day before Triumphal entry.
Perfume commanded a high price.	Perfume valued at 300 denarii.	No mention of cost of perfume.	Perfume valued at 300 denarii.

The account that seems the furthest removed from the other three is Luke's, both with regard to the time of its occurrence as well as to the emphasis of the sinfulness of the woman. Although I do not ignore the possibility that these may have been two different occurrences, there is sufficient similarity between the accounts to make us pause before embracing this conclusion.

THE PLANNED BETRAYAL

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them.

They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. (Mark 14:10-11).

Judas had a decision to make. He could have repented over his attitudes about the cost of the ointment. But instead, he determined to sell out Jesus. We do the same thing when we sin. We turn against our Lord for the sake of...

Our wants
Our desires
Our gains.

We are always seeking. We are either seeking an opportunity to serve Him or else we are seeking an opportunity to sell Him out. To make no decision is to make a decision.

THE LAST SUPPER

Mark 14:12-26

The atmosphere in Jerusalem has been tense and exciting. Two days ago, Jesus confronted all of the religious leaders in the Temple. He rebuked them and pronounced the woe of God upon them. As He was leaving the Temple, He prophesied that not one stone would be left standing upon another.

The religious leaders are incensed. They plot to capture Jesus and put Him to death. However, they are afraid to do so in public because they fear that the crowd will side with Jesus. They are looking for a way to trap him in a house at night or in a dark alley. And then, as if in answer to the wishes, Judas of Kerioth comes to them and offers to betray Jesus to them. The price will be 30 pieces of silver. They need only the opportunity to catch Jesus alone.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE MEAL

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover Lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

And He sent two of His disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'"

"And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; and prepare for us there."

And the disciples went out, and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. (Mark 14:12-16).

Did you ever stop to wonder why Jesus used such a round about way of selecting the upper room? Why didn't he give the two disciples the address? Why send them on this search for a man carrying a waterpot?

I believe that it was because of Judas. Judas had already determined to betray Jesus. He is looking for an opportune moment at which he can catch Jesus in a place that is away from the crowds. The upper room will be such a place.

Jesus knows this. He knows that Judas is the betrayer. He has already predicted that He will be crucified. But it will only be permitted to happen at the proper time. Jesus will not allow His last supper to be interrupted. And so, He sends two trusted disciples into Jerusalem, giving them instructions that Judas will not be able to decipher.

PROPHECY OF BETRAYAL

And when it was evening He came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray me - one who is eating with Me."

They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" ²⁰ And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. ²¹ For the Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." (Mark 14:17-21).

Picture the scene. It is evening in Jerusalem. Nearly every room in every house is filled with pilgrims come to celebrate the feast. The period between the two evenings is now past — that period between the beginning of the sun's decline toward the west and the hour of its final disappearance below the western horizon.

As the first three stars became visible in the growing twilight, the threefold blast of the silver trumpets from the Temple Mount echoed over the city. Pascha, the Passover, had now begun.

Jesus and His disciples are gathered around a low table. While it was normally the custom to sit cross-legged at a table, the tradition at Passover was different. It called for the people to recline. Unlike the first Passover which had called for the people to eat fully dressed, standing, and ready for the Exodus from Egypt, now they were at rest in the Promised Land. To show this rest, they reclined around the table. Each of those present lean their left arm upon a pillow, leaving the right free to partake of the food.

This room which houses the Last Supper of Jesus shall witness the birth of the Church. It is here that Jesus speaks His last words to His disciples and it shall be here that they shall see Him in His resurrected body.

The meal begins with the lighting of the lamps. Ritual greetings are offered around the table. A ceremony of handwashing takes place, interrupted in this case, as Jesus washes the feet of His disciples, mentioned not here, but in John's Gospel. The following items were present as a part of the meal.

Lamb	To remind them of their redemption from Egypt in the first Passover
Unleavened Bread	The absence of leaven pointed to the absence of sin as they left behind in Egypt all of its corrupting influences
Bowl of salt water	To remind them of the tears which they had shed in Egypt and of the waters of the Red Sea through which they had passed.
Bitter Herbs	To remind theme of their bitter bondage in Egypt.
Charosheth	This mixture of apples, date, pomegranates and nuts represented the clay and mortar which they had used to make bricks in Egypt.

The first cup of wine is taken and a blessing given before all partake of it. Bitter herbs are passed around the table in memory of the bitter bondage from which Israel was delivered. A loaf of the unleavened bread is broken and put to the side until later in the meal. The roasted lamb is brought to the table. The meal is enjoined. In the midst of the meal, Jesus makes a startling prediction.

...Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray me - one who is eating with Me." (Mark 14:18b).

Betrayal? One of us who sits at the table and eats? Who will it be? Could it be me? There was one that night who knew the answer to those questions. He was the one who had made the plans for betrayal.

Can I tell you something that troubles me? It is that Judas looked just as holy, just as spiritual, and just as surprised as the rest of the disciples. He knew how to play the game. He knew the right words to say to sound like a genuine disciple of Jesus. He was a disciple; but he was spiritually dead. He was a follower; but he had no faith. He was at the table; but he had not touched the truth. Why does that trouble me? Because, if I had been at the table that night, I would also have been asking, "Lord, is it me?"

There is an invitation here. It was extended to Judas and it is extended to you. It is an invitation to repentance and forgiveness of sins. No matter how deep the sin, or how dark the betrayal, there is a place of forgiveness as the Table for all who come.

BREAD AND WINE

And while they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it; and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body."

And when He had taken a cup, and given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank from it.

And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

"Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:22-26).

The Lord's Supper looks both forward and backward. It has a connection with both the past as well as with the future. It looks to what Jesus died and what He will yet do.

1. The Connection with the Past.

And while they were eating, He took some bread... (Mark 14:22a).

The institution of the Lord's Supper took place while they were still eating. They did not clear the table and start from scratch. Instead, Jesus used the materials at hand. Christianity is based upon Judaism. Jesus was the fulfillment of every ordinance and every ritual of the Law.

There is a lesson here. It is that Christianity is not something new. It is a part of something very old that goes back to the founding of the nation of Israel. It goes even further to the person of Abraham.

This is not the first time that bread and wine were offered by a King in Jerusalem. There was a supper that took place over a thousand years earlier. It was before...

- The building of the Temple.
- The Exodus from Egypt.
- Israel had even become a nation.

It was in the days of Abraham. It is found in Genesis 14. You remember the story. Abraham's nephew, Lot, had been carried off by an invading hoard from the east. Abraham gathered up a force of men under arms and set out in pursuit. He caught the invaders and defeated them in a daring night attack. Lot was rescued.

On their way back home, they were met by a mysterious king. His name was Melchizedek. The name means "King of righteousness." He was king of a mountain fortress called Salem. It was short for "Jerusalem."

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out BREAD and WINE; now he was a priest of God Most High. (Genesis 14:18).

We don't know much about Melchizedek. He seems to come from nowhere and he bestows a blessing upon Abraham and when he is done we never hear from him again. But forever after, there is a promise of a once and future king. He is seen in David who...

- Comes to Jerusalem and makes it his capital city.
- Even though he is not of the tribe of Levi, he dons the white robes of the priest and offers a sacrifice and blesses the people, describing himself as a priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

He is seen in the person of Solomon who likewise wore the white priestly robes at the dedication of the Temple and who made a sacrifice and blessed the people.

But the final fulfillment of the Melchizedek motif was Jesus. We see Him here. The King has entered Jerusalem amidst the waving of palm trees and the singing of hosannas as even the rocks held their collective breath to greet Him. Now we see Him, offering bread and wine and a blessing to those who will partake.

2. The Correspondence of Unity.

...He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it; and gave it to them (Mark 14:22b).

And when He had taken a cup, and given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank from it. (Mark 14:23).

Jesus took one of the Passover cakes from the table. He did not take several of the cakes and pass them around. Instead, He took one and broke it. There was one loaf which was taken and broken for the disciples. He took one cup and passed it around and they all drank from the same cup. There was a point that Jesus was trying to make in this. It was the point of the unity of the body.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, there is a sense in which we are being spiritually united with Him. But that is not all. We are also being united with one another. We are made parts of a single body. That doesn't mean that we all...

Look alike.

Talk alike.

Dress alike.

But it does mean that we experience an organic unity - that when one part of the body hurts we all say, "Ouch." We are united by a tie that binds. It is not merely "until death do us part." It is for all eternity.

3. The Covenant Established.

And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." (Mark 14:24).

When Jesus spoke of the Covenant, He was invoking an Old Testament concept. In those days, a covenant was a legally binding oath which was entered by two parties. You would take an animal and kill it and cut its body into two pieces. The pieces would be placed upon the ground. Then the parties who were invoking the covenant would pass between the pieces as they recited the terms of the covenant.

The idea behind this was one of blessing and cursing. If you would keep the terms of the covenant, then you would be blessed. If you broke the covenant terms, then you would be cursed. The idea was that, just as this animal had been killed and torn into pieces, so you were also swearing destruction upon yourself should you break the terms of the covenant.

Here is the point. Jesus is establishing a covenant. He has just broken bread and they have eaten. He is giving wine and they shall drink.

Where is the animal who shall be killed? Where is the sacrifice? He is the sacrifice. But that is not all. He is also the keeper of the covenant. He took the curse of the covenant upon Himself. The Law said: "Cursed is anyone who hangs upon a tree." He became a curse for us.

4. The Certainty of Return.

"Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25).

This was not the first time that Jesus had kept the Passover with His disciples. But it would be the last time. They would not partake it with Him again until the coming of the kingdom. When we partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper, we do not only look to the past. We also look to the future.

We believe that Jesus is with us in Spirit. But there is coming a day when we shall sit at His banquet table and we shall eat this supper in His physical presence.

Her name was Fanny J. Crosby. When she was a child, she was taken to a doctor who put some salve on her eyes which blinded her for life. She lived for 95 years. She began state schools for the blind. She knew 5 presidents personally. She played the harp and the organ. She memorized Genesis, Psalms, several of Paul's epistles. She was a woman of faith who wrote a number of hymns to the Lord which are sung by us today. One of my favorites is entitled "To God be the Glory." The third stanza says:

*Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.*

Fanny Crosby knew that the very next thing that her blind eyes shall see will be the face of her Lord and Savior as He beckons her to His banquet table.

THE GETHSEMANE INCIDENT

Mark 14:27-42

Beneath the silver starlight and the soft glow of the full moon lies the sleeping city of Jerusalem. The hour is late and the narrow streets and alleys lie quietly in the deep shadows, broken only by the muffled sound of the passing of a small company of men.

There are twelve of them. They are Jesus and eleven of His disciples. Judas has gone away. Even now, he is before the high priest, arranging the betrayal of his Master. Orders are being given and guards are being assembled. Members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel, are being roused and gathered. Before this night is over, all of these diverse groups will come together.

Jesus and His disciples make their way past the silent Temple compound, through the gates of the city, descending down into the Kidron Valley on the east side of the city. They cross over the dark bubbling waters of the Kidron Brook which has swelled from the spring rains. They find themselves on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. It is here that Jesus speaks.

A TIMELY WARNING

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' 28 But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." (Mark 14:27-28).

The words of warning which Jesus spoke to His disciples were not His own. He was quoting what would have been to them a familiar passage. It is a quote from the prophet Zechariah. His meaning is evident to them.

- He is the Shepherd.
- They are the sheep.
- He will be struck down.

- They will be scattered.

But in the midst of that bad news, there is also some good news. Even though He will be struck down, He will also be raised. There is a principle here. You can't have the good news without first having the bad news. There can be no forgiveness without first having sin. There can be no giving of eternal life without first having the problem of death. There can be no rising from the dead if there has not first been a death. There is no crown without the cross.

Satan's way is the promise of a short-cut. He promises instant success. Just turn these rocks into bread. Just jump and trust to the angels. Just choose the counterfeit and no one will know the difference.

Have you received any bad news lately? Take heart! You could never be ready for the good news unless you first passed through the bad.

AN ARROGANT RESOLUTION

But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." (Mark 14:29).

As we listen to Peter, there almost seems to be a touch of arrogance to his voice. He says, "Even though these other disciples might not be very dependable, you can count on me, Jesus."

A long time ago, I was taught that you should not make arrogant resolutions. But I'm older now and I'm not so sure that this is the principle which we should take from this passage. You see, resolutions do not reflect your ability. They reflect your heart. Jesus knew that Peter wouldn't keep his commitment. But that didn't make Jesus love Peter any less.

A number of years ago, I made a New Year's Resolution. It was that I stop making New Year's Resolutions. But I have since come to the conclusion that it is okay for God's people to make resolutions. When we stop making resolutions, it means that we have stopped loving Him and have stopped trying to obey Him. When we stop breaking resolutions, it means that we have stopped needing Him.

And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times."

But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying

the same thing also. (Mark 14:30-31).

This is where Peter steps over the line from love to arrogance. One of the greatest sins you can commit is the arrogant presumption that you can't sin. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" There is no sin of which I am not capable. There is no sin of which you are not capable. When we both realize that, there may finally be some sin of which we are not capable.

A PLAINTIVE REQUEST

They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed."

And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.

And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." (Mark 14:32-34).

Gethsemane is a Hebrew word meaning "oil press." Perhaps it took its name from the nearby olive press which serviced the olive groves that gave the hill its name. It was a quiet place. It is also a place known to Judas. Perhaps the disciples have used it as a regular retreat. Jesus is aware that Judas knows exactly where to come and find Him. He knows that the time of His betrayal is at hand.

The process used to extract olive oil was a laborious one. Whole olives were put into a circular stone basin in which a millstone sat. A donkey or other animal was then harnessed to the millstone and walked in a circle, rolling the stone over the olives and cracking them.

The cracked olives were scooped up into bags, which were then stacked beneath a large stone column — a *gethsemane*.

The enormous weight forced the precious oil to drip from the fruit into a groove and on into a pit at the base of the *gethsemane*, from which it was collected.

But before the betrayal, there will be a battle. Not a battle of swords or spears. A spiritual battle. Among these quiet trees, the forces of darkness are going to be pitted against the Son of Man.

The fate of mankind hangs in the balance. Not since the fall of the human race in the Garden of Eden has such a crucial battle taken place. Indeed, the scene here reminds us of what took place in Eden:

Eden	Gethsemane
Adam and Eve had been placed into a Garden	The Second Adam comes to a garden
The first Adam was tempted	The Second Adam is tempted
The first Adam sinned as a result of his temptation and plunged the world into sin and death	The Second Adam will depart from the garden in victory and shall go forth to free the world from the curse of sin and death

Leaving eight of His disciples at the entrance to the garden, Jesus takes with Him Peter, James, and John. These are the same three who had witnessed the raising of the daughter of Jairus. These are the same three who had gone up with Jesus into the mountain to witness the transfiguration. They have been witnesses of His glory. Now they shall witness His struggle.

This brings us to a question. Why did Jesus bring these three disciples with Him into the garden? Was it so they could bear witness of this time of prayer? Was it so they could learn from Him? Was it so He could strengthen their faith? Perhaps. But I think that an even more compelling reason was that Jesus was lonely.

We do not usually think of Jesus as being lonely. That is because, while holding to the deity of Jesus, we forget that He was also human. He could become hungry. He could weep at the funeral of a friend. He could become lonely.

Have you ever been lonely? You might even have been in the middle of a crowd of people, but you were still alone. Have you ever wished that there was someone who would understand? If you ever feel that way, you go to Him, because He understands.

Verse 33 says that Jesus *began to be very distressed and troubled*. In verse 34, He tells His disciples, “*My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death.*” What was it that brought such distress and trouble? The answer is seen in the prayer of Jesus.

A PRAYERFUL PETITION

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.

And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are

possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” (Mark 14:35-36).

Jesus prays that “*the hour might pass Him by*” - that the Father might “*remove this cup*” from Him. He knew that His death was at hand. It scared Him to death.

The mention of the cup takes us back to His own use of the cup at the Last Supper, just a few hours earlier. The cup in that ritual pointed to His shed blood. It was a sign of the sacrifice.

The cup includes all that he shall undergo on the cross. The beatings. The crucifixion. The mockery and shame. The identification with the sins of men. The wrath of a holy God judging the sins of the world. This was the cup of hell.

Are you horrified by the thought of being separated from God? There is no worse thing that can happen to you.

Jesus had known from the beginning why He had come to the world. It was for this purpose. It was to pay for the sins of the world. It was so that the righteous judgment of God might be poured out upon Him. He is going to be judged for the sins of the world. The sins of the world are going to be credited to Him. God will judge Him as though He is a guilty sinner.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

But now, as Jesus prays in the garden, He comes face to face with the full impact of that cup. He who is without sin is going to be made sin. He who is holy and righteous is going to be identified with all of the defilement and transgression of a world in rebellion against God. He is going to be judged as a guilty sinner. All of the anger and the condemnation and the wrath of a righteous God will come against Him.

For the first time in history, the Son of God is going to experience death. Not just physical death, though He will experience that. He is also going to be subjected to spiritual death. He will be separated from the Father. This had never happened before. The sudden impact of this hits Him like a physical blow. And so, He turns to the Lord in prayer. He asks that this cup might be taken from Him. He asks that the hour might pass by Him. But He supersedes this request with the Father’s will.

There is a tenderness in this request. It is addressed from a Son to His Father - “*Abba.*” Jesus says the word “Father” twice, once in Greek and once in Aramaic. He repeats it in two languages, as if to emphasize the His relationship with the God of the universe.

God is very big and He is very powerful. He is the sovereign Creator of everything. And yet, in all of His infinite power and glory, He cares for me. And for you. That means anything big enough to trouble me is big enough to trouble the Father. There is no problem too big and there is no problem too small.

“Yet not what I will, but what You will.” Even in His request, Jesus remains in submission to the will of the Father. In coming to the earth, He had emptied Himself of that which was rightfully His, being made into the image of a man and taking on human flesh. Born as a man, He continued throughout His life to possess the very character of God. But there was also a relinquishment.

Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:6-7).

When Jesus performed miracles, it was not done by His own power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him. When He taught, it was not His own teaching, but truths that had been given to him from the Father. His entire life was characterized by submission and trust in God. This is an example for us. This is how we are to live. In this day when independence is exalted and praised, we are to live a life of dependence upon the Lord.

And so, Jesus prays to the Father. It is a prayer of faith. It is a prayer of total dependence and submission to God. But God does not immediately answer this prayer. The disciples are of no help. For a time, Jesus is all alone.

THE SLEEPING DISCIPLES

And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?”

“Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Mark 14:37-38).

The hour was late. Midnight had come and gone. Jesus rises from His place of prayer and comes to the place where He has left His disciples.

They are asleep. And so, He rebukes them. The rebuke is meant for all of them, but it is addressed specifically to Peter.

Jesus had already warned Peter that he will deny Him. Peter has already heard the prophecy that before the cock crows twice, he will have denied Jesus three times. Jesus warns them of the coming temptation. It will be a temptation with a way of escape. The only way of escape will be through previous prayer.

There is a lesson here for us. We are often taken by surprise in the midst of a testing. The outcome will be dependent upon our relationship with the Lord. This is the alertness which is required of us. It is an alertness of faith and of prayer. Many years later, Peter would write of the need for believers to remain alert.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8).

Peter learned a crucial lesson in Gethsemane. It was a lesson of alertness of faith. This is the only way in which we can resist the attack of Satan. Notice what Peter says in the next verse.

But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. (1 Peter 5:9).

How can we resist the attack of the devil? He is big and strong and we are little and weak. It is only by being firm in faith. It is only by continuing to depend upon the Lord. We may be little and we may be weak, but we worship a God who is very big and who is very strong.

VICTORY THROUGH PRAYER

Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. ⁴¹ And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" (Mark 14:39-42).

The time of waiting is completed. The temptation is finished. Although the cross still remains before Him, the time of testing is over. No more will Jesus ask that the cup be removed. Rather, He goes forth to embrace the cross.

In his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul tells us of the cup of blessing of which we partake (1 Corinthians 10:18). It is the cup of identification with the blood of Christ. We observe its truth in the Lord's Supper. But we can only drink of that cup because Jesus went out to drink the cup that should have been ours - the cup of our sins and of the righteous judgment of God.

Why did He do this? Why did Jesus consent to drink of this cup? The answer is seen in the book of Hebrews.

Fixing our eyes of Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2).

Why did He drink of that cup? It was for the joy that was set before Him. It was for the joy of obedience. It is seen in the prayer of submission: *"Not what I will, but what You will."*

There is an important lesson here for us to learn. We sometimes find ourselves in a Gethsemane experience. We find ourselves praying that a certain cup might be taken from us.

It might be the cup of an unhappy home life. Or it might be the cup of a difficult job. It could be the cup of persecution or ridicule. Maybe it is the cup of uncertainty.

You might be facing one of these cups right now. You might be praying that the Lord will let it pass from you. You don't want to drink from it. Its taste is bitter. Its aroma is unpleasant.

You need to learn to pray as Jesus prayed: *"Not what I will, but what You will."* This is submission to the will of God. It is only as you do this that you will experience true joy.

BETRAYAL & ARREST

Mark 14:43-52

“Wake up!!!” Flickering torchlights casting wildly moving shadows. The clank of armor and sword and shield. The low growl of muttering voices. Heavy shuffling footsteps. Stirred out of a slumbering sleep, the disciples open blurry eyes to find a mob suddenly swarming into the Garden of Gethsemane.

It had been a long night for the disciples. First had come the preparations for the Passover. The hustle and bustle of the crowded Temple. Then the meal in the Upper Room. For the last few hours, a midnight prayer meeting in the quiet of a deserted garden. Suddenly, they are no longer alone.

THE CROWD

Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. (Mark 14:43).

It had taken some time to organize the arresting group. They are described as a mixed crowd carrying both swords and clubs. Their marching orders had come from three groups:

- The chief priests.
- The scribes.
- The elders.

These three groups made up the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. Central among them is Judas. He had been one of the Twelve. He had been chosen and called by Jesus to be a disciple. But tonight the disciple has become a double-crosser.

Up to this time, the name of Judas was a royal name. There was a tribe of Judah and it was the kingly tribe. But no one ever names a child “Judas” any longer.

THE KISS

Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard."

After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. (Mark 14:44-45).

There is an interesting distinction in this passage revolving around the word "kiss." When Judas arranged the sign of the kiss, he uses the aorist subjunctive of *phileo* (φιλεω), "to love or to kiss" (understandable as a kiss is an expression of love).

However, when we read that Judas actually came up to Jesus and kissed Him, the same word is accompanied by a prefix. It now reads *katephilesen* (κατεφίλησεν, an aorist indicative). The *kata* prefix has the effect of intensifying the verb. Judas didn't merely give Jesus a perfunctory

Inferiors kissed the back of their superior's hand. If they were more than a mere servant, they could kiss the palm. Slaves would often kiss their master's feet. The hem of the garment could also be kissed. But the kiss on the cheek was a sign of love between equals.

peck on the cheek; he kissed him deeply, the way a son might kiss a father whom he loved. The sign of betrayal was not merely the formal kiss of a respectful greeting. It was the kiss of a loved one.

Why a kiss? Why couldn't Judas have simply pointed or called out Jesus' name? Instead, he put his lips to the cheek of Jesus and kissed Him. Max Lucado points out that a snake kills with his mouth.

Here is the point. Jesus knew what Judas was doing, yet He allowed him the kiss. He would not turn away His face from those who spit and slapped. He did not now turn away from the kiss of the serpent.

Why not? Could it be that, in the midst of this betrayal, Jesus continued to show love and grace toward Judas? That is good, because it means He can show love to me.

THE EAR

They laid hands on Him and seized Him.

But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. (Mark 14:46-47).

As the crowd took hold of Jesus, one of the disciples moved into action. He drew his short-sword and charged in. I don't know who it was that he intended to hit, but the attack resulted in cutting off the ear of the slave of the high priest.

Mark is silent about the healing which immediately followed. He is also silent as to the name of the attacker. Indeed, none of the Synoptic accounts mention his name. It is from John's Gospel that we learn it was Peter.

Do you see what is happening? The other writers were protecting Peter. They wrote their accounts at a time when Peter was still living and when he could have been charged with assault and battery. The statute of limitations had not yet expired. And so, they keep his name out of the record. But John writes after the death of Peter. He can no longer be accused or arrested. And so, he tells us his name.

There is a principle here. Am I my brother's keeper? I certainly am. Everyone who is in the family of God is responsible for everyone else who is in the family of God. When one member of the body hurts, the rest of the body needs to say, "Ouch!"

There were a lot of people that Peter could have gone after with his sword. He could have gone after the soldiers or the guard or one of the VIP's. But Peter wasn't stupid. He was a fisherman, not a warrior. And so, he goes after this slave, perhaps the smallest one in the crowd. He will let Jesus and the other disciples handle the rest. But Peter couldn't even do that right. He wasn't aiming for this slave's ear. He was aiming for his head. He missed.

There is something delightful in the picture of Peter rushing into the crowd with his sword swinging. The crowd comes up to take Jesus. Peter is still rubbing the sleep from his eyes, but he has one of the swords and Jesus is in danger and so, he rushes in.

Do your kids draw pictures and you place them on the refrigerator? When Sky was growing up, she never had an artistic bone in her body. When she drew a picture, I always had to ask, "What is it?" But Paula would always take it and say, "Isn't it wonderful!" and tape it to the refrigerator. Paula is a tremendous artist and she knew better, so I don't know why she would say that. No, that's not right. I know why she did it. And I like to think that God has the divine equivalent of a giant refrigerator in heaven. One of the pictures that He has on it is Peter and his sword.

Peter was loyal to Jesus. His heart was in the right place, even if his aim was off and he thought that he could achieve a right result with a wrong method. There are a lot of church ministries that need to learn this lesson. There are a lot of Christian leaders who think that they can achieve the work of Christ through manipulation. They need to learn the lesson that Peter

learned that night - you don't use a wrong method, even to achieve a right result.

THE INTERROGATION

And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber?"

"Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." (Mark 14:48-49).

Jesus calmly faces his enemies. He questions their motives and their fearfulness. If He had truly been a wrong-doer, they had ample opportunity to arrest Him when He was preaching in the temple. But they did not. They tried instead to blanket their actions under the cover of darkness.

A single soldier would have been enough, for Jesus was to offer no resistance. On the other hand, if Jesus had meant to resist this arrest, all of the armies of the world would not have been enough. Indeed, the armies of Rome were powerless to stop the spread of the church. It wasn't that they didn't try. But all of the legions and all of the emperors of Rome and even the very gates of hell itself could not withstand the growth of the church of God.

Why did such a large crowd come to arrest Jesus? Perhaps they remembered that Jesus had single-handedly cleared out the temple. He was not some wimp in a Renaissance painting. He was a bold preacher who spoke with authority and His enemies were afraid of Him. Or perhaps they suspected that He was capable of performing real miracles. It had been reported that He could give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He had raised a cripple and had cast out demons with a word. They recognized real power and they were awed by it.

THE DISCIPLES

And they all left Him and fled. (Mark 14:50).

When I look at this passage, I am tempted to say, "Jesus, if I had been there, I would have stuck by you." But if I say that, I am misjudging the disciples. If Jesus had fought, they would have stayed by His side and fought

and died in the garden. If He had run away and come back to right another day, they would have run with Him. But He didn't do either of those things. He just stood there like a sheep being led to the slaughter. That is hard to do.

THE YOUNG MAN

A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him.

But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked. (Mark 14:51-52).

The mention of this man is found only in Mark's account. There is no further mention of him and we are not told why he is significant to the narrative. It may be that this was Mark himself. He never mentions himself by name. This could be the sole reference to his part in these events.

The home of Mark's parents later became one of the key meeting places of the early church. It is entirely possible that it was this same house in whose upper room Jesus met with His disciples for the Last Supper. Could Mark have been present there? He would have been only a young boy, not worthy of mention. At a time when he ought to have been in bed, he could have slipped out and followed Jesus and the disciples to Gethsemane.

Another possibility is that he was on his way to warn Jesus. He might have learned of the plan to betray and arrest Jesus. Judas had left the upper room early. He knew where Jesus was. He knew that Jesus could be captured here without too much fuss. Did Judas first lead this band of men to the Upper Room, only to find it deserted? If so, we can imagine that this young man grabbing only a linen sheet to cover himself as he races through the night to warn Jesus or the betrayal. He arrive too late to do anything except run naked into the night.

While this may indeed have been Mark interjecting himself into the narrative, one cannot help but to wonder if there is another reason for the inclusion of this event into the account. Perhaps we are to hear this story and to be reminded of another garden where someone fled away naked.

Garden of Eden	Garden of Gethsemane
The First Adam was tested	The Last Adam was tested
The tempter was a snake who spoke enticing words.	The betrayer was a disciple who gave a kiss.

The woman was in the garden with the First Adam.	Three disciples were in the garden with the Last Adam.
The First Adam realized he was naked and he tried to hide himself.	As the Last Adam was being led away, a young man was made naked and escaped into the night.
The First Adam failed the test and was condemned to death.	The Last Adam passed the test and died on behalf of both the young man and all men.

THE JEWISH TRIAL

Mark 14:53-72

There were actually several trials which Jesus was forced to endure. In comparing all four gospel accounts, it has been suggested that there are as many as six distinct trials. They are distinctly divided into two separate groups.

The Jewish Trials	The Gentile Trials
Annas presiding (John 18:12-13)	First Trial before Pilate (Luke 23:1-2)
Caiaphas presiding (Matthew 26:57-66)	Herod Antipas presiding (Luke 23:6-11)
The entire Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71)	Second Trial before Pilate (Luke 23:11-25)

Mark's account merges all of the Jewish trials into a single group and all of the Gentile trials into a second group.

FOLLOWING AT A DISTANCE

They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chiefpriests and the elders and the scribes gathered together.

Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire. (Mark 14:53-54).

Verse 50 says that “*they all left Him and fled.*” But there was one who, after fleeing into the night, stopped and came back. It was Peter. Like a moth to a flame, he could not help but to follow after Jesus, coming finally into the very courtyard of the high priest where the officers who had arrested Jesus now built a bonfire to warm themselves against the cool April air. Meanwhile inside, the Jewish trial was just getting started.

FALSE WITNESSES.

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. ⁵⁶ For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. ⁵⁷ Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying, ⁵⁸ “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’” ⁵⁹ Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. (Mark 14:55-59).

Verse 55 says that the “*whole Council*” had now convened. The word translated “council” is Συνέδριον (*Sunedrion*) — Sanhedrin. The word means “sitting together.” There were many sanhedrins - local courts of law which judged matters both religious as well as civil. But there was only one Great Sanhedrin.

The Great Sanhedrin was composed of 70 elder/judges, going back to the days in the wilderness when Moses had chosen 70 judges to judge the nation of Israel. They were the supreme court of Israel. To this day, the supreme court of Israel is still known as the Sanhedrin.

24 members were chief priests.

24 members were elders.

23 members were scribes.

The high priest served as the president of the court. He was the 71st member (he was one of the 24 chief priests).

They would sit in a semi-circle around the prisoner. Across the room would sit the students of the Rabbis. They were permitted to speak on behalf of the accused, but not against him.

The priests had Jesus in their power. But now they had a problem. Like it or not, they had to go through the legalities of a trial. Now that they had Him, what were they going to do with Him? There was no question about what they wanted. Verse 35 says that they were seeking to “*put Him to death.*” But it was not within their legal power to execute someone. Only the Roman governor

<p>This was a bit like the vigilantes of the American west who would say to the accused, “We’ll give you a fair trial before we hang you.”</p>
--

could do that. This meant that they must be able to come to the Roman governor with a case involving a capital crime and evidence to back it up. And so, they must hold a trial. They knew the outcome of the trial before they started. The only question was how to achieve that outcome. What would be proper evidence? The Mosaic Law provided that legal evidence of wrong-doing must be substantiated via the testimony of two or three witnesses.

“On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.” (Deuteronomy 17:6).

The Law required corroborating testimony. It must be testimony that agreed. It could not be contradictory. Unfortunately for the priests, this is exactly what happened in the case of those who came to bear witness against Jesus. One witness would accuse him and the next would contradict the first. And so, it continued throughout the night. They could not get even two witnesses to agree.

Finally, their testimony began to settle upon the statement that Jesus had said concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. Mark nowhere records any words of Jesus concerning the rebuilding of the Temple. Jesus had said that the Temple would be destroyed and that not one stone would be left upon another (Mark 13:2). Mark does not say anything about Jesus raising up a Temple. But John does. It happened at the cleansing of the Temple.

The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews therefore said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (John 2:18-21).

Do you see the false testimony? Jesus never said that He was going to destroy the temple. He said that they were! They are gathered around Him now, seeking to do just that. They are in the process of fulfilling the very prophecy of which they are accusing Him. It has been pointed out that this trial was illegal on several counts.

- It was held at night, and Jewish law insisted that all trials of criminals before the priests be held in the daytime.

- There were to be no trials held during any of the great feasts. This trial was held on the eve of the Passover.
- It met in the wrong place. The Sanhedrin was to meet only in the Hall of Hewn Stone located within the Temple precincts. Decisions rendered by the Sanhedrin were only valid if they were reached at a meeting held there. But this meeting was held in the residence of the high priest.
- The Sanhedrin was prohibited by law from reaching a verdict on the same day that the trial was held if that verdict were to result in death. This was to give the court a chance to change its mind in favor of mercy. Here the verdict is passed immediately at the end of this farcical trial.
- When evidence was taken, the witnesses were to be examined separately and for their evidence to be considered valid it must agree in every detail. The presence of false witnesses would nullify the case. In this case, there is no mention of individual examination and even with obvious collusion, the witnesses never did agree as to all of the details. Furthermore, the penalty for being a false witness was the punishment which would have been meted out to the accused (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).
- The accused was not required to testify against himself, but as we shall see, the high priest insisted that Jesus answer and then passed sentence solely upon the basis of His testimony.
- Each member of the Sanhedrin was to give his verdict separately, beginning with the youngest and going to the eldest so that there would be no “peer pressure.” In this case, the high priest seems to have given his verdict first.

There was a lot of evidence that the Sanhedrin could have gotten. There was testimony of a blind man who could now see. There was testimony of lepers now cleansed and deaf who could hear and of lame who could now walk. People could have told of changes lives and enlivened hearts. But they did not want to hear any of this.

THE QUESTIONING BY THE HIGH PRIEST

The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” ⁶¹ But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was

questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” 62 And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:60-62).

Now the high priest steps into the picture. He is speaking as the presiding officer, the president of the Sanhedrin and he does something totally illegal. He presses Jesus to answer his accusers. But Jesus would not answer. Their testimony did not require an answer. It was contradictory and showed itself to be in error.

Finally, the high priest asks a question which Jesus will answer. It is the question which underlies the entire book of Mark. It is the question about which this book is written to answer.

“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” The very fact that the high priest asks this question is amazing. Jesus had never announced Himself to be the Messiah. He did not go around calling Himself the Son of God. When demons called Him by such a title He ordered them to be silent. When His disciples came to the conclusion that He was the Christ, the Son of God, He told them to keep this message to themselves and to tell no man. The fact that the high priest asks whether Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, indicates that he came up with this idea on his own! He looked at Jesus and he looked at what the Scriptures said concerning the promised Messiah and he recognized them to be the same and he asked whether this was the case.

Jesus answers in the affirmative. Ἐγώ εἰμι (*Ego eimi*) — “I AM.” It is the same thing that God said to Moses when he asked for the divine name. It is the same thing that Jesus had said in John 8:58, “*before Abraham was born, I AM.*”

But this is not all He says. He continues: “*And you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.*” The meaning of Jesus’ words would not have been lost on the high priest or to anyone else who was present that night. Jesus was referring to a passage from Daniel.

*“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
14 And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations, and men of every language
Might serve Him.*

*His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14).*

Do you see what Jesus is saying? The high priest is trying to judge Jesus. But there will come a day when Jesus will judge both the high priest and all the nation and all the world. The high priest is going through these trial proceedings because he does not have the power himself to put Jesus to death. But Jesus will be given dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, including Rome.

THE CHARGE OF BLASPHEMY

Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? ⁶⁴ You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. ⁶⁵ Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face. (Mark 14:63-65).

At hearing the words of Jesus, the high priest tears his clothes. This was the ultimate expression of outrage. But it was an expression which was forbidden to the high priest.

Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you may not die...” (Leviticus 10:6).

“And the priest who is the highest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor tear his clothes.” (Leviticus 21:20).

The rending of garments was a sign of outrage. But the high priest was to hold himself aloof from such strong emotions. The one who had been anointed to the high priesthood was not to rend his garments. This was changed by later rabbis to say that the high priest was to rend his garments if he recognized blasphemy. There is an interesting contrast here between the high priest and Jesus.

Caiaphas - the High Priest	Jesus
High priest of the Jews through the line of Levi.	High priest according to the order of Melchizedek.
He had been anointed with oil as the high priest.	He was the Christ - the One anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit.
He tore his garments in a theatrical display of anger in violation of the Scriptures.	Even when He was crucified, His garments were not torn that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

The hypocrisy of the high priest in this instance is that this is exactly the claim which he wanted to solicit from Jesus. He was seeking the means to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus gave him those means. The high priest was secretly delighted. But he pretended to be outraged.

Were the words of Jesus blasphemous? They would have been if they had been spoken by any other man. But in this case, they were true. He had demonstrated time and time again that His authority came from the Father.

At this point, all pretenses are dropped. The crowd has degenerated from a court of law to a mad rabble. They attack Jesus and beat Him and mock Him and spit upon Him. Seven hundred and fifty years earlier, Isaiah had described this event:

*I gave my back to those who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6).*

Outside, Peter was watching this, and he never forgot it. Years later, he tells us that we are to remember that scene and take heed to it, for Christ was our example:

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² who committed no sin, now was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being reviled, Hee did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats; but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:21-24).

This is how Christians are to respond when they are falsely accused. Instead of retorting and trying to justify ourselves, Peter says, we are to return good for evil, revile not in return, but commit ourselves to him who is able to judge things justly -- God Himself.

PETER'S DENIAL

While the trial was taking place inside the house of the high priest, there was another drama being enacted in the outer courtyard.

1. The First Denial.

As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, ⁶⁷ and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You, too, were with Jesus the Nazarene." ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out onto the porch, and a rooster crowed. (Mark 14:66-68).

Out of the night, a voice of recognition. "I remember you! You were with Jesus." Startled by the suddenness of the question and all too aware of how the trial is proceeding, Peter denies his involvement with Jesus.

What happened? Peter had gone willingly into the courtyard of Jesus' enemies. He was in the lion's den. The rest of the disciples were away hiding. But Peter was on the front lines. He was ready to fight and to die for Jesus. He was ready to take on an entire band of temple guards. But he wasn't ready to handle this servant-girl.

Isn't that so often the way it is with us? We are ready to withstand the charge of the elephant, but instead we are brought down by the attack of the mosquito. It isn't the big things that defeat us - it is usually the little things. Why? Because we are ready to trust God for the big things. But we get to thinking that we can handle the little things ourselves. That is where we fail.

Mark places in juxtaposition the hatred of the priests with the denial of Peter.

The Priests	Peter
Inside the house of Caiaphas.	Out in the courtyard.
Looking for an excuse to kill Jesus.	Looking for a way to save Jesus.
Jesus is asked a question by the High Priest.	Peter is asked a question by the high priest's servant-girl.
Results in their attacking Jesus and venting all of their pent-up hatred upon Him.	Results in his denying any knowledge of Jesus.

What is the point? It is that Peter and the priests were not all that different. Both showed themselves to be sinners in need of a Savior.

2. The Second and Third Denials.

And the maid saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is one of them!" ⁷⁰ But again he was denying it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean too." ⁷¹ But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" ⁷² And immediately a cock crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a cock crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep. (Marks 14:69-72).

Another servant-girl comes by and makes the same observation as the first had done. Again Peter denies. But now the seed of recognition has been placed so that another of the bystanders soon speaks up. Peter's Galilean accent

is giving him away. And now, Peter reacts. He begins to swear like a sailor, even though he is a bit out of practice, it comes back easily enough. He even goes so far as to bind his denial with an oath. No sooner has he done so then he hears the echoing notes of the cock crowing. The words of Jesus come back to him and he realizes that

Matthew's account indicates that this was a different girl (Matthew 26:71).

he has unwittingly fulfilled them.

Jesus	Peter
Questioned by the high priest	Questioned by a servant girl
Silent at false accusations	Cursed and swore at accusations
Admitted to being the Christ	Denied knowing the Christ

The chapter ends with the tears of Peter. In those tears, there is hope. It is the hope of repentance. How do I know that Peter repented? It is seen in the resurrection. The first thing that will be said when the resurrection of Jesus is announced will be, “Go tell His disciples... and Peter” (Mark 16:7).

I said before that there was not much difference between the denial of Peter and the hatred of the priests. But there was this one difference — the tears of Peter. That made all the difference in the world.

There is hope here for you. Have you sinned? Do your sins weigh down upon you? Do you ever wonder if you have passed the point of forgiveness? I have some good news. It is that God is a forgiving God. He forgave Peter and He can forgive you, too.

Did you ever stop to think where Mark got the story of Peter’s denial? He got it from Peter! Peter used this shameful story to tell men of the forgiveness of Christ and the message of hope that is found in him.

THE ROMAN TRIAL

Mark 15:1-15

It had been a long night. The night had seen the Last Supper and the agony of Gethsemane. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Then He had been taken to the house of the high priest where he had been put on trial and interrogated and finally beaten and mocked.

DELIVERED TO PILATE

Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. (Mark 15:1).

Immediately after sunrise, the entire Sanhedrin meets to hold “a consultation.” The purpose of this meeting is to ratify the decision of the earlier trial which had been held at the home of the high priest. A trial at night was illegal. And so, they meet again first thing in the morning to “do it right.” Having concluded their self-righteous resolution, they lead Jesus away to Pilate.

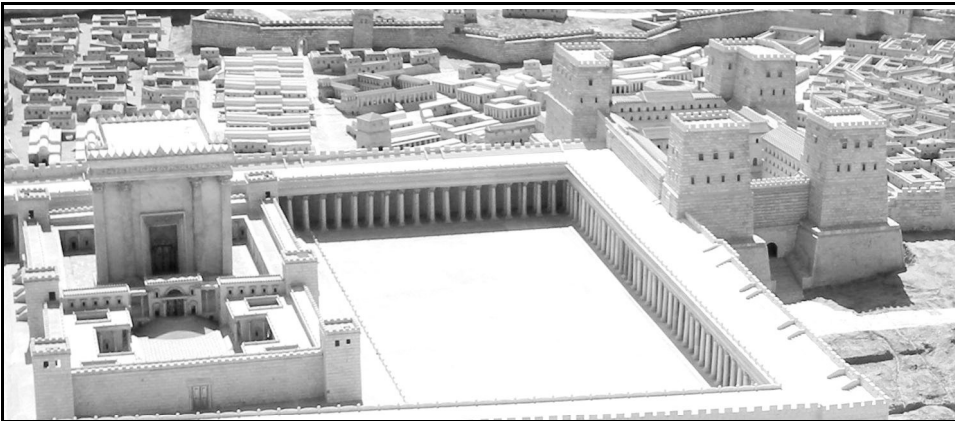
Pontius Pilate had been the governor of Judea since 26 A.D. He was an Equestrian, one of the middle class of Romans who had been appointed by the Roman Emperor Tiberius to his present position. His immediate superior was the Roman governor of Syria. Pilate had already made several serious mistakes in his dealings with the Jews.

1. Pilate had ordered the soldiers under his command to bring in the standards bearing the likeness of Tiberius. The Jews considered these emblems to be idols and they petitioned him to remove them. He remained obstinate, stating that to remove them would be an insult to Caesar.

When the Jews continued to complain, Pilate called out the legion, threatening the Jews with death. The Jews responded by throwing themselves to the ground and baring their throats, daring Pilate to kill them. Pilate finally relented and had the standards moved back to Caesarea.

2. When Pilate ran short of money to fund a project to repair the aqueduct which brought water to Jerusalem, he raided the Temple treasury. This stirred up a mob of Jews and, fearing a riot, Pilate sent soldiers into the crowd. At a signal from Pilate, they attacked, killing a large number and wounding many more.
3. Philo of Alexandria tells us that Pilate was afraid that the Jews might go to Rome and complain of his cruelties and corruption.

Pilate would ultimately be recalled to Rome to be judged and banished to Gaul where he is reputed to have committed suicide. On this day, Pilate would have been in the Antonia fortress, named for the old friend and benefactor of Herod the Great, Marcus Antonius. The fort and its high walls and four towers overlooked the northern side of the Temple.



Model of Temple with the Antonia Fortress to the right

THE ANSWER OF THE KING

Pilate questioned Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him, “It is as you say.” (Mark 15:2).

This is a dramatic moment. Jesus stands before Pilate. God meets Rome. The question of Pilate speaks volumes. He asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?” The issue of Jesus being the proper king of the Jews had not even come up on the previous night. They had heard testimony of His prophecy of rebuilding the Temple in three days. They had heard Jesus answer the cross-examination of the High Priest as to being the Messiah, the Son of God. This was enough to convince the Sanhedrin that Jesus was

deserving of death. This was enough to convict Him of blasphemy.

But blasphemy was not a capital crime under Roman law. And so, they needed another charge. They needed a charge that would stick under the Roman law. And so, they came up with this one. They put forth the claim that Jesus is aspiring to be a king.

The Romans are in charge of Judea. Pilate is the governor of the territory. There has not been a king since Herod the Great. Anyone attempting to make himself king will find that the Roman government will take a dim view.

Here stands a man accused of trying to make Himself into a king. He has been beaten. His countenance is bloody and bruised. There is spittle dripping from his face and beard.

Pilate examines the prisoner, questioning Him as to the charge. Is He indeed a king? His answer is indirect, but it is an affirmative. “*It is as you say*” (Σὺ λέγεις). Literally, it reads, “You say.”

Jesus gives a similar indirect affirmative in Matthew 26:25 when Judas asks if he is the betrayer and Jesus responds, σὺ εἶπας.

Why does Jesus give such an indirect answer? It is because He does not want to lend his words to the idea that he is a political rebel who is out to overthrow Rome by means of an armed revolt. It is as though he says, “I am a king, but not in the way you think.” He did not come to sit on a throne or to be clothed in purple. His armies were not armed with sword or spears. He did not seek to overthrow governments. His kingship is of a different nature than the kings of the world.

THE SILENCE OF THE LAMB

The chiefpriests began to accuse Him harshly. 4 Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, “Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!” 5 But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed. (Mark 15:3-5).

After this initial affirmation of Jesus, He made no further answer to Pilate. Instead, He stood in silence. This was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy.

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;*

*Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
He did not open His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7).*

Pilate was amazed. He had presided over countless trials. He was used to hearing men proclaim their innocence. Some would be whimpering, others would be sullen and others shouting. Here was something different. A calm silence. Instead of the prisoner being unnerved by the prospect of death, it seems that the judge was unnerved by the silence and calm of the prisoner. Somehow, he must have begun to realize that it is really he who was on trial.

THE OFFER OF RELEASE

Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. 7 The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection.

8 The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. 9 Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. (Mark 15:6-11).

The name "Barabbas" is Aramaic. "Bar" is the word for "son." "Abba" is the word for "father" – it is the diminutive form of *ab*, "father." We could translate it as "daddy." His name means, "Son of daddy." There is a sense in which this man could stand for every man. He is every father's son.

Barabbas was a zealot. He would have termed himself a patriot. He had involved himself in an insurrection against Rome and he had killed a man in that rebellion. He was a terrorist.

But that is not all. John's account adds that Barabbas was a robber (John 18:40). There had come a time when Barabbas abandoned his high ideals and he had gone from freedom fighter to terrorist to a petty criminal. He had now been captured, tried and condemned. He is imprisoned and awaiting execution.

He comes into the story because of Pilate's offer to free a political prisoner in view of the Passover and a longstanding custom of leniency at

this time of the year.

Barabbas	Jesus
His name means “son of the father”	He was the Son of God
A man of violence	A man of peace
Freedom fighter	Made men free from sins.
He had murdered.	He had raised the dead.

Pilate was no fool. He may have been greedy and cruel and vacillating. But he was not stupid. He could plainly see that Jesus was innocent. He could see that the Jewish religious leaders had some ulterior motive for wanting Jesus to be put to death. Verse 10 says that it was “*because of envy.*”

What did Jesus have to make them envious? He had no possessions. He held no office. He wasn’t particularly good looking - he had no “*stately form or majesty*” (Isaiah 53:2). Of what were they envious?

They were envious of His popularity with the people. They were used to having the applause of the population. They didn’t care for the idea of sharing the limelight with anyone they could not control.

I think that they were also envious of His relationship with God. It made them uncomfortable when He spoke of God as being His Father. They knew that they had no such relationship. They didn’t want anyone to have that which they could not also boast.

THE QUESTION OF INNOCENCE

Answering again, Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?”

They shouted back, “Crucify Him!”

But Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify Him!” (Mark 15:12-14).

Pilate had come to the clear conclusion that Jesus was innocent. He said as much in this question: “*What evil has He done?*” He had examined the evidence and he had found nothing of a substantial basis upon which to

convict Jesus of any crime.

This brings us to a question. If Pilate was convinced of the innocence of Jesus, then why didn't he release Him? It was because of the crowd. Pilate was a coward. He did not have the courage of his convictions. He rejected principle for position. He turned his back on Christ to protect His own interests.

Pilate is like many today. They turn their back on Christ and Christianity because they want what the world has to offer. Many are afraid to be identified with Christianity. They are afraid of what their friends may think, what their boss may think. They are afraid that somehow it may cost them something. Because they are cowards, they choose not to stand and be counted. Their cowardice keeps them from Jesus.

I charge you with having the courage of your convictions. Say what you believe and then act upon what you believe. You are called to bold living and a bold witness for Jesus Christ. You are called never to be ashamed of Him or His people. God has not given you a spirit of fear. You are called to be bold.

THE SUBSTITUTE OF THE CONDEMNED

Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified. (Mark 15:15).

Jesus was crucified on the cross that had been destined for Barabbas. He died in place of Barabbas. In that regard, Barabbas is really not so very different from us. We were also guilty. We had been imprisoned by sin and were under the sentence of death. We were awaiting the day of our execution. But Jesus died in our place. Not because we deserved it and not because He deserved it.

THE CROSS

Mark 15:16-47

The scene was Jerusalem. It was the day of the preparation of the Passover. On this evening, the Passover meal would be eaten in thousands of homes throughout Jerusalem and Judea. Within the temple, the high priest is preparing to officiate in the slaughter of thousands of lambs. The stones of the temple will run red with the blood of countless lambs.

Meanwhile, merely a couple of hundred yards away, another Lamb is being prepared for the slaughter. This is the ultimate sacrificial Lamb. This is the Lamb of God.

BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION

1. In The Praetorium.

The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. 17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; 18 and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. (Mark 15:16-19).

The word "praetorium" refers to the headquarters of the military commander. In an army on the march, this would be the general's tent. But in a case like this, it would have referred to the Antonia Fortress, located on the northwest side of the Temple Mount.

The entire Roman cohort was called out for this event. A cohort was a tenth part of a legion. A full legion was made up of 6000 men. A cohort would contain 600 men.

It wasn't every day that these soldiers were permitted to crucify a king. And so, they took the opportunity to make sport of Jesus. Theirs was a crude sort of cruelty. It wasn't that they hated Jesus. They didn't know enough about Jesus to hate him. He

represented to them the Jews and they did hate the Jews. And so, they took out their hatred of the Jews upon Jesus. The scourging which was inflicted upon Jesus was meant for the entire nation.

*I gave my back to those
who strike Me,
And My cheeks to those
who pluck out the beard;
I did not cover My face
from humiliation and
spitting. (Isaiah 50:6).*

- a. A robe of purple.

Purple signified royalty. This was a part of their humor. Ever since the coming of the Romans, the Jews wished for a king and they would show what was to be done to the idea of a Jewish king.

- b. The crown of thorns.

It was also designed as a cruel joke against the Jews. But it pictures more than that. Do you remember the first mention of thorns in the Bible? It was in Genesis 3 where a curse is placed upon mankind and upon the earth itself. The crown of thorns was a sign of that curse. It was a curse which Jesus Himself would bear upon His own body.

2. Simon of Cyrene.

After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him.

They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. (Mark 15:20-21).

The route to the cross would often be, not the shortest, but the longest way possible, going down every street and lane so that the maximum amount of people would see and take warning. Because Jesus was so weakened by his ordeal, another man was pressed into service. We don't know much about Simon of Cyrene. Cyrene was located in modern Libya on the plateau between Benghazi and Tobruk. Lying seventeen miles inland from the Mediterranean, Cyrene was a Greek city, having also a large Jewish population.

Simon was a Jew living in Cyrene. But on this day, he had

come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On his way, he was conscripted into service to carry the cross of this condemned Galilean.

This was the domain of Rome. Any man might be impressed into the service of a Roman soldier at any time. It did not matter that Simon was on his way to celebrate the holy feast of Passover. His inconvenience was inconsequential to Rome.

I imagine that Simon would have been angry at the Romans that forced him to carry the cross. He might have even been angry at this stumbling Galilean whose crimes now interfered with his Passover celebration. But that anger was replaced by something else. Even when his journey to Golgotha was completed, Simon may have tarried.

How do I know this? Because Mark adds that Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander. Why would he add this? There is no reason - unless Rufus and Alexander were known to those for whom Mark was writing his Gospel account.

You see, Simon's life was changed that day. What began as an inconvenient detour became his salvation. What started as an irritating chore forced upon him by a rude soldier became his entrance into eternal life.

When we read of the gospel first being taken to Greeks in the city of Antioch, we read that the leaders of that church were *Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene* (Acts 13:1). When Paul writes his epistle to the Romans, he instructs the church there to "*greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord*" (Romans 16:13).

This tells me something about Simon. He was a bystander, but he became a participant, not only with his hands, but with his heart. He came for the cross, but he stayed for the crown. He was forced to bear the cross, only to find that it was to be the bearer of his own sins.

He had come for his own purposes. He was stopped by some Roman soldiers and the next thing he knew, he was carrying a cross for which he had never asked.

We are like that. We were once doing our own thing and then we were confronted with the person of Jesus. Before we knew it, we had become participants in His cross and our life has never been the same.

There is a lesson here. It is that you need to be aware of the unexpected nature of such encounters. The story is told of an old mountain man who was as mean as could be and who was hated by everyone. He died and in those days they did not embalm the body.

They took him, put him into a wooden casket, and his family gathered together to act as pallbearers. They had lifted the casket to their shoulders and were coming out of the house to carry the casket to the cemetery when they bumped the casket into the gatepost. The shock of the gatepost was enough to revive the old man and he sat up in the casket and began cursing at everyone present.

He lived for another year and when he finally died, the entire scene was repeated once again. Once again, the pallbearers came and as they were carrying the casket down the steps and past the gate, the old man's poor, bereaved widow called out, "Watch for the gateposts!"

Are there any gateposts in your life? They are those unexpected occurrences which come upon you and change your entire life. They aren't always pleasant. But if you look carefully, you will usually find that they are in the shape of a cross.

THE CRUCIFIXION

Four soldiers would have been detailed to carry out the crucifixion of each of the prisoners. Over the entire squad was a centurion. At the front of the procession would be an official with a wooden board on which the crimes of the convicted had been written. This official would read out the crimes so that all who heard would be warned of the results of committing such actions.

They march the prisoners through the winding streets of the city and out to the place of the crucifixion. Finally they arrive at their destination.

1. The Place of the Crucifixion.

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. (Mark 15:22).

Where was Golgotha located? We don't know for a certainty. Hebrews 13:11 says that Jesus suffered "*outside the gate.*" John 19:20 says that it was "*near the city.*" The traditional location is marked today by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It lies within the gates of today's city, but was outside the wall of the city in that day.

The name of the place was called Golgotha. This is Aramaic. Its meaning is given here in the passage - "*Place of a Skull.*" Luke gives us the Greek, calling the name of the place *Kranion* (Κρανιον), "Skull." The Latin for "skull" is *calvaria*, from which we get

Calvary. Some have thought that the place must have looked like a skull, but there is no Biblical evidence that this was the case.

2. The Drink of the Crucified.

*They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh;
but He did not take it. (Mark 15:23).*

Crucifixion was considered to be the most degrading and the most painful form of execution known to man. It was so bad that a Roman citizen could not legally be executed in this way, no matter what his crimes. It was reserved for common criminals, slaves and rebels. For humanitarian reasons, a drugged mixture of wine and other narcotics was often given to those being crucified to ease some of their suffering.

Jesus had told His disciples at the Last Supper that He would not again drink the fruit of the vine until He did so in His kingdom. Remaining true to His word, He rejects this mixture.

I want to tell you that, if it had been me, I would have drunk the wine and the myrrh. Don't get me wrong. I don't usually drink alcoholic beverages. It isn't so much that I think it is wrong as the fact that I just don't care for the way it tastes. But if I knew that I was going to be crucified and have nails driven into my flesh and a crown of thorns pressed into my skull, I would have taken any painkillers that were offered.

Why didn't Jesus? Why did He refuse to partake of that which would deaden His pain? I think that it is because once He had decided to partake of the cup of our sins, He determined to do so fully and without holding back.

3. The Garments of the Crucified.

*And they crucified Him, and divided up His
garments among themselves, casting lots for them to
decide what each man should take. (Mark 15:24).*

Mark abstains from giving us any of the gory details of what went on in the crucifixion, the piercing of tender flesh with rough hewn nails, the screaming agony of tearing skin and cartilage. Instead there is a simplicity to his statement.

As the Galilean rabbi hangs spreadeagle upon the rough, wooden crossbeams, the soldiers assigned to the task divided up His

belongings among themselves. There were no valuables, nothing but the clothes He had worn. He was stripped naked and His clothes were divided among the soldiers.

It seems scandalous that the Roman soldiers should be shooting craps at the base of the cross where our Lord was crucified. The truth is that they had no idea of the significance of what was going on in their midst. It is like the sailor who was present at Pearl Harbor. As he saw the Japanese planes begin their bombing attack, he exclaimed, "I didn't even know what they were mad about." People are like that today. They go through their whole lives and they don't even think about life, death, and the life hereafter. It isn't that they do not believe. It is that they don't even think about it.

4. The Hour of the Crucifixion.

*It was the third hour when they crucified Him.
(Mark 15:25).*

Mark uses the Jewish method of reckoning time. It began with sunrise. This was now three hours after sunrise, about nine o'clock in the morning. It was the time of the morning sacrifices. In the Temple, a lamb was being killed and its blood sprinkled upon the altar. It would not be long now before the slaughter would begin for all the Passover lambs.

5. The Inscription of the Crucified.

*The inscription of the charge against Him
read, "The King of the Jews." (Mark 14:26).*

It was customary to write the name of the criminal and the nature of his crimes for which he was being punished upon a white tablet. This inscription would then be taken and nailed to his cross. The inscription of Jesus was unique. It had never before been used. It declared that the One who hung upon this cross was a king.

Who was responsible for this inscription? Mark does not tell us. John's gospel states that it was written by Pilate, the Roman procurator who had sentenced Jesus to death (John 19:19-22). Pilate did not believe the claims of Jesus. He was not particularly interested in whether He was innocent or not. He was more interested in his own political position. He was more interested in keeping the peace with the Jews. He was more interested in not making waves. And

yet, he wrote this inscription. Why? I think that it was meant as a mockery against the Jews. For a long time, Pilate had been antagonistic to the Jews. They had already sent petitions to Rome complaining of his rule and asking for his removal. They hated him and he hated them. So when political pressure forced him to have Jesus crucified, he sought his petty revenge in the posting of this inscription. By this he indicated that he was crucifying the king of the Jews. It was an open taunt. It was meant as an insult.

But God used it to glorify His Son. Golgotha was located near the northern gate to the city. Thousands of Jews were coming to the city to celebrate the Passover. Every Jew that passed along that road saw the inscription and read the words. They testified to the kingship of Jesus.

That is not the only inscription which was nailed to the cross of Jesus that day. There was another inscription, unseen by human eyes.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14).

This other inscription was our certificate of debt. It consisted of all our crimes. It pronounced our guilt. It declared that we were worthy of death. It condemned us. This inscription was also nailed to His cross. It consisted of the crimes for which Jesus was punished. He took that punishment in our place. He suffered the penalty of death instead of us.

6. The Company of the Crucified.

They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors." (Mark 15:27-28).

Jesus was crucified between two robbers - two who were being executed for their crimes. Why? This was evidently an

attempt by the authorities to discredit Him, to identify Him with a criminal element. It was fitting that, even in His death, He accompanied with sinners.

7. The Mockery of the Crucified.

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

³¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. ³² Let this Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him. (Mark 15:29-32).

Notice all of the different groups which joined into the mockery of Jesus.

- Those who were passing by.
- The chief priests and the scribes.
- Those who were crucified with Him.

It is as though the entire world rose up against Him to insult Him and to mock Him. I can understand the chief priests and the scribes doing this. But some of those who taunted Jesus had nothing to do with the day's proceedings. Some were merely "passing by." And if anyone had been able to empathize with His sufferings, it should have been the two robbers who were nailed beside Him. But they also taunted Him.

Indeed, there is something almost supernatural about the venomous hatred that people felt for Jesus upon this day. It is as though Satan filled the heart of anyone and everyone to heap up scorn upon scorn on the Son of God. Notice the taunts.

- a. *"He saved others; He cannot save Himself."*

This was a true statement. If He was to save others, then He could not save Himself.

- b. *“Come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!”*

It is specifically because Jesus did not come down from the cross that we believe in Him. The world says, “Let us see and then we will believe.” God says, “Believe and then you will see.”

8. The Darkness of the Crucifixion.

When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. (Mark 15:33).

This was not an eclipse of the sun. This was the time of the Passover. The Jews used a lunar calendar. The Passover was always held at the time of the full moon. A solar eclipse may only take place at the time of the new moon.

What was signified by the darkness? The One who is the light of the world is being covered in darkness. As He hangs spreadeagle and naked for all the world to see, the sun refuses to shine upon Him.

9. The Cry of the Crucified.

At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, “Behold, He is calling for Elijah.”³⁶ Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.”³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last. (Mark 15:34-37).

The ninth hour would have corresponded to about 3:00 p.m. This was considered to be the early evening. It was at this time of the day that the evening sacrifices began in the Temple. We saw in verses 29-32 that Jesus was rejected by the world. Now we see Him rejected by God.

What saved us? Was it the physical pain and agony that Jesus suffered upon the cross? No. The other two robbers suffered from

that same physical torture. What saved us? It was the forsaking from the Father. It was when the Father turned His back on the Son and the Son was forsaken by the Father. It was when God reckoned as guilty the One who was sinless.

*All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall
on Him. (Isaiah 53:6).*

Our iniquity fell upon Him. He was made a curse for us. He who was from the beginning and who was in the beginning with God was cut off from the presence of God.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” This was a cry of loneliness. The two who have been one are now two. For a moment in time, the Father is Sonless and the Son is Fatherless. The Trinity is dismantled. The unity is dissolved.

It is more than Jesus can take. He has withstood the beatings and the mock trials. He was silent as He was struck about the face and scourged. No scream came forth as the nails pierced his skin. But now something happens which evokes an agonizing shriek. “Why?” begs the pitiful wail.

10. The Tearing of the Veil.

*And the veil of the temple was torn in two from
top to bottom. 39 When the centurion, who was
standing right in front of Him, saw the way He
breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the
Son of God!” (Mark 15:38-39).*

In the temple was a veil. It was made of blue and purple and scarlet linen. Josephus tells us that it was a great double veil, each measuring 60 feet high and 30 feet wide and as thick as a man’s hand. There was an opening at one end which allowed you to walk between the veils and come out the other end in the Holy of Holies. This was the innermost sanctum. It was the place where no Jew was permitted to go. Not even the priests were permitted to come here. Only the high priest and only once a year was entrance into this place permitted. On Yom Kippur the high priest would enter beyond the veil and offer an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the nation.

It used to be that the Ark of the Covenant sat here. But the

Ark of the Covenant had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar 600 years earlier and had never returned. Now there was only the place where the Ark once stood. Just a barren rock covered with generations of dried blood.

The Holy of Holies signified the presence of God. The veil was there to keep men out. They could not come into the presence of God. Their sins separated them from the holiness of God. Their sins demanded a sacrifice. A sacrifice had been offered for the nation each year for the past six hundred years. Six hundred years of lambs being slain. Six hundred years of being shut off from the presence of God. Six hundred years of God being hidden behind a veil.

At the very moment that Christ died, something spectacular took place in the Temple. It was the ninth hour. It was the time of the evening sacrifices. The Passover lambs had been slain. A final sacrifice was made. Blood was sprinkled once again on the altar. The high priest himself went into the temple to offer incense upon the Altar of Incense.

Suddenly there is a commotion. It comes from inside the Temple. The great veil which separates the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is torn from top to bottom, signifying that the way has been made for men to enter into the presence of God. No more sacrifices. No more blood. No more veils.

There was one who saw these things on that day and who came to an astounding conclusion. He was not one of the priests or scribes. He was not a rabbi. He was not even Jewish.

He was the Roman centurion who had been in charge of the crucifixion detail. He would have been present at the trial under Pilate. He had ordered the cross to be carried, the nails to be driven, the clothing to be divided. Through it all, he has watched this simple

Galilean carpenter. And now, he comes to an astounding conclusion:

“Truly this man was the Son of God!” What made him say this? Was it the sun turning black? Was it the tearing of the veil? Was it the love and forgiveness reflected in the bruised and bloody face? I don’t know. But I do know that, for a brief moment and perhaps for a lot longer, this pagan centurion saw more spiritual truth than all of

There are four centurions mentioned in the Bible.

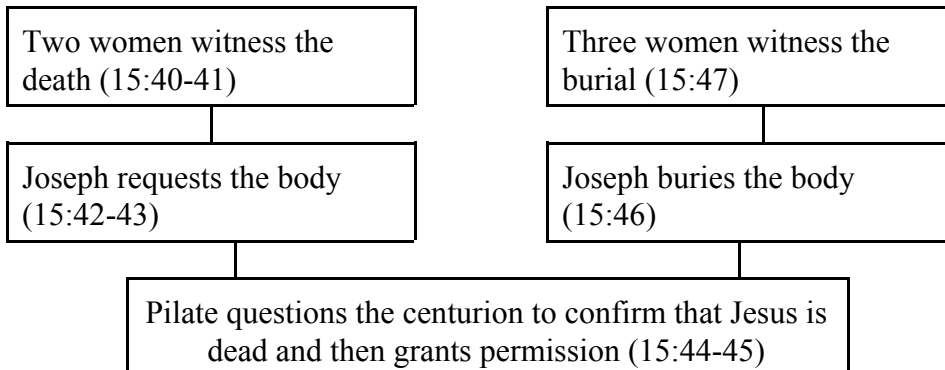
- One asked Jesus to heal his son.
- Cornelius was the first Gentile convert.
- Julius escorted Paul to Rome
- This centurion who witnessed the crucifixion.

Not a bad thing is ever said about any of them.

the theological experts in Jerusalem.

AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

This section is presented in the form of a chiasm. It is a series of parallel statements.



The point is made that there was a chain of testimony and witnesses to the fact that Jesus died and was buried. Under Jewish Law all things were required to be substantiated by two or three witnesses.

1. The Witnesses of the Crucifixion.

There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome.

When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15:40-41).

Not much mention has been made of the women who were a part of the following of Jesus. But they were there. While the disciples were off in hiding, while Peter was weeping, while Judas was hanging around, the women were witnesses of the events of the cross.

They are mentioned here because their part in the story will come to the forefront in the next chapter. They will be witnesses, not only of the death of Christ, but also to the events surrounding the

resurrection.

2. The Request of Joseph.

It often happened that the bodies of criminals were not buried at all but merely left as food for vultures or wild dogs or merely thrown onto the town garbage heap. It is possible that Golgotha was called the place of the skull because of the litter of skulls from previous crucifixions.

When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. (Mark 15:42-43).

Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57). He seems to have been a secret disciple. There is no mention of any defense made by Josephus on behalf of Jesus before the Sanhedrin. That might not have been Joseph's fault. He might not have been called to the trial - remember that it was held in secret. But John's gospel tells us that Joseph was a secret disciple "*for fear of the Jews*" (John 19:38). He had never stood up for Jesus while He was alive. But now that He is dead, Joseph determines to perform a deed of service.

3. The Questioning of the Centurion.

Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. ⁴⁵ And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. (Mark 15:44-45).

The early death of Jesus upon the cross was unusual. It would not be uncommon for a person being crucified to endure several days before finally dying. And so, Pilate asks for a personal report as to the condition of Jesus. He calls for the medical examiner - in this case, the centurion in charge. It had been his job to make certain that the execution was carried out.

4. The Burial of the Body.

Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid. (Mark 15:46-47).

Having been granted permission from Pilate, Joseph now takes the body of Jesus, wrapping it as was according to the custom of the day and placing it into a tomb.

Caves were often used as tombs. But this was no mere cave. This tomb had been *hewn out in the rock*. It was more elaborate than a mere cave. Joseph already owned the tomb. He had prepared it for his own eventual death. But he uses it to bury the body of Jesus.

Did you ever stop to consider that Joseph got his tomb back? Jesus did not stay there. He arose from the dead. The tomb was merely temporary for Him. Because He rose, we will also rise and the tomb will not be permanent for us, either.

THE EMPTY TOMB

Mark 16:1-8

As the early light of dawn paled the eastern sky above the Mount of Olives and began to banish the shadows from the winding streets of the ancient city of Jerusalem, a small group of women made their way out of the city to a garden tomb.

THE DAY OF DISCOVERY

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. (Mark 16:1-2).

The last verse of the previous chapter closed with a reference to the women. They had been present at the crucifixion (15:40-41). They had been at a distance, but they could still see what was taking place. Later, they followed the removal of the corpse and they saw the place where Jesus was buried (15:47). Once the stone was finally rolled into place and the tomb was sealed, they went home to observe the Sabbath.

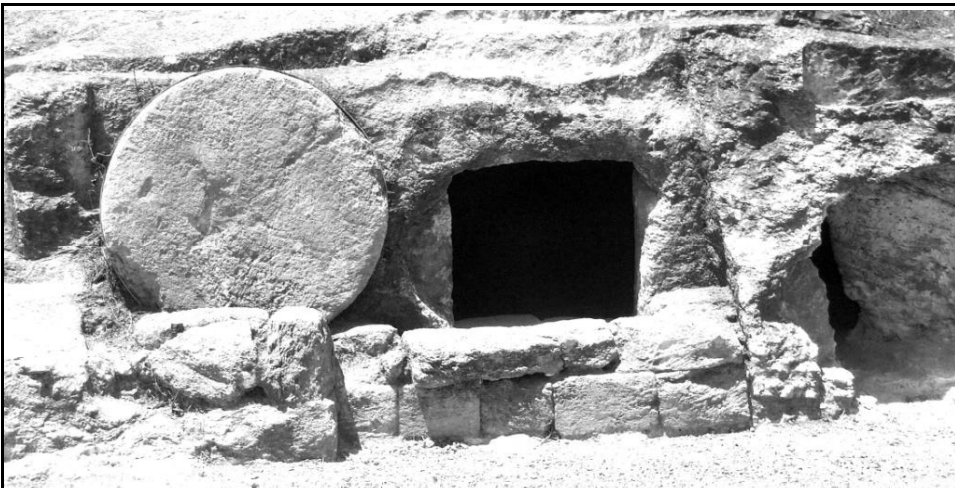
As this chapter opens, the Sabbath is over. It has been spent in rest and in remembrance. There can be no doubt that some of those remembrances were of the recent life and death of Jesus. As the new day dawns, it sees some of these same women coming to the tomb. Their purpose is to anoint the Anointed One. They wish to do one last service to their departed Lord.

They come very early. A new week is about to begin. They do not yet know it, but there are new things in the wind. They may have started out before sunrise, but by the time they arrive at the tomb, the sun is up. There will be no mistake as to which tomb Jesus has occupied. The sun has risen and, when they arrive, the Son has risen.

THE PROBLEM OF THE STONE

They were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” 4 Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. (Mark 16:3-4).

There were a variety of tombs in use in that part of the world. A grave could be merely a slot in the ground with a flat stone covering it to keep animals from digging it up and desecrating it. The wealthier residents had larger tombs cut into the rock, virtual caves with niches into which an entire family might be interned. As land values rose, it became customary when using these larger tombs to lay out the body and then return when decomposition had completed, perhaps a year later, and collect the bones, placing them into a stone box known as an ossuary. These larger tombs would be secured with a heavy round stone that could be rolled into place.



Example of a first century tomb on the slopes of Mount Carmel

The tomb into which Joseph of Arimathea had laid the body of Jesus is described in terms of one of these larger tombs. It was a new tomb that had been cut out of the rock. A stone had been rolled into place to secure it. This stone promised to be an obstacle to the women. They anticipate the problem it presents as they journey to the tomb and they have no obvious solution. They seem to be aware that it is large enough to resist the efforts of their combined strength. Verse 4 describes it as “extremely large.” Perhaps they hope to enlist the aid of others in the area.

THE AMAZING WITNESS

Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. 6 And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, here is the place where they laid Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’” (Mark 16:5-7).

As the women journey to the tomb, they anticipated the problem of the immovable stone. Upon arriving there, the stone had been rolled away and there is a new problem. The problem is that the tomb is empty. Instead of a lifeless body, there is a young man.

1. The Young Messenger: *They saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe (16:5).*

Who was this young man? We are not told. The only other time this specific Greek word is used by Mark is back in Mark 14:51 where those who had arrested Jesus were followed by a young man dressed in a linen cloth who, when they attempted to apprehend him, fled naked into the night. Here is another reference to a young man and once again we are told what he is wearing. This time he is clothed in a white robe.

John’s parallel account describes Mary Magdalene seeing two angels dressed in white and seated within the tomb where the body of Jesus had been (John 20:12). Mark only mentions a single young man, but it may be that he is mentioning only the single figure because he wants to echo the instance of the previous appearance of a “young man.”

Mark 14:51	Mark 16:5
Young man clothed in linen	Young man wearing a white robe
Following Jesus after His arrest	Seated in the tomb after the resurrection of Jesus
A witness to the arrest	A witness to the resurrection

Possible reference to Mark?	Seems to be an angel
-----------------------------	----------------------

2. The Message of a the Risen Jesus: *Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen (16:6).*

Mark does not say that this young man was an angel, but he is said to have a message and that makes him a messenger; the word “angel” means “messenger” in both Greek and in Hebrew. The message presented by this young man involves the resurrection. He states very specifically that Jesus has risen from the dead.

3. Instructions to Relay the Message: *But go, tell His disciples and Peter (16:7).*

The women are instructed to go and to tell the disciples. This implies that they will be able to find those disciples. They evidently know where the disciples are hiding and will be able to take the message to them.

The inclusion of Peter is striking. The last time Mark mentioned Peter, it was at the trial of Jesus. Peter was seen there in the role of a turncoat. He was seen denying Christ. He told those in his hearing that he did not even know the man. But Jesus still knows Peter.

That is the wonderful story of grace. When we sinned against the Lord and pretended that we did not know Him, He still responded in grace and love to let us know that He knows us.

THE FEARFUL ASTONISHMENT

They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:8).

The women were not certain what to make of the message. Their first reaction was one of fear and astonishment. The last thing they had been expecting was to find that Jesus had risen from the dead. Whereas the other miracles in the Gospel of Mark invariably resulted in those who witnessed the miracle telling everyone else about it, this reaction was very different. What made the difference is that the women had not seen the risen Jesus.

They had seen the empty tomb. They had seen the young man who claimed Jesus was risen. But they had seen no Jesus.

There is a sense in which their situation is your situation. You have not seen the risen Jesus, but you have been told some astonishing news about him. You have been told by other parties that He is alive, that a dead man got up and walked and that He has ascended into heaven and that He is coming again. You have been given the evidence of an empty tomb. Now the question is what you are going to do with that message. Will it be met with faith? Will it change your life?

The women left the tomb that day feeling they had more questions than answers. Perhaps you feel that way, too. But that need not stop you from responding to the message in faith and repentance. Go to the Lord and ask Him, not to give you all the answers to all your questions, but faith to find the One who has left behind the empty tomb.

THE FINAL VERSES OF MARK Mark 16:9-20

There has been some controversy as to whether the last twelve verses of Mark were a part of the original text, or whether they were interpolated at some later date. The passage is missing from several of the very oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

- The Codex Sinaiticus (Codex Aleph) was discovered in the 1800's in a Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. The manuscript stops short at Mark 16:8 and omits the rest of the book. It has been dated at approximately 365 A.D.
- Codex Vaticanus (Codex B) also omits the passage, but a space is left blank between the end of Mark 16:8 and the beginning of Luke. The space is of a size which would be sufficient for the traditional ending to be inserted. It is as though the scribe who was copying this manuscript knew that there was a longer ending, but perhaps it was missing from his original copy. Thus, the older of these two manuscripts indicates an older manuscript than itself -- the manuscript from which it was copied; and this blank space bears silent testimony to a longer ending that was understood by the scribe to be there.

In addition to these, there are three Armenian manuscripts which also leave it out. It should also be noted that one Greek Cursive (Manuscript 274) and a Latin manuscript substitute a shorter ending which is only one verse long.

Nearly every other manuscript contains the traditional ending, although several have both the long and the short endings. Furthermore, the longer reading can be found in every single Textual Family. You see, the many thousands of manuscripts can be divided into several families of texts which tend to have similar readings.

- a. Proto-Alexandrian: These are some of the very earliest manuscripts and include both the Sinaiticus and the

Vaticanus.

- b. Later Alexandrian: Have manuscripts which date as early as the third century, although most are considerably later.
- c. Western: The Latin and Syrian versions as well as some early Greek texts are in this family.
- d. Pre-Caesarian: The Washingtonian Text includes the long reading of Mark.
- e. Caesarian.
- f. Byzantine: It is from this family that the Textus Receptus and the King James Version were taken.

Now here is the point. We can find manuscripts from every single textual family to bear witness of the longer reading of Mark.

Tradition has both Eusebius and Jerome stating that the longer reading was absent from many of the Greek copies of Mark known to them (we do not have the actual words of their testimony, but Jerome did include the long ending in his Latin Vulgate). The earliest testimony that we have is from Irenaeus (202 A.D.). He quotes Mark 16:20 and attributed it to that gospel.

It has been argued by some that the style of writing in the last twelve verses of Mark are different from the rest of the book. It is true that this section contains a large number of hapax legomenon - words which appear only here in the Bible. On the other hand, the long ending has no more words which are unique to Mark than does the first 8 verses of the chapter which are undisputed in all texts.

Thus, while perhaps containing some dissimilar vocabulary due to the special nature of events which are described, the longer reading is consistent with the rest of Mark.

If it is assumed that the Gospel of Mark ends at the close of Mark 16:8, the abruptness of the conclusion would be striking in the English translation and even more so in the Greek, ending with the phrase *ephobounto gar* ("for they feared"). It seems scarcely possible to suppose that it could have ended at this point.

Dr. Bruce Metzger believed the absence of the passage in the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus to be due to a "lost page" in a previous copy from which both of these were taken. However, there is no reason to think that it was not the long traditional ending that was lost to that theoretical copy. I

would therefore suggest that it is entirely possible that the long ending might be a part of the original gospel of Mark.

RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

This passage relates three post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. All three of these can also be found in other Gospel accounts. In all three of these cases, the other gospel accounts are longer and contain more details of the encounter with Jesus.

1. Appearance to Mary: *Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. 10 She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. 11 And when they heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. (Mark 16:9-11).*

The Gospel of John gives an extended description of the encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Mark introduces Mary as one *from whom He had cast out seven demons*, a description echoed in Luke 8:2. While Mark does not choose to tell us the details of the encounter, he does tell us that it was reported to the disciples and that they refused to believe. It is the lack of faith on the part of the disciples that is underscored here as well as in the next appearance.

2. Appearance to Two Men in the Country: *And after that, He appeared in a different form to two of them, while they were walking along on their way to the country. 13 And they went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. (Mark 16:12-13).*

This is an abbreviated account of Luke's narrative of the appearance of Jesus on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13-32). Once again, the emphasis is not so much on the details of the appearance as it is upon the lack of faith exhibited by the disciples when the story was reported to them.

We are in the same situation today. We have not seen the risen Jesus. We have only heard the reports of those original eyewitnesses. The question we face is whether we will respond in faith or whether we will suffer a similar hardness of heart.

3. Appearance to the Eleven: *And afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. (Mark 16:14).*

John's account tells us of two appearances of Jesus to the gathered disciples, the first during which Thomas was absent and the second, a week later, in which they were all present. Mark does not make such a distinction and does not give us any of the details of the encounter except to say that it took place *as they were reclining at the table*. What he does emphasize is the same thing that had been emphasized in the previous two appearances. It is the lack of faith.

It is not that they refused to believe now that they had seen Jesus for themselves, but they had refused to believe the eye witness testimonies of Mary and of the two disciples on the Emmaus Road.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. ¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; ¹⁸ they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:15-18).

Mark opened his book with the phrase: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1)*. As this book draws to a close, he relates the commission of Jesus that His disciples go and preach that same gospel to all creation. Matthew records how that, during the ministry of Jesus, He sent disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6) with specific instructions not to go to the Gentiles. Mark does not record those limitations because he is addressing the world as his audience and his emphasis is upon reaching the world with the gospel.

What is this gospel that is to be preached? It is the entire story that Mark has related within his book. It is the story of the servant of God who came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

1. Results of Belief and Unbelief.

Jesus sets forth what will be the results in the lives of those who believe versus those who do not believe the gospel. His statement looks like this:

<i>He who has believed and has been baptized</i>	shall be	<i>Saved</i>
<i>He who has disbelieved</i>		<i>Condemned</i>

Some have tried to teach baptismal regeneration through this passage as if somehow the act of being baptized is a necessary ingredient to salvation. On the one hand, I must agree that baptism is the normative outward sign of faith that has led to salvation and, with few exceptions, the New Testament knows virtually nothing on an unbaptized Christian. On the other hand, it is notable that Mark includes only the issue of disbelief in that which leads to condemnation.

2. *Accompanying Signs: And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mark 16:17-18).*

This is another passage with which some Christians have wrestled. There have been Charismatics who took this passage to say that all Christians must necessarily demonstrate these various signs. But Mark says no such thing. What he does say is that these signs will be manifested. When we read through the book of Acts, we find that most of them did take place upon occasion. The one exception on which Acts is silent is the drinking of deadly poison. At the same time, given some of the obvious and not-so-obvious miracles that do take place within that book, it is not unreasonable to assume that this sign might also have taken place upon at least one occasion.

CONCLUSION

So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. 20 And they went out and preached everywhere, while

the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. (Mark 16:19-20).

Mark's concluding paragraph sums up the completed work of Christ as well as the ongoing work of the church.

1. The Ascension: *He was received up into heaven (Mark 16:19).*

Luke gives more details on the ascension of Jesus in the first chapter of the book of Acts. It is there we read that the ascension took place from the Mount of Olives and that two angels appeared and promised that Jesus would return in the same way He had been taken up.

The only other person in the Bible described as having been taken up into heaven was the prophet Elijah. He was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. He was taken up in a chariot of fire. Now we read of Jesus being received up into heaven. He has already been seen to be greater than Elijah, for His forerunner was one who came in the manner of Elijah (Mark 9:12-13).

2. Seated: *The Lord Jesus... sat down at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).*

When we hear about Jesus sitting down, we ought to remember how He has been presented within the Gospel of Mark. He has been presented as the Servant of the Lord. Servants do not normally sit in the presence of their master. But Jesus was a servant who sat down. He not only sat down, we read that He sat down *at the right hand of God*. This is the place of honor.

This is a fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus had cited in Mark 12:36, the prophecy where David says: "*The Lord said to my LORD, 'Sit at My right hand, Until I put Thine enemies beneath Thy feet.'*" Those words first uttered a thousand years before Christ now see their fulfillment in this passage. The Servant-Son who emptied Himself to come to earth and die upon the cross has completed the work He set out to do and now has taken the position of honor at the right hand of His Father on high.

3. The Ongoing Work of the Church: *They went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed. (Mark 16:20).*

Because Jesus has successfully accomplished His work of service, we have a message to proclaim to the world. It is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That is how Mark opened his gospel message in Mark 1:1 and now we have come full circle to see the entirety of that message and how we have been entrusted with passing it onto a world in need.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aharoni, Yohanan & Avi-Yonah, Michael,
1978 *The MacMillan Bible Atlas Revised Edition*, New York, NY:
MacMillan

Barclay, William
1975 *The Gospel of Mark*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press

Beasley-Murray, G. R.
1957 *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen*. New York, NY: MacMillan

Brown, Steve
2008 *Various Audio Commentaries*, Maitland, FL: Key Life

Constable, Thomas L.
2008 *Notes of Mark*. Garland, TX: Sonic Light

Donaldson, Stephen
1977 *Lord Foul's Bane*. New York, NY: Nelson Doubleday

Dumdei, Mark A.
2008 *Unpublished thoughts on Mark and the Primacy of Matthew*. Plano,
TX

Edersheim, Alfred
1977 *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans
1979 *The Temple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

Gage, Warren
2003 *"A Surprising Case for the Longer Ending of Mark's Gospel"*, Fort
Lauderdale, FL: Knox Seminary

Hendriksen, William
1990 *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI:
Baker

Bibliography

Hoehner, Harold W.

1977 *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Horne, Mark

2003 *The Victory According to Mark: An Exposition of the Second Gospel*. Moscow, ID: Canon

Josephus, Flavius

2008 *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. Translated by William Whitson. Wesley Center Online:
http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/josephus/

Keller, Timothy

2009 *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. New York, NY: Dutton Adult

Lawrence, John W.

1977 *The Six Trials of Christ*. Memphis, TN: Open Door Bible

Lindsay, Gordon

1987 *The Life & Teachings of Christ: Volume 2 - Christ Teaches His Apostles*. Dallas, TX: Christ for the Nations

Lucado, Max

1993 *And the Angels were Silent: The Final Week of Jesus*. New York, NY: Walker & Company

Lund, Nils Wilhelm

1992 *Chiasmus in the New Testament*. Peabody, MS: Hendrickson

Metzger, Bruce M.

1975 *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Societies

Morris, Canon Leon

1966 *The Cross and the New Testament*. Devon, England: Paternoster Press

Pentecost, J. Dwight

1982 *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Bibliography

Pritchard, James B. (Editor)

1987 *The Harper Atlas of the Bible*, New York, NY: Harper & Row

Robertson, Archibald Thomas

1930 *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume I - Matthew and Mark*.
New York, NY: Harper & Brothers

Scroggie, W. Graham

1976 *The Gospel of Mark*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

Stott, John R. W.

1986 *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity

Wright, N. T.

1997 *What Saint Paul Really Said*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans