

Lesson One

(Mark 1:1-16)

Background Notes

MADMAN OR SON OF GOD??? Who is Jesus Christ??? Shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus was being interrogated by the High Priest, who asked him point-blank: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God?” “I am,” answered Jesus, “and you will all see the Son of Man seated at the right side of the Almighty, and coming with the clouds of heaven!” (see Mark 14:61-64). The High Priest understood the claim Jesus was making. He tore his ceremonial robe, and declared: “We don’t need any more witnesses! You heard his wicked words.” There can be no doubt at all that Jesus made the claim to be God. This was the official charge placed against him by the Jewish leaders. “We have a law that says he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God” (John 19:7).

The answer of the identity of Jesus Christ is at the heart of each of the four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each produced a general account of the life of Jesus, each with his own special emphasis and added material. Matthew writes as a “preacher”; Mark as a “chronicler”; Luke writes as a “historian”; and John writes as a “theologian.” Matthew gives us a Jewish point of view, proving from the Old Testament portion of the Bible that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Mark gives us the Roman point of view, describing Jesus as “God’s Superman,” who demonstrates his deity by his miracles. He emphasizes what Jesus *did*, rather than what Jesus taught. He shows us the war of Jesus against sin and evil in the world. Luke writes “an orderly account” of the things that had taken place. He emphasizes the universality of the “Christ event” as it applies to all mankind, both Jewish and Gentile. Clement of Alexandria speaks of John’s Gospel as the “spiritual gospel.” John shows us The Word (Logos) who came down from the invisible God to reveal the Father to all mankind.

Scripture declares to us that Jesus is the Messiah -- the Lord from heaven! It is this statement of fact that makes it possible for us to know Jesus by faith. But how can we learn what Jesus was like when he lived here on earth as a human being? What was it like to be with him? How did he deal with difficult situations? How did he relate to people? The four Gospels give us the opportunity to know who Jesus is and what he is like. Each of the Gospels is a character sketch of Jesus, carefully detailed by someone who knew him (and who was inspired by the Holy Spirit). Only Matthew and John traveled with Jesus in his public ministry. But Mark and Luke drew on eyewitness accounts from Jesus’ first disciples. (And they were guided by the Spirit in their choice of material.) Each of the four Gospel writers knew Christ with a faith full of excitement and with a love that illuminates Jesus’ character forever in the Gospels!

When you have four “pictures” of a person, you can compare one with another, and get a clearer understanding of that person. Perhaps this is why God gave us four accounts. There can be no real doubt that Mark’s Gospel is independent of the others. He also gives us a valuable statement of God’s truth. As we compare the Gospels, we remember some things which Alexander Campbell said.

1. Not one of these four historians wrote with any design of improving upon the others, of detailing the things omitted by them, or of supplying any defects which he observed in their statements.

2. Not one of these historians relates all that he knew of Jesus, nor do they all relate as much as any one of them could have related concerning him.

3. These historians do not always aim at giving the precise words of those they quote, not even of the Savior himself; but only the full and precise sense of what was uttered or written. Campbell adds that Jesus certainly taught the same things many times and worked the same miracles many times. Also that the order of narration does not follow our modern plan of historic writings; but is similar to the Jewish or Oriental way of looking at things. All this helps to explain the “differentness” of the four Gospels.

The probable date for Mark to write is between 60-70 A. D. A statement by Papias (in the second century) has Mark writing at Rome, traditionally around the time of Peter’s death there. But this has been challenged by the discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls of what may be a fragment of Mark’s Gospel (*Bible and Spade*, Winter, 1972). This could push the date back as far as 35 A.D. Since Mark clearly wrote by inspiration, such an early date would pose no real problem. Peter has traditionally been identified as the source of Mark’s eyewitness accounts. There is a similarity in the way both word their statements. Compare Peter’s sermon in Acts chapter two. Peter gives a good summary of Mark’s Gospel in these words from Acts 10:38. “You know about Jesus of Nazareth, how God poured out on him the Holy Spirit and power. He went everywhere, doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

Mark was very likely the young man who “ran away naked” in Mark 14:51-52. Although not one of the “inner circle,” he would have known Jesus at least by sight, if not personally. His mother was Mary, an aunt (sister, KJV) of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). His mother’s home was such a center of Christian activity, that when Peter was released from prison, he immediately went there (Acts 12:12-17). Some think her house was where the apostles stayed just after the ascension (Acts 1:13), and some think the Last Supper was eaten in the “Upper Room” of her house. He was probably born in Jerusalem, and his Jewish name was “John.” “Mark,” his Roman name, gradually superseded the other (compare the change of Saul to Paul). The “John Mark” of Acts 12:12, 25, and the “John” (“John Mark” in some versions) of Acts 13:5, 13 becomes “Mark” only in Acts 15:39; Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phm. 24. He was a helper to Paul and Barnabas in their first tour of missions. Johnson thinks Mark did most of the actual work of baptizing people into Christ (compare 1 Cor. 1:14-17). Mark returned to Jerusalem before the first tour ended, and this became a problem (Acts 15:38-39). But this was worked out to Paul’s satisfaction (Col. 4:10). He was with Paul during the first imprisonment, (Col. 4:10; Phm. 24). Later we find him with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13) at Babylon. Still later during Paul’s second imprisonment, he seems to be with Timothy at Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:11). Tradition makes him the founder of the church at Alexandria, and says he died a martyr’s death in the eighth year of Nero.

Mark and the other Gospels cover much identical material, yet there are facts which prove we are listening to an independent statement. The outstanding characteristic of Mark is *realism*. He does not *idealize*, but presents the facts as they were, with all the “warts and wrinkles” that might appear. For Mark, Jesus is the *Jesus of history* and the disciples are simply disciples. Remember that Jesus is the Logos who *became* a human being (John 1:14; 1 John 1:1-4). Mark gives us the true human personality of Jesus in all its originality and power, and as colored by the time and the

place. Jesus is a *carpenter* (6:3) before he begins his public career. The Spirit *drives* Jesus into the desert at the temptation (1:12). When Jesus first appears in the synagogue at Capernaum, the people say, “What is this?” (1:27). Before daylight the next morning, he is up and out of the city (1:35-38). We see Jesus so involved with his mission that his family fears for his sanity (3:20-21). We see Jesus climax his teaching in parables by suddenly leaving the crowd (4:35-36). Toward his last days on earth, Jesus goes ahead of his disciples on the ascent to Jerusalem, and the disciples are alarmed and the people are afraid (10:32). Jesus promised the return of the colt ridden in the Triumphant Entry (11:3). But in everything, Mark is faithful to his theme: “This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1).

There are probably no more than twenty-four verses in Mark which are not paralleled, more or less exactly, in Matthew and Luke. Mark tells us: “The Sabbath was made for the good of man” (2:27); his family “set out to get him” by force (3:21); more detail in the healing of the Gadarene demoniac (5:1-20); some detail in the raising of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the woman with severe bleeding (5:22-43); some detail in the calming of the storm (4:35-41); more detail in the healing of the boy with an evil spirit (9:14-29); “For everyone will be salted with fire: (9:49); that Jesus “would not let anyone carry anything through the temple courts” (11:16); that “The large crowd heard Jesus gladly” (12:37b); the command to watch and be alert (13:33-37); the young man who ran away naked (14:51); the conflict of the false witnesses (14:59); details about Simon who carried the cross (15:21); Pilate’s surprise that Jesus was already dead (15:44); the statement of the women about the stone (16:3-4).

Mark connects Peter with Capernaum (1:29); identifies Levi as the “son of Alphaeus” (2:14); tells Jesus named “Peter” (3:16); that Jesus called James and John, “Boanerges” (3:17); he names “Bartimaeus” (10:46); he mentions that Barabbas was part of a group of rebels (15:7). Mark also preserves words, phrases, and complete statements of Jesus which deserve to be examined: 1:15; 4:13; 6:31-34; 7:8; 8:38; 9:12; 39; 10:21-24, 30; 11:17; 13:32; 14:18-37; 16:7, 15-18.

Any controversy about the different endings to Mark’s Gospel has been solved by further discoveries. Over five thousand manuscripts have now been found. Of the most important ones, the Regius and Athos manuscripts give both endings. The Alexandrinus and Ephraemi Rescriptus give the longer ending, and it must have been in existence at the close of the first century. Both endings are considered *authentic*, and all Greek Testaments since Westcott & Hort include both endings in the text.

The Preaching of John the Baptizer

(Mark 1:1-8)

1 This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It began as the prophet Isaiah had written:

“‘Here is my messenger,’ says God; ‘I will send him ahead of you to open the way for you.’

3 Someone is shouting in the desert, ‘Get the Lord’s road ready for him; make a straight path for him to travel!’”

4 So John appeared in the desert, baptizing people and preaching his message. "Turn away from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." 5 Everybody from the region of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

6 John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater than I am; I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

If someone came up to you and said, "Bill Jones who lives next door is the Son of God" -- what would you say??? Probably, "Bill? I've known him all my life. We played together as kids. I went to his wedding. He's just a normal guy like the rest of us." That's the same reaction people had to Jesus, and it points up God's problem. How will Jesus be identified as the Messiah -- yet in such a way that our freedom of choice is not destroyed??? The Jewish leaders expected the Messiah to suddenly come with great power -- full-grown (see John 7:27). But God already had his Plan. Jesus the Messiah was born into the world (a miraculous birth) through a human Jewish mother. He grew to be an adult -- just as everyone does. The climax of his mission was to be the bloody death of the cross (Luke 9:31). Jesus had to demonstrate his identity so that we could believe in him, and he did this in his years of public ministry. God had spoken through the prophets of old, to give identifying marks so we could know the true Messiah when he came. Jesus fulfilled each of these prophecies. We believe because of the *facts* (see John 20:30-31).

But before Jesus could begin his work of public ministry, some kind of preparation had to be done. And here we see John the Baptizer. His work was that of "advance man," laying the groundwork by calling the Jewish people to renewal! He came to those who were *already* God's people (but disobedient), and called them to turn away from sin and return to God (the technical word is "repent"). His work was also one of the identifying marks, and Mark shows this by quoting the Old Testament portion of the Bible, John dressed like the ancient prophets (compare 2 Kings 1:8), and was a "Nazarite" from birth (see Luke 1:15). He lived off the land, eating locusts (a kind of giant grasshopper, Lev. 11:22) and wild honey.

John was noted for the fact that he *baptized* (immersed) people. He introduced a new *religious rite*. As representatives from the Pharisees were interrogating John, he was asked: "Why do you baptize?" (See John 1:24-25). John's baptism was *water only* as a sign of repentance. It was for those who were already God's people. Christian baptism is both *water* and the *Spirit* (John 3:5; compare Acts 19:1-7) and is an act of *new birth*. (Note how Jesus speaks in Acts 1:5, and how Peter gives God's command in Acts 2:38. Compare Paul's statement in Acts 19:4.) Even though John the Baptizer was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets (Luke 7:28), yet in terms of rank and privilege the weakest Christian is greater than he. (Yet don't overlook the statement of Hebrews 11:39-40.)

The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (*Mark 1:9-13*)

9 Not long afterward Jesus came from Nazareth, in the region of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan. 10 As soon as Jesus came up out of the water he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am well pleased with you."

12 At once the Spirit made him go into the desert.

13 He was there forty days, being tempted by Satan. Wild animals were there also, but angels came and helped him.

John had been preaching and baptizing for some six months, when we see Jesus come to be baptized also. Mark shows us Jesus apparently waiting in line like everybody else, and with everybody else. A strange way for the Messiah to enter the stage of history! The "Sinless One" shows he is willing to be a part of sinful humanity (compare Heb. 2:14-18). The visible form of the Spirit was probably for the benefit of the people there (compare John 12:30). The key to what took place at the baptism of Jesus is found in these words by Robert Brinsmead. "A thing cannot be a new covenant sign or seal if Christ as God did not give it. Neither can it be God's sign or seal if Christ as man did not also accept it from God and give God thanks for it." The baptism of Jesus *set the pattern* for him to be the first among many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29). We learn that this *event* was to be the mark of identification to show the one who was the Messiah (see John 1:29-34). In the same way, Christian baptism can be viewed as a mark of identification in which the Holy Spirit "seals" us to God (Eph. 1:13-14). God voiced his approval of Christ Jesus in a way which all those present could hear (1:11; compare 9:7; John 12:28). So it was Jesus the Christ, the Logos as a human being, who came both with the *water of his baptism* and the *blood of his death* (1 John 5:6).

At once following his baptism, the Spirit *made* Jesus go into the desert to spend forty days being tempted by Satan. This was no make believe, but a severe time of testing! The wild animals and the angels imply complete isolation from human contact during this period, yet under the eyes of a watchful Father. Even though Jesus did not *sin*, he experienced every kind of temptation which a human being may face (see Heb. 4:15). Some may argue that Jesus could not have faced such temptations as we have today, but this is incorrect. A little thought will show that there are no *new* temptations, but only the same old ones that the Devil has been using through the centuries. Jesus experienced to the fullest the entire human existence, *but without sin*. Further, he is our *Pioneer* who has already undergone both death and the resurrection from the dead!

Even though Mark does not directly state that Jesus defeated the Devil, it is obvious that he did (compare 3:27). The way Mark mentions the temptation implies that this event was a preparation or probation for the work of public ministry. Jesus battled the prince of evil personally, before beginning his war with sin, evil, and sickness in the world. (Of course, Satan continued to tempt Jesus up to the point of actual death. Compare 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; etc. All of this is part of *God's act in Christ* to set us free, as Paul describes it in Rom. 8:1-4.)

The Good News of the Kingdom

(Mark 1:14-15)

14 After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God.

15 “The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!”

“The right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near!” This was the message which Jesus began preaching in Galilee. (Compare Col. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Luke 17:20-21.) The teachers of the law would connect what Jesus was saying with the prophecy of Daniel. Daniel’s 70 weeks (490 years) would pinpoint the beginning of 27 A.D. (by the corrected calendar). And so they would understand what Jesus said in the light of Dan. 7:22 (“The time had arrived for God’s people to receive royal power”). It is easy to see why they would take this in a political sense, but that was not what God had in mind.

Note that Matthew quotes Jesus using the phrase “Kingdom of heaven.” And that this means the same as “Kingdom of God.” The Kingdom was *near*, but the “setting up” could not take place until Jesus was *glorified* in death and resurrection (see Luke 24:44-49; John 7:37-39). The public ministry then, was *preparation* for the climax of *God’s act in history* --which is the *crucified Christ*. The first statement of the resurrection was by a woman (16:9-11), but the first official declaration of God’s terms of salvation was at Pentecost (Acts, Ch. 2). Paul could later say: “He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). The announcement of the coming of the Kingdom was certainly Good News to the entire world (compare Isa. Ch 52).

What Jesus had announced, contains two points of sharp change. First, he says, *near*. Jesus knew he had been sent to begin a new era of salvation. The crucifixion and Pentecost would be decisive stages in making this possible. The basis for this new salvation was to be Christ - on - the - cross, the *crucified Messiah*. (Compare Heb. 9:15; 1 Cor. 1:18-25.) This was to be “the very thing God prepared for those who love him: (the primary meaning in 1 Cor. 2:9b). God intended for us to “reach out through faith to seize the sacrifice of Christ to make ourselves part of it” (see Rom. 1:16-17; Col. 2:11-13). Because of what God has already done, there must be a final Judgment upon all who have rejected this offer of salvation during their life on earth. Jude shows us the Lord coming to execute vengeance upon “godless sinners” at the world’s end (Jude 14-15).

The second point is that Jesus called on the Jewish people to *turn back to God*. They had thought themselves to be free from sin, but they were no better off than the Gentiles (compare Rom. 3:9-20). In this *calling* to repent, Jesus was saying the same thing as John the Baptizer (and their work overlapped, see John 3:22-24). But John could only point to the One who was coming. Now the Messiah himself called them to believe the Good News and receive God’s promise!

Questions for discussion

(Mark 1:1-15)

1. If Mark’s Gospel had been lost, would this have cost us anything that could not be found in the other Gospels?

13. What was the purpose of John's baptism?

14. What does it mean to be a "Nazirite?" Was Jesus a Nazirite? Why not?

15. Did the people who heard John understand the promise of the Holy Spirit?

16. Do you see a relationship between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of a believer into Christ? Discuss the similarities and differences.

17. Why was the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove?

18. What were the other two times during the life of Jesus when God spoke from heaven?

19. What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the temptation?

20. Why is the time of the temptation important?

21. Was Jesus tempted during the entire forty days?

22. Why mention wild animals and angels?

23. Why does Jesus say the right time has come?

24. What was the Good News Jesus preached?
25. Why does he mention *repentance* before *belief*?
26. What is the Kingdom Jesus spoke about?
27. How do Daniel 2:44; 7:22; Isa. 52:7 relate to the message Jesus preached?
28. How would you preach the gospel today using 1:14-15 as a text?

Lesson Two

(Mark 1:16 - 2:12)

Jesus Calls Four Apostles

(Mark 1:16 - 20)

16 As Jesus walked by Lake Galilee, he saw two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish in the lake with a net. 17 Jesus said to them, "Come with me and I will teach you to catch men." 18 At once they left their nets and went with him.

19 He went a little farther on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. 20 As soon as Jesus saw them he called them; they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and went with Jesus.

Mark does not show us the initial stages of the public ministry of Christ, but immediately begins with Jesus preaching in Galilee. As we see Jesus call four fishermen

to be his first apostles, we note that they were already his disciples (compare John 1:35 - 45; Luke 5:1-11). We see Jesus officially *identify* (appoint, ordain) them in Mark 3:14ff. We may also read into this the fact that *response* to the gospel involves *following* Jesus (that is, living his life-style). The whole New Testament is evidence of the fact that the Good News cannot be separated from the *person* of the Messiah. If He is the *preacher* of the Good News, He is equally the *content* of the message, and one will find it impossible to believe the gospel in any other way than by “reaching out through faith to become united to Him.” “It is through faith that all of you are God’s sons in union with Christ Jesus. You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ himself” (Gal. 3:26-27).

It is Jesus himself who calls men and women to become his disciples. (Notice John 6:44-45. God calls through the message.) Mark sharpens the contrast to bring out this one essential lesson. Jesus calls people who respond by at once leaving everything to go with Him! Does Jesus call all disciples to be “fishers of men,” or is this a special call to the apostles? The answer must be -- both. None of us can be “apostles” as were the Twelve plus Paul. They had a special mission to carry out (compare Acts 10:40 - 42). Yet who could deny the fact that each Christian is to use his or her talents to bring others to Christ (compare John 1:41, 45). We give our lives to Christ, and he gives them back to us to use for his glory. The disciples of Christ are farmers, mechanics, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc., etc., who in the process of their everyday living *put Jesus first in everything!* The calling of these four demonstrates the *authority* of Jesus in each of our lives!

The Lake of Galilee (also called Gennesaret) was named for the province of Galilee on its western side. It was about thirteen miles long and six miles wide. The Jordan river runs through it and on into the Dead Sea. Jesus lived, taught, and did most of his miracles on its borders. Fishing was a prosperous trade on the lake (notice the hired men). These four had continued to fish. Now they are called to devote their time to a new work -- catching men for Christ. But this does not mean they immediately gave up fishing forever. We find them continuing to fish (see Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-14; compare Acts 18:1-4). There is no disgrace in working at a job. The correct picture that the scripture shows us is that as the demands of their discipleship became greater, they would spend less and less time at their fishing. This in no way discredits the genuineness and real depth of their devotion to Jesus. (In certain situations, a self-supporting missionary may be more effective. Compare Acts 20:34; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:12. But different circumstance required different methods, Phil. 4:15-16.) Every Christian is one who has been called to a “higher obligation.”

The Authority of Jesus

(Mark 1:21-28)

21 They came to the town of Capernaum, and on the next Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people who heard him were amazed at the way he taught. He wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead, he taught with authority.

23 Just then a man with an evil spirit in him came into the synagogue and screamed, 24 “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you here to destroy us? I know who you are: you are God’s holy messenger!”

25 Jesus commanded the spirit, “Be quiet, and come out of the man!”

26 The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him.

27 The people were all so amazed that they started saying to each other, “What is this? Some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give orders to the evil spirits, and they obey him!”

28 And so the news about Jesus spread quickly everywhere in the region of Galilee.

The synagogue was much like our church, and it was usual for the leaders to invite any man whom they considered competent to speak to the people (compare Acts 13:15). What we know about the teachers of the law shows that they loved to quote what former teachers had said, and so their teaching lacked conviction and motivation.

Mark emphasizes the authority of Jesus. He tells us that Jesus *taught with authority* -- in contrast to the teachers of the law. DeWalt says: “There was no lifeless droning over dry traditions or idle ceremonies, but his teaching was fresh as the morning, original, going to the root of things, authoritative, and burning with Divine fire. It is not strange that the great Teacher whose doctrines have revolutionized the earth, astonished the audiences who listened to him in Judea and Galilee.”

The congregation’s amazement at the prophetic type of teaching by Jesus turns to astonishment and alarm as a man with an evil spirit runs into the synagogue and loudly challenges Jesus. Note that as in other cases, the evil spirit *knows* who Jesus *is*. (The evil spirit uses language very similar to 1 Kings 17:18.) Mark shows us that the authority of Jesus extends even to the world of evil spirits. He *commands*: “Be quiet, and come out of the man!” And the evil spirit does so in a clearly visible way! This is for the benefit of the congregation, and they identify Jesus’ *teaching* with his authority over evil spirits (vs. 27). The result was that his fame spread everywhere! The purpose of these miracles was to bring glory to God and to the Son (compare John 11:4).

The people of the first century understood the world to be filled with disembodied spirits or demons, who were part of the forces of evil. Compare Eph. 6:12. The Jewish people probably thought of them as the servants of the Devil (in much the same way that angels served God). These evil spirits had the ability to hurt people, and some were actually subject to the control of these demons. Consider: 1) supernatural strength (Mark 5:20); 2) blindness (Matt. 12:22); 3) predict the future (Acts 16:16); 4) demons knew Jesus (Mark 1:24); 5) Jesus spoke to them (Matt. 8:32); 6) demoniacs spoke of this control (Mark 5:9); 7) Jesus affirmed it (Matt. 12:28); 8) Peter affirmed it (Acts 10:38); 9) apostles affirmed it (Luke 10:17); 10) they could be sent into animals (Mark 5:13). But Satan’s power over Christians is limited (1 Cor. 10:13).

Are demons still active today??? This is a difficult question. Some scholars think demon possession ended at 70 A.D. when Jerusalem was destroyed. Certainly we do not seem to see the things which were common at that time. But the scriptures present the world of evil as being a reality, and evil is certainly at work in our society today. Compare Eph. 6:10-18.

Jesus Heals Many People

(Mark 1:29-34)

29 They left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew; and James and John went with them. **30** Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus got there he was told about her. **31** He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

32 When evening came, after the sun had set, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. **33** All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. **34** Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was.

That day when Jesus entered Simon Peter's house to heal his mother-in-law, who was sick in bed with a high fever -- would be indelibly impressed on Peter's mind. It is part of Mark's picture to show Jesus as one who waged *all out war* on the forces of evil. This includes sickness -- which often is identified as having its source in the world of evil. The picture is *Jesus the healer*. We see him go to her, take her by the hand, and help her up out of bed. The fever immediately leaves, and so complete is her recovery that she begins to wait on them! The fever was probably malaria (compare Luke 4:38), and this shows the authority of Jesus -- even over human illness.

A side issue is that Peter was married. If this seems strange to anyone, it only shows how much Greek thought has influenced our world. The fact that most of the Lord's closest followers were married men who continued to live with their wives (see 1 Cor. 9:5) is impressive. We can only admire the great things which they were able to do, and their wives could not have been a hindrance. In fact, in Jewish thought, there was something unnatural about celibacy, although Paul tells us that it is a possible option for those who have the "gift" (1 Cor. 7:25-35). In view of the Jewish attitude, note 1 Tim. 3:2.

We live in a time when many make an issue out of *disbelieving* the miracles of Jesus. The reasoning which says: "because Jesus worked miracles, he therefore must be divine" -- will not be accepted by them. Perhaps the best way to approach this, is to say: "if Jesus was divine, then he could have worked miracles." The purpose of these supernatural things was not simply to impress people with his power, but rather to demonstrate the presence and power of God. It was their spiritual meaning which was most important, but they *had to take place* in order to have any kind of meaning at all! As Mark presents these facts, it is very hard to doubt that physical power to heal originated from Jesus. However, it was possible for people to see these things which Jesus did, and still fail to believe. They were not compelling signs (John 12:37). Since the apostles boldly declared these things, so should we. God the Son has authority over all creation (Matt. 28:18).

The most outstanding thing about the demons continues to be the fact that they *knew who he was*. Whatever might have been his motive for not allowing them to say anything (about who he was), this must have been in order to fulfill this greater purpose. That is, Jesus made his choices and acted on the basis which would lead the greatest number to understand that he was God's Messiah. Yet he did come to die as the world's sin-offering (Luke 9:31), and he must not act in such a way that freedom of choice is

denied. His death was the complete victory over the Devil, and we should look to Jesus as a *hero!* Compare Heb. 9:15; 10:5-14.

Jesus Preaches in Galilee

(Mark 1:35-45)

35 Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place, where he prayed.

36 But Simon and his companions went out searching for him; 37 when they found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you."

38 But Jesus answered, "We must go on to the other villages around here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

39 So he traveled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

40 A leper came to Jesus, knelt down, and begged him for help. "If you want to," he said, "you can make me clean."

41 Jesus was filled with pity, and reached out and touched him. "I do want to," he answered. "Be clean!" 42 At once the leprosy left the man and he was clean. 43 Then Jesus spoke harshly with him and sent him away at once. 44 "Listen," he said, "don't tell this to anyone. But go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered, to prove to everyone that you are now clean."

45 But the man went away and began to spread the news everywhere. Indeed, he talked so much that Jesus could not go into a town publicly. Instead, he stayed out in lonely places, and people came to him from everywhere.

As Mark shows us this day in the life of Jesus, we see him up before the sun, to pray quietly. This tells us something of the relationship between Jesus and his Father. There may have been some special stress, which created this need to pray, since Mark rarely associates prayer with Jesus (compare 6:46; 14:32-39). But this may have been his normal way of doing. Compare Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 28-29; 11:1; 23:46; Matt. 19:13; John 11:41-42; 12:27-28; Ch. 17. His disciples asked to be taught to pray as he did (Luke 11:1-4).

It may be that Jesus' prayer related to the future of his public ministry. His mission was wider than the area of Galilee. Peter comes looking for him, saying that "Everyone is looking for you." Probably Peter (and the others) felt a deep need for the Lord's presence. This presents one of the two direct statements by Jesus in Mark's Gospel, in which he states his purpose on earth. (The other is 2:17). "I have to preach in them also, because this is why I came." Since the context is healing, it must be of extreme significance that Jesus says he should *be preaching*. This surely indicates how he viewed his basic work. Mark describes his tour of missions, showing that Jesus preached daily in the synagogues, and healed those with spiritual and physical problems. But more than once he returned to Capernaum.

We see something of Jesus' reputation as a man with a dreaded skin disease comes and begs to be healed. ("Leprosy" in the Bible covers a wide range of things, from true leprosy to ringworm.) Mark tells us that Jesus was filled with pity for the man. (Some texts say that *he blazed with anger* -- i.e., at the disease which had made a slave of this man. See NEB.) The fact that Jesus "reached out and touched him," must be viewed

in the light of Jewish thought which said that such contact made the one who touched *religiously unclean*. Chrysostom says: “His hand became not unclean from the leprosy, but the leprous body was made clean by his holy hand.”

An important part of this healing is that Jesus sternly told the man to keep quiet about it. Why would Jesus want to keep his miracles secret??? The most reasonable answer is that Jesus had no intention of being the center of a popular uprising. The people were looking for a *political* Messiah who would lead a revolt against the Roman Occupation Forces (see 15:7), and longed for the glory of the days of David and Solomon. But Jesus refused to be a political king (compare Matt. 4:8-10; John 6:15; 10:17-18; 12:19). Jesus revealed his Messiahship in such a way that those who *love* him will know him as God’s Messenger and through their faith will see him more fully and openly (see John 14:21-24). The way in which even his disciples continued to misunderstand him shows how right Jesus was to adopt this method of working. Note that *healing* was a sign of the eschaton or end-time (compare Luke 4:17-21; Matt. 11:5; Acts 2:16-21).

Authority to Forgive Sins

(Mark 2:1-12)

2 *A few days later Jesus came back to Capernaum, and the news spread that he was at home. 2 So many people came together that there wasn’t any room left, not even out in front of the door. Jesus was preaching the message to them, 3 when a paralyzed man, carried by four men, was brought to him. 4 Because of the crowd, however, they could not get the man to Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof right above the place where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they let the man down, lying on his mat. 5 Jesus saw how much faith they had, and said to the paralyzed man, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”*

6 *Some teachers of the Law who were sitting there thought to themselves, 7 “How does he dare talk against God like this? No man can forgive sins; only God can!”*

8 *At once Jesus knew their secret thoughts, so he said to them, “Why do you think such things? 9 Is it easier to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, pick up your mat and walk’? 10 I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralyzed man, 11 “I tell you, get up, pick up your mat, and go home!”*

12 *While they all watched, the man got up, picked up his mat, and hurried away. They were all completely amazed and praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”*

Although this section deals with the healing of a paralyzed man, the purpose is not simply to show the healing power of Jesus (contrast the earlier healings which Mark records). We are shown the deeper issues and conflicts with the religious leaders. It is amazing that the very fact Jesus obeyed the Father’s will aroused such controversy and opposition (but compare Matt. 10:34-39).

The incident shows a lesson on the need for faith. Palestinian houses were built with a flat roof, and people slept out on them in good weather. Mark shows us the

determination of this man's friends as they carry him up the outside stairs, tear up part of the roof, and lower the paralyzed man down to Jesus with the entire crowd looking on! Luke tells us that many in the crowd were Pharisees and teachers of the Law who had come to investigate this one who healed diseases (see Luke 5:17). And of course Jesus was aware of this.

The account takes a surprising turn in verse five. Both friends and enemies of Jesus were in the crowd. Ultimately he must force a decision about himself, his person, and his mission. He boldly says to the paralyzed man: "My son, your sins are forgiven." Note the healing does not occur at this point. The two things must be clearly separate. The teachers of the Law are shocked! A prophet could speak in God's name (see 2 Sam. 12:13), but could Jesus be a prophet when prophecy seemed to have died out??? Surely this was blasphemy! Only the offended person could forgive the offender! Only God himself can forgive sin! And in this they were correct. But they should have asked the question: Could this man be God??? How different the course of events might have been!

Now, Jesus points out through a question, that two things are involved: forgiveness of sin, and healing. His purpose is to *prove* that the Son of Man (this is a favorite phrase of Jesus for himself) has *authority* to forgive sins! His proof is to heal the man. Remember: *first* Jesus forgave his sins; *second* Jesus heals him from his paralysis. Healing is a humanitarian thing to do: forgiveness has messianic (eschatological) implication. As the formerly paralyzed man walks out carrying his mat, this must have been a thunderous conclusion to the interplay in the crowd. They praised God and said: "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus gave visible proof of his authority to grant the invisible (and unprovable) act of forgiveness. This was God's prerogative and impossible for an ordinary man. He claimed authority as the *Son of Man*. This was deliberately *ambiguous*. "Son of Man" could be understood both as "the helpless" (Psalm 34:6), or as a divine title (Luke 22:69-70). He chose to leave an air of mystery around his identity. (Remember, he rejected the political kingship.) The forgiveness of sins, which comes through Jesus, was to be a key issue separating the church from Judaism (see Heb. 10:1-18).

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 1:16-2:12)

1. Was this the first time Jesus had seen Simon and Andrew?
2. Why did these men abandon their business to go with One who offered them no money?
3. Compare Mark 1:16-20; Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 5:1-11. Are these parallel accounts?

4. Why are hired men mentioned in verse 20?
5. How was Jesus able to teach in the synagogue?
6. Didn't everyone teach from the same source of authority? Why were the people amazed?
7. When did the possessed man scream?
8. Is demon possession just another way of describing insanity? Why?
9. Why did Jesus tell the evil spirit to be quiet? Wasn't what the demon said true?
10. In what sense could Jesus destroy the evil spirit? Aren't spirits immortal?
11. List the miraculous elements of the healing of Peter's mother in law.
12. Were any of the apostles married?
13. How did so many people know where to find Jesus?
14. Read Isa. 53:4-5 with Matt. 8:17, and show how it was fulfilled here.
15. Did Jesus have a special reason for prayers?

16. Why didn't Jesus return immediately to Capernaum?
17. Did Jesus come to heal or to preach?
18. Give two qualities which characterized the preaching of Jesus.
19. Is our Savior concerned with our physical and spiritual difficulties? Compare Heb. 4:14-15.
20. How much time was required for the healing to take effect?
21. Did Jesus expect to be king over a political kingdom?
22. How did the paralyzed man and his friends demonstrate their faith?
23. How did Jesus demonstrate his authority?
24. Why didn't Jesus first heal the man, and then forgive his sins?
25. Isn't Jesus divine? Why is he called the "Son of Man"?
26. This is said to be the first step of Jesus toward the Cross. How is this true?
27. Do we find the apostles forgiving sin as Jesus did? See Acts 8:20-23.
28. Are the miracles a help or a hindrance in preaching the gospel today?

29. Is there a place for a healing ministry in the church today? Why?
30. In what way is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of judgment? Compare John 16:1-15.

Lesson Three

(Mark 2:13 - 4:9)

Jesus Calls Levi

(Mark 2:13-22)

13 Jesus went back again to the shore of Lake Galilee. A crowd came to him and he started teaching them. 14 As he walked along he saw a tax collector, Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting in his office. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Levi got up and followed him.

15 Later on Jesus was having a meal in Levi's house. A large number of tax collectors and outcasts was following Jesus, and many of them joined him and his disciples at the table. 16 Some teachers of the Law, who were Pharisees, saw that Jesus was eating with these outcasts and tax collectors; so they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such people?"

17 Jesus heard them and answered, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call the respectable people, but the outcasts."

18 On one occasion the followers of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came to Jesus and asked him, "Why is it that the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but yours do not?"

19 Jesus answered, "Do you expect the guests at a wedding party to go without food? Of course not! As long as the bridegroom is with them they will not do that. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; when that day comes then they will go without food.

21 "No one uses a piece of new cloth to patch up an old coat. If he does, the new patch will tear off some of the old cloth, making an even bigger hole. 22 Nor does anyone pour new wine into used wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins will be ruined. No! Fresh skins for new wine!"

This section might also be called "The Universal Nature of the Gospel." Mark shows us something about the kind of men Jesus called to be his apostles. Try to view Matthew Levi as the Jewish people saw him. He was a tax collector, and therefore a "turncoat" who represented the hated occupation government. The Roman method of collecting taxes involved *selling* the right to collect. That way they received their money immediately, and the tax collector could squeeze every cent out of the people he could get; legally (but not morally) right. Tax collectors mingled freely with Gentiles, and so were ritually unclean. They were viewed as "sinners," and included in with the outcasts from the synagogue. However, some of them were honest, such as Zacchaeus (Luke 19:7-8) and certainly Levi. The "sinners" and "outcasts" were all people who simply

made no effort to live up to the strict standards of the Pharisees. For Jesus to openly associate with such as these, brought him into direct confrontation with the super-religious Pharisees, and they were the most influential religious party in the nation. If Jesus had the authority to forgive sins, he has the right to come to those who are deeply *aware* of their need for him (vs 17). Certainly Jesus does not mean to say that some are already righteous, but that the Pharisees would also come if they only knew their great need. Compare Luke 7:36-50.

In the calling of Levi, then, we can see Jesus defend his gospel of grace and his mission to bring this to all who need it. God's sensational offer of salvation is intended for everyone -- Jew or Gentile, male or female -- who will believe it and respond to it!!! Compare the "whosoever will" of Rev. 22:17, and read what James quotes in Acts 15:14-18.

We do not know whether Levi already knew Jesus personally. He was certainly a disciple of John the Baptizer (compare Acts 1:21-22). We may be sure that when Jesus said, "Follow me," the words fell on a heart that was prepared to receive them. Here was a hungry soul in a most unlikely place! But compare the woman at the well (John 4:7-38). Mark identifies Levi as the son of Alphaeus, so it is possible that Thomas may have been his twin and James also his brother (see Luke 6:15).

God through the Law of Moses required all Jews to *fast* (go without food) on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29). The Pharisees had expanded this, and required fasting on every Monday and Thursday (compare Luke 18:12). John the Baptizer seems to have required his disciples to fast regularly. But Jesus does not do this! Therefore the question. Jesus answers them with three parables which show something of the *jubilant nature* of true Christianity (compare John 16:33). First, "*Do you expect the guests at a wedding party to go without food?*" The Jewish leaders did not think of the Messiah in terms of "the heavenly bridegroom," but it is evident that Jesus did! Verse 20 points to his coming death, but it was to climax in the joy of his resurrection! Second, "*No one uses a piece of new cloth, etc.*" The new age Jesus was bringing in, would not be a "warmed over version" of the old Judaism. To try to patch the new movement into the old Judaism would be a disaster. Third, "*Nor does anyone pour new wine into, etc.*" The *joy* of the new message of truth is not to be stifled by Jewish legalism. It is tragic that some Christians no longer believe these things which Jesus taught. Geoffrey Paxton says, "Now is the time for weeping. The veil has been sewn back together again, the stone rolled up against the mouth of the tomb, and we mount the rostrum as self-made victors. May God grant us the gift of repentance."

The Question about the Sabbath

(Mark 2:23-3:6)

23 Jesus was walking through some wheat fields on a Sabbath day. As his disciples walked along with him, they began to pick the heads of wheat. 24 So the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look, it is against our Law for your disciples to do this on the Sabbath!"

25 Jesus answered, "Have you never read what David did that time when he needed something to eat? He and his men were hungry, 26 so he went into the house of God and ate the bread offered to God. This happened when Abiathar was the High

Priest. According to our Law only the priests may eat this bread -- but David ate it, and even gave it to his men."

27 And Jesus concluded, "The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for

the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

3 *Then Jesus went back to the synagogue, where there was a man who had a crippled hand. 2 Some people were there who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong; so they watched him very closely, to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath.*

3 Jesus said to the man with the crippled hand, "Come up here to the front." 4 Then he asked the people, "What does our Law allow us to do on the Sabbath? To help, or to harm? To save a man's life, or to destroy it?" But they did not say a thing. 5 Jesus was angry as he looked around at them, but at the same time he felt sorry for them, because they were so stubborn and wrong. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and it became well again. 6 So the Pharisees left the synagogue and met at once with some members of Herod's party; and they made plans against Jesus to kill him.

These two stories of conflict deal with the tradition surrounding the Sabbath. God's Law prohibited working on the Sabbath day (which was our Saturday). The Pharisees distorted this into something God had not intended. It was their tradition which Jesus and his disciples kicked by their actions. Jesus answers their charge by referring them to what David did at Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-6). This clearly broke the letter of the law (see Exod. 25:23-30); Lev. 24:5-9). We usually think this was excused as a matter of necessity. Yet Jesus shows that what David did was not condemned by scripture! His disciples broke no law (that is, the spirit of the law) of scripture by their act of shelling out and eating the grains of wheat. It was their Tradition which was in error!

Jesus teaches two new positive principles here. First, "*The Sabbath was made for the good of man.*" The man-made rules, which made it into a heavy burden for the people, were wrong. Compare Matt. 7:21-23. Second, "*the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*" If the Sabbath is for man's good, how much more is man's Lord and representative, the Son of man, the One who has authority over its use. In the Old Testament portion of the Bible, the Sabbath is uniquely the *Lord's* day. By his claim, then, Jesus is making himself equal with God! McGarvey says, "The passage teaches, then, not that man might violate the law of the Sabbath when their welfare seemed to them to demand it, but that Jesus could set it aside, as he afterward did, when his own judgment of man's welfare required him to do so." (There is no mention of "Sabbath-breaking" in the catalogue of sins in the New Testament portion of the Bible. The Christian's "Sabbath" comes in heaven, Heb. 4:1-11.) As a side note, the "Church Fathers" said that *both* father and son were named Abiathar Ahimelech (compare 1 Sam. 22:20; 2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chron. 18:16).

Jewish law warned the first offender rather than punishing him. It might have been, they said, that he did not know he was breaking the law. If he did it a second time, this could only have been a deliberate act of disobedience. The second act would require severe punishment. With this in mind, we see Jesus again kick the tradition of the Pharisees by deliberately healing a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Some who

were looking for an excuse to accuse Jesus, were watching very closely to see what he would do. (It may be that they had planted the man there.) Their tradition only permitted an act of healing (on the Sabbath) in response to an actual threat to life. Jesus ignores Tradition to ask what the law itself allows. His words imply that his critics want to “destroy,” while he wants to “save” (compare John 10:7-10). The Pharisees show the truth of this by their action in verse 6. “Herod’s party” was a political group who wanted to replace the Roman governor with a descendant of Herod. Since the Herods were agents of the Roman occupation forces, it is unthinkable that the superpatriot Pharisees would form an alliance with them! But evil can unite men as well as good.

We note Jesus felt both anger and sorrow toward his critics. They had such a great need, yet they were rejecting God’s mercy! Compare Matt. 23:29-39; Rom. 9:30-33; 11:1-12; also see verses 1 Thess. 2:14-16.

Jesus Chooses the Twelve

(Mark 3:7-19)

7 Jesus and his disciples went away to Lake Galilee, and a large crowd followed him. They came from Galilee, from Judea, 8 from Jerusalem, from the territory of Idumea, from the territory on the other side of the Jordan, and from the neighborhood of the cities of Tyre and Sidon. This large crowd came to Jesus because they heard of the things he was doing. 9 The crowd was so large that Jesus told his disciples to get a boat ready for him, so the people would not crush him. 10 He had healed many people, and all the sick kept pushing their way to him in order to touch him. 11 and whenever the people who had evil spirits in them saw him they would fall down before him and scream, “You are the Son of God!”

12 Jesus gave a stern command to the evil spirits not to tell who he was.

13 Then Jesus went up a hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him

14 and he chose twelve, whom he named apostles. “I have chosen you to be with me,” he told them; “I will also send you out to preach, 15 and you will have authority to drive out demons.”

16 These are the twelve he chose: Simon (Jesus gave him the name Peter); 17 James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee (Jesus gave them the name Boanerges, which means “Men of Thunder”); 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Patriot, 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

At this point, the conflict with the Pharisees has done nothing to diminish the popularity of Jesus. Large crowds come from all over Palestine, but drawn by his miracles rather than his preaching. So many people come that Jesus plans to go out in the lake to escape the press of the crowds. The statement that they wanted to “touch him” suggests the incident of the woman with severe bleeding (5:24-34). It must have been that Jesus’ power to heal could be claimed just by touching him. Notice also the action of those possessed by evil spirits. “*And whenever the people, etc.*” Every time the spirits saw Jesus they began to speak (through the person they possessed) in the way recorded here!

“. . . and scream, ‘You are the Son of God!’” Earlier they had said, ‘God’s holy messenger.’ Jesus again sternly orders their silence! It must have been very difficult to reveal his divinity in just the right way. The evil spirits must have made his healing ministry much more demanding and strenuous.

For the “New Israel” to emerge, it was necessary to intensify the efforts in a way that demanded *helpers*. There were a number of disciples (Paul later mentions 500 in 1 Cor. 15:6), and from this group, Jesus chooses twelve who would form the hard core of God’s new “nation.” These would first of all be trained by Jesus, and then be sent out to extend the scope of his work. “Twelve” suggests the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28), also the twelve spies sent into Canaan (Num. 13:8-16). “Apostle” conveys the idea of “messenger” or “agent.” Jesus was sending them out to preach, and giving them authority over evil spirits (compare Matt. 10:8; John 20:21-23). This is known as the “limited commission.” Later Jesus would send out 72 more (70 in some versions) to assist in this work (Luke 10:1-12). Still later, after Jesus had been raised from death, the “unlimited commission” was given, sending the followers of Christ “*to all peoples everywhere*” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Mark gives us a list of the original Twelve (see also Matt. 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13). It was common to have more than one name, and sometimes two children in the same family were given the *same* name. “Boanerges” may refer to their quick temper but probably to their forceful preaching. Bartholomew is Nathaniel. “Patriot” is the same as “Zealot” or “Canaanite,” and we would use the word “Zionist.” “Iscaiot” probably means “man of Kerioth” (in Judah, see Joshua 15:25). Judas Iscaiot was the only non-Galilean. All were from the ranks of the common people. Many of these Twelve had been disciples of John the Baptizer, had left him to follow Jesus, and would stay with Jesus during his teaching ministry (compare Acts 1:21-22). Except for Judas Iscaiot, all would see Jesus after he was raised from death. There were many who could fit this description, but Matthias was the one later chosen to take the place of Judas. Paul was a special case, the thirteenth apostle (there were actually 13 tribes of Israel, Levi not being counted). Each of the Twelve plus Paul were hand picked by Jesus for their mission.

Jesus and Beelzebul

(Mark 3:20-35)

20 Then Jesus went home. Again such a large crowd gathered that Jesus and his disciples had no time to eat. 21 When his family heard about this they set out to get him, because people were saying, “He’s gone mad!”

22 Some teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem were saying, “He has Beelzebul in him!” Others said, “It is the chief of the demons who gives him the power to drive them out.”

23 So Jesus called the people to him and told them some parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a country divides itself into groups that fight each other, that country will fall apart. 25 If a family divides itself into groups that fight each other, that family will fall apart. 26 So if Satan’s kingdom divides into groups, it cannot last, but will fall apart and come to an end.

27 “No one can break into a strong man’s house and take away his belongings unless he ties up the strong man first; then he can plunder his house.

28 “Remember this! Men can be forgiven all their sins and all the evil things they may say. 29 But whoever says evil things against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, because he has committed an eternal sin.” 30 (Jesus said this because some had said, “He has an evil spirit in him.”)

31 Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent in a message, asking for him. 32 A crowd was sitting around Jesus, and they told him, “Look, your mother and brothers are outside, and they want you.”

33 Jesus answered, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” 34 He looked over the people sitting around him and said, “Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does what God wants him to do is my brother, my sister, my mother.”

“Beelzebul” (or “Beelzebub,” compare “Baalzebub,” “2 Kings 1:2) is a New Testament name given to the Devil as the chief of the evil spirits. This Satan is the accuser who opposed Christ and continues to oppose the followers of Christ (compare Rev. 12:10). Satan does not work directly, but uses human agents. We are not surprised to find Satan using the enemies of Christ. But even the family and friends of Christ are used in the battles, the Devil uses their *misunderstandings* and *good intentions* to try to stop what Jesus is doing. See verses 21 and 31. The Devil hoped to use their concern to defeat Jesus. We learn an important lesson from the family and friends of Jesus. We see that good intentions may be opposed to God. Because some were saying, “He’s gone mad! -- they believed they must save him from himself. Yet everything Jesus did was in response to God’s will.

The local religious leaders had called in the high officials from Jerusalem to give the verdict on the ministry of Jesus. “*He has Beelzebul in him! It is the chief of the demons who gives him the power to drive them out.*” That was the charge, but Jesus shows it is ridiculous. “*How can Satan drive out Satan?*” Since the evil spirits were Satan’s servants, then to drive them out by Satan’s power would have Satan fighting against himself, a situation which would produce collapse of Satan’s power. Obviously this is illogical. But for a Jew to reject Jesus, it became necessary for him to repudiate the power and authority of Jesus and claim it was really the Devil’s power and authority. Compare Heb. 10:29. One who does this places him in a position where there is *no way to lead him to repent* (compare Heb. 6:4-6), and it becomes an *eternal sin*. (It is commonly called: “The Unpardonable Sin.” One who *worries* about having committed it obviously has not.)

Jesus uses the parable of plundering a strong man’s house, to show that he has “tied up Satan and rendered him powerless.” Was he thinking of the temptation? Was this comparison to show that what he had been doing proved he was in conflict with Satan? Compare Isa. 49:24-26. God does deliver his people! Satan’s most crushing defeat came at the Cross (see John 12:31-33; Col. 2:15; Rev. 5:6-14)! The Old Testament portion of the Bible contains two streams of prophecy about the Messiah. One describes him as a great King, the other shows him a One who suffers. Both streams were fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

A final lesson is that spiritual relationships are every bit as important as physical ones. Those who make God their *Leader* and *Father* find themselves to be brothers. In fact, the spiritual even supersedes the physical when a choice must be made (see Matt. 10:34-39). Certainly Jesus does not intend to teach that family relationships should be destroyed (compare 1 Cor. 7:12-16). What he does teach is that when a choice must be made, we must choose HIM. (The *church* is a *community* of believers in the Messiah -- who are united to each other by the common *bond* of their relationship to God through Christ. Compare Eph. 4:25-32; 5:21 to 6:9. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen, men and women, children and parents -- can all *respect* each other because of their *oneness* in Christ!!!)

The Parable of the Sower

(Mark 4:1-9)

4 Again Jesus began to teach by Lake Galilee. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it. The boat was out in the water, while the crowd stood on the shore, at the water's edge. *2* He used parables to teach them many things, and in his teaching said to them,

3 "Listen! There was a man who went out to sow. *4* As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. *5* Some of it fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. The seeds soon sprouted, because the soil wasn't deep. *6* Then when the sun came up it burned the young plants, and because the roots had not grown deep enough the plants soon dried up. *7* Some of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, and they didn't bear grain. *8* But some seeds fell in good soil, and the plants sprouted, grew, and bore grain: some had thirty grains, others sixty, and others one hundred."

9 And Jesus concluded, "Listen, then, if you have ears to hear with!"

How would you describe color to a man born blind??? You could only do so in terms of reference of things that he already knew. Just so, we who are unspiritual must have spiritual things described in a way we can understand. One of the most amazing things about Jesus was the way in which he used parables. He took things well known by his hearers and used simple stories of common things in such a way as to explain spiritual truth.

The farmers of Palestine lived in cities and towns and walked as much as two or three miles to their fields. Isolated farmhouses were nonexistent. There were no fences, and paths through the fields were packed hard with centuries of use. The area was rocky, and some sections would be a rocky ledge with only a thin covering of soil. Some sixteen varieties of thorny plants grew in Palestine. Thistles grew so tall and strong that even horses could not push through them. Thorns and thistles were part of the "curse" (see Gen. 3:18), grew rapidly, and were extremely difficult to kill. There may have been farmers working in their fields as Jesus taught this parable.

Everyone knew that a farmer planted his seed by taking it by the handful and flinging it out over the prepared ground. Because of this, some of the seed would fall on unfavorable places, such as the paths which crisscrossed the fields, rocky grounds,

thorns, etc. The seed which found good soil grew in response to how fertile it found the soil.

Obviously this all has a spiritual application. What does it mean??? We must allow Jesus to furnish the key. And this gives us a second fact about parables: each is intended to teach one lesson. They were not intended to be allegories, and we must accept the interpretation which Jesus gives. The spiritual meaning remains hidden to one who is not given the key. In this case Jesus explains to his disciples in verses 13-20. But the crowds would not have heard the explanation. What would they have made of this parable??? “Listen, then. . .” calls the attention of the crowd. What Jesus means, is: “You must find something more in this than a simple lesson on farming.” But what could the crowd have thought -- since even the disciples did not understand the parable??? Was he comforting his disciples? Promising a great harvest? Telling them to be like the good soil? Saying that, just as in farming, mixed results were to be expected? And of course we have no way of knowing.

Parables, then, are unusual ways of speaking that teach a sharp and pointed lesson. In the Old Testament portion of the Bible we find a number of similar things: proverbial statements (compare 1 Sam. 24:13); fables (Judges 9:8-15; 2 Kings 14:9); examples of disaster (Deut. 28:37-45); oracles (Num. 23:7-10); tales and allegories (Ezek. 17:2-10). Jesus used: proverbial sayings (Luke 4:23-24); metaphors and similes (Mark 2:21-22; 3:23-25); typical events (such as the Sower); and accounts of particular events (such as the Good Samaritan). Jesus was a master at telling stories in such a way that those who wanted to learn (i.e. those who believed in him) could see the lesson. But for those who did not believe, it would remain a mystery which they would be unable to use against him.

Questions for discussion

1. Why would a tax collector be working by Lake Galilee?
2. Why was Matthew willing to respond immediately to Jesus' call?
3. Why did Jesus go to a meal at the home of Matthew? Be specific.
4. Why were the tax collectors and outcasts at the meal also?
5. Was there anything wrong with associating with tax collectors and outcasts?
6. Who may have been the brothers of Matthew?

7. Why the question about fasting? What was the probable motive?

8. What does Jesus' answer show us about the contrast between Judaism and Christianity?

9. Does "Christ's law" (1 Cor. 9:21) make any difference in our interpretation of the "Sabbath?"
Compare Col. 2:16.

10. In what sense is the son of Man "Lord of the Sabbath?"

11. Jesus deliberately "offended" the Jewish leaders. Was this right?

12. Why the question in verse four?

13. Why the decision to *kill Jesus*, and why this particular time?

14. Why the testimony of the demons?

15. Why did he sternly order their silence?

16. What was the purpose in the appointment of the Twelve?

17. What does the word "apostle" mean?

18. What were the requirements to be an apostle?

19. Did Christ give Peter more authority than he gave the others? Compare John 20:19-23; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

20. Why the authority to drive out evil spirits?

21. In view of the agitation of the political activists (compare mark 15:7), why would Jesus choose a “Patriot” as an apostle?

22. Compare the four lists of apostles. How can we harmonize them?

23. What was it about this (vs. 20-21) that disturbed his family and friends? What did they intend to do about it?

24. What incident is verse 27 pointing to?

25. In what way were the Jewish leaders speaking evil against the Holy Spirit? What is an “eternal sin,” and why would it be impossible to be forgiven for it?

26. Are family relationships more important than spiritual relationships?

27. What do we know about the methods of the farmer in the parable?

28. Why did paths run through the fields?

29. Why would there be thorns in a field prepared for sowing?

30. What is the meaning of a seed giving “some thirty grains, some sixty, and others one hundred?”

Lesson Four

(Mark 4:10 - 5:34)

The Purpose of the Parables

(Mark 4:10-20)

10 When Jesus was alone, some of those who had heard him came to him with the twelve disciples and asked him to explain the parables.

11 “You have been given the secret of the Kingdom of God,” Jesus answered. “But the others, who are on the outside, hear all things by means of parables, *12* so that,

*‘They may look and look, yet not see,
they may listen and listen, yet not
understand;*

*for if they did, they would turn to God
and he would forgive them.’”*

13 Then Jesus asked them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How, then, will you ever understand any parable? *14* The sower sows God’s message. *15* Sometimes the message falls along the path; these people hear it, but as soon as they hear it Satan comes and takes away the message sown in them. *16* Other people are like the seeds that fall on rocky ground. As soon as they hear the message they receive it gladly. *17* But it does not sink deep into them, and they don’t last long. So when trouble or persecution comes because of the message, they give up at once. *18* Other people are like the seeds sown among the thorns. These are the ones who hear the message, *19* but the worries about this life, the love for riches, and all other kinds of desires crowd in and choke the message, and they don’t bear fruit. *20* But other people are like the seeds sown in good

soil. They hear the message, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirty, some sixty, and some one hundred.”

Mark shows us the disciples asking Jesus to explain the whole reason and purpose behind the parables. The answer Jesus gives them teaches two lessons: A. No one will find truth who does not actively search for it. B. Those whom God cannot convince, he confuses. Compare 2 Thess. 2:11-12. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to prove this. Both Mark and Luke make what sounds like a harsher statement, but this may be due to the Hebrew custom of stating *result* as *purpose*. Faith in Christ qualifies one to understand the truth. Compare what Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14.

“Secret” in the way scripture uses it, means almost the exact opposite from our usual meaning. It refers to God’s plan which has long been kept hidden, but has now been *revealed* to the men of his choice. Compare the way Paul speaks about this in 1 Cor. 2:6-10. Paul shows us more about God’s secret purpose in Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2-3; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 3:9; 16; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Eph. 5:22-33. God’s final message came through his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). God’s plan to act in sovereign power to set men and women free from sin and guilt was made known to these disciples through Jesus the Son. They should understand what they see and hear taking place in Jesus’ ministry. But the outsiders are mystified by the parables and do not respond. It is a scriptural principle that: “to everyone who has, even more will be given; but the one who has nothing, even the little he has will be taken away from him.” (Compare Matt. 13:12.) It is God’s *intent* that everyone be saved through Christ. But when men and women close their minds to the truth, God takes away from them the opportunity of responding to it. This is not unfair, because when one turns to Christ, the cloud is taken away (compare 2 Cor. 3:14-16). It is not an unalterable *decree*, but the offer of a free *choice*. Parables were meant to stimulate the search for truth, and the opportunity will be given to all who open their minds to His teaching.

As Jesus explains the parable, he speaks of the different kinds of individuals who come into contact with the gospel. Note the sower sows God’s message (word). In each case the message which is sown is the same. The difference lies in the *response* of the soil. The soil symbolizes the *reaction* of the one who hears. *The Path* symbolizes the person who is “too hard” for the message to be able to penetrate. This is due to such things as sin, indifference, prejudice, false teaching, etc. Notice that Satan immediately takes it away. Is this fair??? Yes, because the person has deliberately closed his or her mind to the message of God. *The rocky soil* symbolizes the person who has no strong conviction of belief. Since they are not really committed to Christ, they are unwilling to pay the price (Luke 14:27) to follow Him. *The Soil with Thorns* symbolizes the person who is committed, but who is so busy with everything else that no time is left for Jesus. Then we see also three types of good soil. This person finds new life and gives Jesus the highest priority. Certainly all will receive the same gift of eternal life (compare Matt. 20:1-16), yet there are three different levels of “fruit bearing” (Luke mentions only the “one hundred”). This reminds us of the parable of talents (Matt. 25:14-30), which teaches that each is responsible for the capability which he has, not for what he does not have. By working together, we accomplish the Lords’ purpose (compare 1 Cor. 3:5-9).

Further teaching in parables

(Mark 4:21-34)

21 Jesus continued, "Does anyone ever bring in a lamp and put it under a bowl or under the bed? Doesn't he put it on the lampstand?"

22 Whatever is hidden away will be brought out into the open, and whatever is covered up will be uncovered. 23 Listen, then, if you have ears to hear with!"

24 He also said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear! The same rules you use to judge others will be used by God to judge you -- but with even greater severity. 25 The man who has something will be given more; the man who has nothing will have taken away from him even the little he has."

26 Jesus went on to say, "The Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed in his field 27 He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens.

28 The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit: first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain. 29 When the grain is ripe the man starts working with his sickle, because harvest time has come."

30 "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?" asked Jesus. "What parable shall we use to explain it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world. A man takes it and plants it in the ground; 32 after a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade."

33 Jesus preached his message to the people, using many other parables like these; he told them as much as they could understand. 34 He would not speak to them without using parables; but when he was alone with his disciples he would explain everything to them.

Verses 24-25 confirm the parable of the sower. Mark stresses "what you hear," Luke stresses "how you listen." What we hear depends upon how we listen, and determines what we get out of it. This involves our attitude toward others. If we are harsh and critical of everyone else, God will do to us just what we do to our fellowman! Furthermore, an opportunity which is not used is taken away, and becomes a curse. But every opportunity used, brings further opportunity.

The very purpose of light is to provide illumination. Who would cover it up or hide it??? If a light is hidden, it can only be for a short time, and when it is placed on the lampstand, its light reveals the things hidden by darkness. Jesus himself is *light* (John 1:4-5), and it would be foolish for him to hide the very thing he came to reveal. Yet we can see that time was required for this light to be clearly revealed. The parables and the whole mission of Jesus were not easy to understand, but in time the meaning would be clearly revealed. Jesus worked *secretly* in his earthly ministry, but the *meaning* was to be made known at the right time as God vindicated Him and brought in His kingly rule in power. Compare Paul's anthem of praise in Acts 13:26-41.

Only Mark gives the Parable of the Growing Seed. The same lesson is taught by Isa. 55:10-11; James 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:23-25. Results do not come *instantly* either in nature or in spiritual things. We are to "sow the seed" and to "water it," but it is God who makes it grow (compare 1 Cor. 3:6-9). The public ministry of Jesus was a time of

probably mentioned to show that a large number witnessed the miracle when Jesus stilled the tempest.”)

When they see Jesus act and the storm die down, they were stunned with surprise! Mark tells us they were “terribly afraid.” If they had earlier expected him to do something, they are now terrified by the result of his command! Who and what is this man who can control the forces of nature and silence them with a word! They had not yet learned that Jesus is both Lord and Creator of nature (see Col. 1:16). Their question is to be answered from the Old Testament portion of the Bible where it is the Lord who controls the elements. See Psalm 107:23-30; also Psalm 89:8-9; 93:3-4; 106:8-9; Isa. 51:9-10.

If this miracle did not happen, then no power of God was revealed in the event. Yet the early church did believe this incident was the power of God revealed! A strong testimony, then, to the historicity of the calming of the storm.

McGarvey writes: “In the parables of this section, especially in those of the sower, the seed and the mustard seed, the prophetic power of Jesus is clearly exhibited. Without superhuman foresight he could not have so accurately traced out the manner in which different classes of men throughout all time would deal with the word of God, as he describes it in the parable of the sower; nor could he have known in advance of experiment, that the seed of the kingdom would grow from its planting until the time of harvest, as described in the next parable; nor that, as declared in the third, the kingdom would ever attain to the prodigious growth which our eyes have witnessed. His divinity is attested by his unailing foresight into the distant future.”

Jesus Heals a Man With Evil Spirits

(Mark 5:1-20)

5 *They arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, at the territory of the Gerasenes. 2 As soon as Jesus got out of the boat he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves. 3 This man had an evil spirit in him and lived among the graves. Nobody could keep him tied with chains any more; 4 many times his feet and hands had been tied, but every time he broke the chains, and smashed the irons on his feet. He was too strong for anyone to stop him. 5 Day and night he wandered among the graves and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones.*

6 He was some distance away when he saw Jesus; so he ran, fell on his knees before him, 7 and screamed in a loud voice, “Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me? For God’s sake, I beg you, don’t punish me!” 8 (He said this because Jesus was saying to him, “Evil spirit, come out of this man!”)

9 So Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

The man answered, “My name is ‘Mob’ -- there are so many of us!” 10 And he kept begging Jesus not to send the evil spirits out of that territory.

11 A large herd of pigs was near by, feeding on the hillside. 12 The spirits begged Jesus, “Send us to the pigs, and let us go into them.” 13 So he let them. The evil spirits went out of the man and went into the pigs. The whole herd -- about two thousand pigs in all -- rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and were drowned.

14 The men who had been taking care of the pigs ran away and spread the news in the town and among the farms. The people went out to see what had happened. 15 They came to Jesus and saw the man who used to have the mob of demons in him. He was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the man with the demons, and about the pigs. 17 So they began to ask Jesus to leave their territory.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!"

19 But Jesus would not let him. Instead he told him, "Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how kind he has been to you."

20 So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns telling what Jesus had done for him; and all who heard it were filled with wonder.

Films such as "The Exorcist" have made people more aware of the reality of *evil* as an actual malignant spiritual force (but have also given the Devil a lot of free publicity in a distorted way). The thought of actually being controlled by demonic powers is especially frightening! In our time, this man would be diagnosed as having a particularly severe "manic-depressive psychosis" which made it impossible for him to live a normal life in human society. However this diagnosis would be incorrect. Two facts in this incident take it out of the realm of a purely physical illness: the supernatural knowledge this man had about Jesus (verses 7-8); the incident of the pigs.

It was not unusual for places to have more than one name. The territory of the *Gerasenes* was also known as the territory of the *Gadarenes*. Gadara, an important city, was seven or eight miles to the south. Gergesa is modern Khersa on the lakeside, and the cure must have taken place near here. The burial caves are still to be seen in the cliff. The only way society had of dealing with him was to try to chain him up. He stayed away from people. Note he had superhuman strength when under the control of the demons. It was a characteristic of these demons that *they knew who Jesus was*. Compare James 2:19. Nothing is observed today in any way comparable to the *messianic insight* seen in those demon-possessed individuals.

The incident with the pigs has raised endless questions. Perhaps Jesus did this to show the reality of the demons. A "psychosis" or "epilepsy" or any other such thing could not be instantly transmitted from a man to a herd of animals. Mark specifically mentions the number *two thousand*. This implies there were two thousand demons in this man. (A demon being a spirit and not material, could do this.) They had identified themselves as "Mob" ("Legion") because there were so many of them. The demons expected to be sent back to the abyss, and they knew Jesus had the authority to send them there. They beg to be allowed to go into the pigs (swine is another name for pigs). It seems they would much rather do this, and they also seemed to feel free to bargain with Jesus. The sight of the two thousand pigs rushing down the slope of the hillside to drown in the lake gives us a vivid insight into the severity of demon possession! The authority of Jesus is once again displayed dramatically.

Why did Jesus *not* tell the man to keep silent about his cure this time??? Was it because this was a Gentile area? Or because Jesus did not intend himself to work there? Mark shows the man sitting "clothed and in his right mind." This should *not* be

understood in “twentieth-century psychological terms,” however, the demon-possessed were clearly *abnormal* people. When normality returned after healing, everyone could clearly see the difference. The people (14, 16) reacted negatively to all this, and asked Jesus to leave their territory. Christ does not stay where he is not wanted. He did not visit the Gerasenes again.

The Woman Who Touched Jesus’ Cloak

(Mark 5:21-34)

21 Jesus went back across to the other side of the lake. There at the lakeside, a large crowd gathered around him. 22 Jairus, an official of the local synagogue, came up, and when he saw Jesus he threw himself down at his feet 23 and begged him with all his might, “My little daughter is very sick. Please come and place your hands on her, so that she will get well and live!”

24 Then Jesus started off with him. So many people were going along with him that they were crowding him from every side.

25 There was a woman who had suffered terribly from severe bleeding for twelve years,

26 even though she had been treated by many doctors. She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time. 27 She had heard about Jesus, so she came in the crowd behind him. 28 “If I touch just his clothes,” she said to herself, “I shall get well.”

29 She touched his cloak and her bleeding stopped at once; and she had the feeling inside herself that she was cured of her trouble. 30 At once Jesus knew that power had gone out of him. So he turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched my clothes?”

31 His disciples answered, “You see how the people are crowding you; why do you ask who touched you?”

32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 The woman realized what had happened to her; so she came, trembling with fear, fell at his feet, and told him the whole truth. 34 Jesus said to her, “My daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed from your trouble.”

We see some of the pressure under which Jesus worked, as two people ask for his help at the same time. Jairus was one of the synagogue elders who convened the congregation, preserved order, and who invited the readers and speakers. (The actual work was done by the attendant, Luke 4:20, who was responsible for the building and its furniture.) His request shows us that by no means were all of the religious leaders opposed to Jesus. Believing in the power of Jesus, he had the faith to come to him to find help for his critically ill daughter. (Matthew’s condensed account has him saying she is already dead. This is an *idiom* to emphasize the critical nature of her condition.) She was already at the point of death as Jairus came to Jesus and she passed away as he was speaking (vs. 35).

As they were going to the house of Jairus, the incident with the woman who had severe bleeding took place. Certainly this healing would have an effect on the faith of Jairus. The woman had suffered for twelve years from this serious illness. No slur is

intended upon doctors as such. This is to show the hopelessness of the victim. It is difficult to view this through Jewish eyes, since the woman's condition would have prohibited her from participation in the religious rites of Judaism (see Lev. 15:25-30). Her condition made her religiously unclean, and she would be shy about coming to a holy man such as Jesus. She believes that touching is the way to be healed (compare 6:56). Matthew's condensed version has Jesus turning around and looking at her. Certainly Jesus was aware of the woman and healed her as she touched him. What he says about "Who touched my clothes?" was to bring out the lesson. His question asks for her declaration of faith. This woman's faith caused her to act, and Jesus healed her.

The way in which the woman was healed shows a certain supernatural quality about Jesus. It would be wrong to think that power flowed *involuntarily* from him, as from a short-circuited battery. The spiritual power of Jesus is not to be narrowly defined and consequently misunderstood. Jesus himself made certain that there could be no basis for superstition in the thinking of the woman. He brought her out into the open so that she might recover her self-respect and find healing for her soul as well as for her body. He gave her dignity by his love and care for her as an individual. He spoke a healing word which transformed what might have been a mechanical act into a personal relationship. A lesson in this is that care -- even spiritual care -- is incomplete without accompanying love (compare 1 Cor. 13).

Alford writes: "The error of her view was overborne, and, her weakness of apprehension of truth covered, by the strength of her faith. And this is a most encouraging miracle for us to recollect when we are disposed to think despondently of the ignorance or superstition of much of the Christian world: that He who accepted this woman for her faith, even in error and weakness, may accept them."

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 4:10 - 5:34)

1. What is meant by the expression "secret" (mystery) of the kingdom? (4:11)
2. Please explain verse 12 in your own words.
3. Why does Jesus give the rebuke in verse 13?
4. Show how the parable of the sower fit in with the time and place where Jesus gave it.
5. What seems to be the key to all the parables?

6. Show the difference between emotion and conviction.
7. In what ways is teaching in parables relevant to the church today?
8. Jesus states a strange purpose for hiding something. Explain. (4:22)
9. Isn't it unfair to give to the one who has and take from the one who doesn't have? (4:25)
10. What is the main point of the parable of the growing seed?
11. What is the main point of the parable of the mustard seed?
12. Jesus taught in parables "as much as they could understand." What is the significance of this? (4:33)
13. Does our service to Christ exempt us from "storms?" Explain.
14. Describe the storm in your own words.
15. What did the disciples think Jesus could do about the storm? Was their faith weak?

16. Could what Jesus did here be compared with the creation of the world?
17. Be specific in your reason for the rebuke in verse 40.
18. What is the most important lesson in this incident?
19. Why would demons run to Jesus -- not away from him? Explain.
20. Why would demons have any desire to go into pigs?
21. Wasn't it wrong to destroy the property of another?
22. Show how the man was both attracted and repelled by Jesus.
23. What was the response of the crowd when they saw the man healed?
24. What is the only thing that can turn the Savior away?
25. Use your own words to describe the humility and sincerity of Jairus.
26. Why mention the woman had spent all her money on doctors without beneficial results?
27. Show the determination and faith which this woman had.

28. Did Jesus know who touched him before he asked the question?

29. Why did the woman make the confession which she did?

30. Did Jesus accept the woman's error and weakness? What did he accept?

Lesson Five

(Mark 5:35 - 6:44)

Jairus' Daughter

(Mark 5:35-43)

35 While Jesus was saying this, some messengers came from Jairus' house and told him, "Your daughter has died. Why should you bother the Teacher any longer?"

36 Jesus paid no attention to what they said, but told him, "Don't be afraid, only believe." 37 Then he did not let anyone else go on with him except Peter and James and his brother John.

38 they arrived at the official's house, where Jesus saw the confusion and heard all the loud crying and wailing. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this confusion? Why are you crying? The child is not dead -- she is only sleeping!"

40 They started making fun of him, so he put them all out, took the child's father and mother, and his three disciples, and went into the room where the child was lying. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha, koum," which means, "Little girl! Get up, I tell you!"

42 She got up at once and started walking around (She was twelve years old.) When this happened they were completely amazed! 43 But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and said, "Give her something to eat."

Certainly Jairus would be impressed by the healing of the unfortunate woman. Yet would he feel Jesus was wasting valuable time??? We know he believed Jesus could heal the sick, but did he believe Jesus could restore one already dead??? His worst fears were confirmed by the messengers who say, "Your daughter has died." The messengers refer to Jesus as *the Teacher*, and this shows how the people thought of him. "Teacher" is close to "prophet" in their thinking (compare 1:27).

Jesus paid no attention to their message of death, and acts to relieve the anxiety of the suffering father. "Don't be afraid, only believe." At the house, the ritual of Jewish mourning has already begun. Mark shows us the mourners *outside*. Paid musicians and mourners were hired to play sad music and to scream and cry to show the sadness of the death. Notice how quickly they turn to laughter and ridicule when Jesus says, "The child is not dead -- she is only sleeping!" At this point Jesus has not yet seen the child, so he

cannot be making a medical diagnosis. What he says must be taken as meaning she is in a state of death from which she can be “awakened” (compare John 11:11-14) It is somewhat unusual that Jesus had allowed only Peter, James, and John to come along to the house, and allowed only them and the child’s parents to go in where the child was. (Peter, James, and John are the three who saw Jesus transfigured.)

Mark’s vivid description of the healing preserves the Aramaic (the Hebrew dialect spoken in Palestine) words spoken by Jesus, “*Talitha, koum.*” Mark then translates this for his readers, as meaning: “Little girl! Get up I tell you!” (Note there is no incantation nor magic formula chanted, just a plain command in the language of the people.) “She got up at once and started walking around.” It is characteristic of Mark to emphasize the instantaneous results of the healing. He also mentions her age to explain the fact that she walked. Jesus commands she be given something to eat. This shows both his thoughtfulness and the completeness of the healing. From Jesus’ perspective, physical death is no more a barrier than waking someone from natural sleep.

Again Jesus demands secrecy! Surely such a thing could not be kept secret. But Jesus must be concerned with the act of raising the girl from the dead. Those outside the room could speculate, but never really know (except as later revealed by eyewitnesses). It might be that Jesus declared the girl was not dead but only sleeping, with the intent of creating uncertainty in the minds of the people (that is, the minds of those who did not believe in him). Jesus had a work to do before the climax of the cross. His fame must not spread too quickly. Things must be prepared. In addition to his own rising from death, Jesus rescued three from the grave. Here it is a girl who had just died. The widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:11-15) had been dead at least a few hours. Lazarus (John 11) had been dead four days. Note that this girl was raised from death privately, the widow’s son publicly, and Lazarus in the presence of bitter enemies.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

(Mark 6:1-6)

6 *Jesus left that place and went back to his hometown, followed by his disciples. 2 On the Sabbath day he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there, and when they heard him they were all amazed. “Where did he get all this?” they asked. “What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles? 3 Isn’t he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters living here?” And so they rejected him.*

4 Jesus said to them, “A prophet is respected everywhere except in his home town, and by his relatives and his family.”

5 He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 He was greatly surprised, because they did not have faith.

Then Jesus went to the villages around there, teaching the people.

In showing us the ministry of Christ, Mark shows us sharp contrasts between success and failure (that is, from our point of view, since Jesus himself completed the work he came to do), acceptance and opposition, understanding, and misunderstanding.

Jesus usually showed his power only in the presence of *faith*. There was no lack of ability on his part, but when people had already decided not to believe, it would have been useless to do great signs and wonders. Even the philosopher Plato wrote: “*To find the maker and father of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him, it is impossible to speak of him before all people.*” This is a reminder to the followers of Christ not to expect a problem-free, constantly successful life. It may be that some you love the most dearly will not listen to you (but may listen to a stranger).

There is an old saying that, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Older adults are especially likely to look down upon a person who had grown up in their midst. Of all places, Nazareth, where Jesus had spent most of his life, might have been expected to really celebrate the return of their now famous son. But they *thought* they knew him already. Their mood was skeptical, when he began to teach that day in the synagogue. They were amazed -- but not impressed. The synagogue congregation was not as formal as our church, and so they begin talking with each other. What they say, means: “*Who does he think he is?*” And so they rejected him! This is the second time they have done this, the other time being some months before this (Luke 4:16-30). In view of their unbelief, other than healing a few, all he could do was to point out that great men are not appreciated at home. Certainly there are many exceptions to this “proverb,” but it is especially true of prophets who say unpopular things. Jesus was himself a prophet (see Luke 13:33).

The fact that Mary had other children after Jesus was born in no way damages the miracle of the Virgin Birth. No hint is given in the Bible of the *dogma* of “Mary’s perpetual virginity.” In fact, when someone tried to “elevate” Mary, Jesus rebuked them (see Luke 11:27-28). About 380 A.D., Epiphanius proposed the theory that the “brothers and sisters” were children of Joseph but not of Mary. About the same time Jerome proposed that they were cousins of Jesus, sons of Mary’s sister. However, Luke 2:7 and Matt. 1:25 *imply* that Mary had other children. There is no biblical reason to think otherwise.

The fact that Joseph is not mentioned here or in the parallel passage in Matthew, could mean that he is dead at this time. However, there is possibly darker meaning in the omission. Identification by the mother sometimes was used as an insult (compare Judges 11:1-2). Evidently rumors were circulated that Jesus was illegitimate (see John 8:41; 9:29). If this is their thought, they are intentionally giving an insult to Jesus.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

(Mark 6:7-13)

7 He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. He gave them authority over the evil spirits 8 and ordered them, “Don’t take anything with you on the trip except a walking stick; no bread, no beggar’s bag, no money in your pockets. 9 Wear sandals, but don’t wear an extra shirt.” 10 He also told them, “Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that town. 11 If you come to a place where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. This will be a warning to them!

12 So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. 13 They drove out many demons, and rubbed oil on many sick people and healed them.

Despite the failure (it was the people who failed, not Jesus) at Nazareth, the ministry of Jesus had now grown so much that the Twelve were ready for the commission. Also we can be sure Jesus intended this to be a time of testing for them and an opportunity to get the feel of their own capabilities. The mission of these disciples is an extension of the mission of Jesus. And here is the symbolism of twelve: Jesus is calling *all Israel*, not just a handful.

The travel instructions sound very strange to us. The emphasis is on speed -- *urgency!* They were to dress like poor people, and to avoid anything that might look like luxury or ease. (Compare John the Baptizer.) It could be that this was because of other wandering preachers who were victimizing the gullible public and making themselves rich. But the ones being renewed ought to supply the needs of the one renewing. And so Jesus instructs them to expect to be supported by the people themselves. This first tour of mission was probably a brief tour in a limited area, so that they could easily live in this style. Later seventy-two more (seventy in some versions) would be sent out as Jesus extended his *call* (see Luke 10: 1-12).

Mark tells us that Jesus sent them out “two by two” This was standard practice, both in Judaism and in the early church. This provided both companionship and mutual help in dangerous country. But more importantly, it made possible a message proclaimed by *two witnesses* and this carried more weight with the people (see John 8:17-18; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

In their evangelism, they were to make one home their base of action, rather than going from house to house. Living in different houses would take more time. As they chose a house in a village, they were to “bless” it by saying, “Peace be with you.” If the people of the house did not welcome them, they were to take back their blessing (see Matt. 10:11-13). But if some home or if a town refused to welcome them or listen to their message, they were to act out a parable by shaking the dust off their feet as they left. Every pious Jew did this upon leaving Gentile territory. In this case, it was a symbolic act that would say all responsibility had ended. God does not force his word upon unwilling people (see Acts 13:50-51).

Since this is *before the cross*, their message was identical -- at this stage -- with that of John the Baptizer (see Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:4) as well as of Jesus himself (see Mark 1:15). Both John and Jesus preached the *nearness* of the Kingdom. It could not be set up until the events of the cross (see Luke 9:31). The apostles were to say it was near, since the time was nearly fulfilled. Jesus said some in his company then would “see the Kingdom of God come with power” (Mark 9:1). After he ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50, 51; Mark 16: 19), the kingdom is spoken of as *fact* (Col. 1:13).

They were to duplicate the work of Jesus in healing the sick and driving out demons. This shows they had been given the power. Matthew also mentions, “raise the dead” (Matt. 10:8). They “rubbed olive oil on sick people” (anointed them). Olive oil symbolized God’s Grace, and using it pointed to God as the Healer. Compare Isaiah 1:6; James 5:14; Luke 10:34. This ministry was a direct confrontation with the sources of evil!

The Death of John the Baptizer

(Mark 6:14-29)

14 Now King Herod heard about all this, because Jesus' reputation had spread everywhere. Some people were saying, "John the Baptist has come back to life! That is why these powers are at work in him."

15 Others, however, said, "He is Elijah."

Others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

16 When Herod heard it he said, "He is John the Baptist! I had his head cut off, but he has come back to life!" 17 Herod himself had ordered John's arrest, and had him tied up and put in prison. Herod did this because of Herodias, whom he had married, even though she was the wife of his brother Philip. 18 John the Baptist kept telling Herod, "It isn't right for you to marry your brother's wife!"

19 So Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted to kill him, but she could not because of Herod.

20 Herod was afraid of John because he knew that John was a good and holy man, and so he kept him safe. He liked to listen to him, even though he became greatly disturbed every time he heard him.

21 Finally Herodias got her chance. It was on Herod's birthday, when he gave a feast for all the top government officials, the military chiefs, and the leading citizens of Galilee. 22 The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, and pleased Herod and his guests. So the king said to the girl, "What would you like to have? I will give you anything you want." 23 With many vows he said to her, "I promise that I will give you anything you ask for, even as much as half my kingdom!"

24 So the girl went out and asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

25 The girl hurried back at once to the king and demanded, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a plate!"

26 This made the king very sad; but he could not refuse her, because of the vows he had made in front of all his guests. 27 So he sent off a guard at once with orders to bring John's head. The guard left, went to the prison, and cut John's head off; 28 then he brought it on a plate and gave it to the girl, who gave it to her mother. 29 When John's disciples heard about this, they came and got his body and laid it in a grave.

The increasing popularity of Jesus attracted the attention of all kinds of people. Herod had been away in a war with Aretas, king of Arabia, and probably had not heard much of Jesus until his return. "King Herod" (Herod Antipas was the governor of a fourth-part of a province, ruler of Galilee) was a superstitious man with a bad conscience. He believed in a world of spirits, and he began to believe the popular clamor that identified Jesus with John the Baptizer come back from the dead. John had done no miracles during his lifetime (see John 10:41), but if he had returned from the dead, the people thought he could be expected to possess supernatural powers.

Mark gives us a "flash-back" to explain the death of John. That event had taken place only a short time before (compare Matt. 14:12-21). Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells that John the Baptizer had been imprisoned at Machaerus. This was a grim fortress near the Dead Sea, with large, beautiful apartments in it (for the visiting dignitaries, etc.). It was here that Herod had John's head cut off.

The dynasty of the Herods were not known for their moral qualities. Herod the Great had been married to seven wives. Herod Antipas was his son by Malthace.

Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great and Mariamne. She had been married to Herod Antipas' half-brother Philip (who was probably the son of Herod the Great and *another* Mariamne). It seems to have been a case of "bigamy," since John kept telling Herod that it wasn't right to marry his brother's *wife*. Herod's legal wife was the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia. Jewish law did not permit a man to marry the wife of a living brother. Nor did it allow a man to marry his niece (this would be incest). It was a very complex situation.

Herod viewed John as a "holy man," but Herodias had no such scruples. She schemed to rid herself of John the Baptizer, and the opportunity presented itself at Herod's birthday feast. The Herods imitated the Roman emperors by celebrating their birthdays with very extravagant social events. This would be termed a "wild party," and Salome's dance was on the level of a "strip-tease" in a nightclub. This was not unusual, especially considering the Herods. But he knew she danced because she wanted a favor. In his intoxicated condition, he rashly swears a vow to give her anything -- even half a kingdom (which he didn't have). The girl asks her mother, and Herodias demands *the head of John on a plate*. Because he has sworn a vow, and also because he fears the taunts of his guests, Herod orders the death of John. He had John beheaded in spite of public opinion and his own fear of John as a holy man. Jezebel was the woman who wanted to kill Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-2). Herodias is "Jezebel" to the second "Elijah" (Matt. 11:14), John the Baptizer. The voice of John was silenced, but the words he had spoken to Herod still stood, sealed by his bloody death. From now on a dark shadow hangs over the ministry of Jesus (see 9:12-13). Mark shows us the disciples of John as they bury the body of their leader. Matthew adds: "then they went and told Jesus." In their sorrow they look to the One whom John had pointed out to them.

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand Men

(Mark 6:30-44)

30 The apostles returned and met with Jesus, and told him all they had done and taught. 31 There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. So he said to them, "Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest a while." 32 So they started out in the boat by themselves to a lonely place.

33 Many people, however, saw them leave and knew at once who they were; so they went from all the towns and ran ahead by land and got to the place ahead of Jesus and his disciples. 34 When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw this large crowd, and his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things. 35 When it was getting late, his disciples came to him and said, "It is already very late, and this is a lonely place. 36 Send the people away, and let them go to the nearby farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

37 "You yourselves give them something to eat," Jesus answered.

They asked, "Do you want us to go and buy two hundred dollars' worth of bread and feed them?"

38 So Jesus asked them, "How much bread do you have? Go and see."

When they found out they told him, "Five loaves, and two fish also."

39 Jesus then told his disciples to make all the people divide into groups and sit down on the green grass. 40 So the people sat down in rows, in groups of a hundred and groups of fifty. 41 Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, and gave thanks to God. He broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 Everyone ate and had enough. 43 Then the disciples took up twelve baskets full of what was left of the bread and of the fish. 44 The number of men who ate the bread was five thousand.

It is true that our world is under a curse (see Gen. 3:14-19). Yet the Bible shows us that God created this world for the use and enjoyment of mankind. Work is a blessing as well as a duty, and rest is a privilege and a joy. Sometimes the work is so pressing that rest must wait a while, and this is what we see here with Jesus. The crowds were already there when he got out of the boat. The area west of Lake Galilee was heavily populated. Capernaum alone had some 30,000 people. There were twelve other cities near its shores. John 6:3 implies Jesus first went up the mountain, but then returned to the crowd, drawn by his sympathy for them. Note there were 5,000 *men*, plus women and children (as Matthew tells us). Jesus went up the mountain, but then returned to the crowd, drawn by his sympathy for them. Note there were 5,000 blessing as well as a duty, and rest is a privilege and a joy. Sometimes the work is so pressing that rest must wait a while, and this is what we see here with Jesus. The crowds were already there when he got out of the boat. The area west of Lake Galilee was heavily populated. Capernaum alone had some 30,000 people. There were twelve other c, plus women and children (as Matthew tells us). Jesus went up the mountain, but then returned to the crowd, drawn by his sympathy for t “*You yourselves give them something to eat.*” He said this to test them (see John 6:5-6). Their answer is almost sarcastic as they point out it would take *two hundred silver coins* (a silver coin was a day’s wages to a rural worker) to feed so many people. Jesus asks how much bread they have, and they find five loaves and also two fish. Having called their attention to the problem, Jesus acts. The people are seated in groups of a hundred and groups of fifty. Jesus says the usual “grace.” He gives thanks to God before breaking the loaves of bread and giving them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also did this with the fish. We see the scanty bread and fish feed all the people so completely that twelve baskets full of what was left were gathered up! This was not a skimpy miracle! It also teaches us to conserve our resources.

What is the meaning of this miracle??? In John’s account (John 6) it symbolizes Jesus’ ability to give the *bread of life*. Is this similar to the miracle of the manna in the wilderness??? Is it a prophecy of the Lord’s Supper??? Is it a prophecy of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Rev. 19)??? Perhaps there are elements of all three here, yet there are radical differences also. The actions of Jesus in feeding these people were familiar things which he gave new meaning in the Last Supper. An interesting clue is found in Mark 8:14-21. Mark makes no mention of the reaction of the people to this miracle. John tells us that they were about to come and seize him and make him king by force (John 6:14-15). But this was not why Jesus came.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 5:35 - 6:44)

1. How is Isaiah 42:3 fulfilled in Jesus, dealing with Jairus?

2. In what sense did they feel they were “bothering” Jesus (35)? (5:35)
3. What was Jairus to believe (36)?
4. In what sense was the girl sleeping?
5. Why command that she be given something to eat?
6. Why does Jesus command this raising from death be kept secret, when he openly raised the widow’s son and Lazarus?
7. Why did Jesus go to the synagogue in Nazareth when he had been rejected there before (Luke 4:14-30)?
8. Just what caused the amazement of those who heard Jesus?
9. Did the mother of Jesus have other children?
10. What darker meaning may be implied in calling Jesus “the son of Mary”?
11. Why was Jesus not able to perform miracles there? (6:5)

12. Why is a prophet respected everywhere but with his own people (4)? Relate this specifically to Jesus at Nazareth.

13. What reason lay behind the mission given to the Twelve (compare Matt. 9:36-38)?

14. Why the strange travel instructions?

15. Why stay in the same house until they left that place?

16. What was the message they were to tell the people?

17. What was the purpose of rubbing olive oil on the sick people (anointing them)?

18. How could shaking the dust off their feet be a warning to the people?

19. Why did the things which Jesus was saying make Herod think of John the Baptizer?

20. Why wasn't it right for Herod to marry Herodias?

21. If John spoke so plainly about Herod's sin, why did he like to hear him and why did he protect him?

22. Can the gospel be preached without any reference to human sin?
23. Did Herodias arrange things to trap Herod into making a rash vow?
24. Did the execution really silence the voice of John forever?
25. Some say you cannot preach to a man with an empty stomach. What responsibility does the Christian have to the physical needs of the unconverted?
26. What factors made it impossible to feed the crowd by normal means?
27. What two things did Jesus do for the crowd (34)? Does this set an example for medical and preaching work?
28. Why ask how much bread they had?
29. How much food were the people given?
30. What kind of miracle do we see performed here? What other events might it be related to?

Lesson Six

(Mark 6:45 - 7:37)

Jesus Walks on the Water

(Mark 6:45-56)

45 At once Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida, on the other side of the lake, while he sent the crowd away. After saying good-bye to the disciples, he went away to a hill to pray. 47 When evening came the boat was in the middle of the lake, while Jesus was alone on land. 48 He saw that his disciples were having trouble rowing the boat, because the wind was blowing against them; so sometime between three and six o'clock in the morning he came to them, walking on the water. He was going to pass them by. 49 But they saw him walking on the water. "It's a ghost!" they thought, and screamed. 50 For when they all saw him they were terrified.

Jesus spoke to them at once, "Courage!" he said. "It is I. Don't be afraid!" 51 Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind died down. The disciples were completely amazed, 52 because they had not understood what the loaves of bread meant; their minds could not grasp it.

53 They crossed the lake and came to land at Gennesaret, where they tied up the boat. 54 As they left the boat, people recognized Jesus at once. 55 So they ran throughout the whole region and brought the sick lying on their mats to him, wherever they heard he was. 56 And everywhere Jesus went, to villages, town, or farms, people would take their sick to the market places and beg him to let the sick at least touch the edge of his cloak; and all who touched it were made well.

Jesus *at once* made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead to Bethsiada (they must have expected to pick up Jesus there and go on to Capernaum, compare John 6:17). This leads us to think there is some connection with the fact that the crowd intended to make him the leader and focal point for an armed rebellion against the Romans. John tells us: "Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself" (John 6:15). With the faulty understanding, which the disciples had, they might have been in danger of being caught up by the intense emotion of the crowd. Even after the crucifixion and resurrection, they still thought in political terms (see Acts 1:6). And possibly Jesus himself was tempted by the thought (since the Devil had used this to tempt him, see Matt. 4:8-9). Mark seldom mentions Jesus praying, but now he shows Jesus going away to a hill to pray. This suggests a crisis. (Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, but did not sin, Heb. 4:15.)

Meanwhile the disciples are making very slow progress as they try to row against the wind. They are still in the middle of the lake (they probably had intended to go around the lake rather than across) and it is between three and six o'clock (fourth watch). This means they have been rowing against the fury of the storm for some eight or ten

hours. This helps us understand their terror when Jesus comes to them walking on the water. They think Jesus to be a “ghost,” and they *scream with fear!* The Master speaks at once to calm them: “Courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid!” “*Courage; do not be afraid*” is God’s word to his people when they are in a crisis. Compare Isaiah 41:10; 13; 14; 43:1; 44:2. “It is I,” (literally *I am*) may only be him identifying himself to them, but it might also have a hint of the “I AM” of God (compare John 8:24; 28; 58; Exod. 3:14). Mark is showing us the *authority* of Christ Jesus, and there is certainly the strong evidence of divine power in all that took place.

(Matthew gives some additional detail. He shows us Peter getting out of the boat and also walking on the water -- in response to the Lord’s authorization. Yet this is also evidence of the power of faith. As Peter’s faith begins to evaporate, he begins to sink in the water. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him. They both got into the boat, and the wind died down. If Peter is to be identified with Mark’s Gospel, this would be a truly embarrassing event to him.)

Verse 52 presents a puzzle. Matthew shows the disciples worshipping Jesus, but Mark introduces what could be taken as *doubt*. Mark seems to be saying that they were “taken by surprise” in this revealing of Jesus’ power, because they did not understand the true meaning of the feeding of the five thousand men. Alford says: “They did not, from the miracle which they had seen, infer the power of the Lord over nature... there was no intelligent comprehension *founded* on the miracle of the loaves.” The phrase in some versions, “*for their heart was hardened,*” is better translated, “*their minds could not grasp it*” (compare Mark 8:14-21).

John tells us that after Jesus got into the boat, “*immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.*” Since they were originally sent to Bethsaida at the top of the lake, the storm must have caused a change in plans. “*Immediately*” certainly indicates a miracle, rather than normal travel. We see Jesus “mobbed” by the crowds who seek healing for their diseases.

Religious Tradition

(Mark 7:1-13)

7 *The Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus. 2 They noticed that some of his disciples were eating their food with unclean hands -- that is, they had not washed them in the way the Pharisees said people should.*

3 *For the Pharisees, as well as the rest of the Jews, follow the teaching they received from their ancestors: they do not eat unless they wash their hands in the proper way, 4 nor do they eat anything that comes from the market unless they wash it first. And they follow many other rules, which they have received, such as the proper way to wash cups, pots, copper bowls, and beds.*

5 *So the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law asked Jesus, “Why is it that your disciples do not follow the teaching handed down by our ancestors, but instead eat with unclean hands?”*

6 *Jesus answered them, “How right Isaiah was when he prophesied about you! You are hypocrites, just as he wrote:*

*‘These people, says God, honor me with
their words,
but their heart is really far away from
me.*

*7 It is no use for them to worship me,
because they teach man-made command-
ments as though they were God’s rules!’*

8 *“You put aside the commandment of God and obey the teachings of men.”*

9 *And Jesus continued, “You have a clever way of rejecting God’s law in order to uphold your teaching. **10** For Moses commanded, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who says bad things about his father or mother must be put to death.’ **11** But you teach that if a person has something he could use to help his father or mother, but says, ‘This is Corban’ (which means, it belongs to God), **12** he is excused from helping his father or mother. **13** In this way you disregard the word of God with the teaching you pass on to others. And there are many other things like this that you do.”*

This could also be called “counterfeit religion.” The confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus show us two types of religion. What the Pharisees were trying to do is described by Paul in this way: *“They have not known the way in which God puts people right with himself, and instead they have tried to set up their own way; and so they did not submit themselves to God’s way of putting people right”* (Rom. 11:3). Two basic questions run through this chapter: the question of the things that make a person “unclean”; and the question of “the teachings of men and man-made rules and traditions.” Note the quotation from Isaiah in verses six and seven.

Mark explains the things unfamiliar to his Gentile readers in verses three and four. It is true that these rules about washing had a good result from the viewpoint of health. They improved sanitation. However, this is not the purpose that the Pharisees had in mind. They had a special *ritual* of washing which they believed would prevent possible defilement from certain contacts and would make a person religiously clean. The Jewish law did prohibit certain foods and practices, but the Pharisees had extravagantly expanded the list of such things beyond reason, which, they said, made a person spiritually or ceremonially unclean or defiled. In this *condition*, they would not permit such a person to take part in the public worship until he or she had performed certain rituals which (in their thinking) would remove the defilement.

The fact that the disciples had not ritually washed their hands may imply that Jesus taught them it was not necessary to do so. When Mark says “all the rest of the Jews” (verse three), he may only mean the Pharisees, etc. Perhaps most of the common people found these restrictions too difficult to follow. The law did not require this ritual washing, but their tradition did. And the Jewish leaders were so strict about this, that when Rabbi Akiba was in prison with barely enough water to stay alive, he used it for ritual washing. But Jesus was kicking their traditional beliefs, since what the disciples did would be taken as evidence of his beliefs.

Jesus answers their charge by challenging one of their flagrant violations of God’s law. He says: *“You have a clever way of rejecting God’s law in order to uphold your own teaching.”* Their tradition allowed them to declare all their material possessions “Corban,” and this then relieved them of any obligation to take care of their aged parents.

This was a “legal fiction,” because it did not mean that the possessions were actually turned over to religious use. They evidently kept these things, but said to their parents, “This is Corban to you.” In this way they believed they were fulfilling the *letter* of the law, while continuing to keep and use their worldly wealth for themselves. Jesus calls them “hypocrites,” which in Jewish thinking meant “godless.” The “many other things” would certainly include their restrictive Sabbath tradition (see Mark 2:23-28). A more important question, is : Does the church today fall into this same kind of trap in their thinking???

Where Does Sin Originate?

(Mark 7:14 -23)

14 Then Jesus called the crowd to him once more and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. 15 There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him unclean. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. [16 Listen, then, if you have ears to hear with!]”

17 When he left the crowd and went into the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 “You are no more intelligent than the others,” Jesus said to them. “Don’t you understand? Nothing that goes into a person from the outside can really make him unclean, 19 because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach and then goes on out of the body.” (In saying this Jesus declared that all foods are fit to be eaten.)

20 And he went on to say, “It is what comes out of a person that makes him unclean. 21 For from the inside, from a man’s heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, kill, 22 commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly -- 23 all these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean.”

The question involving tradition dealt with authority in religious matters. Now Jesus returns to the question of the things that make a person *unclean*. This was the issue which the Pharisees raised. Jesus calls the crowd to him, and gives a general principle which is universal in its application. The principle is stated in the form of a parable within the structure of *ritual law*. As verse 19 shows, Jesus is speaking about foods entering the body and being expelled, but this has a much wider spiritual application. The Law of Moses gave some restrictions on food, but *tradition* had evolved a complex system. These traditional laws caused serious problems in the early church (see Acts 10:9-15; Gal. 2:1-5; Rom. 14:1-12; Acts 15:19-21).

The disciples are puzzled by what Jesus has said. Jesus rebukes them and restates the “spirit” of the Law. Nothing that comes into the body from the outside can contaminate the *heart*. “Heart” here is used in the sense of the real person (the whole inner person of the individual and not simply the emotions; the part that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and reasons). Evil actions and evil words begin from evil ideas. Compare Matt. 7:15-20. The source of things that make a person unclean are *internal*. James writes: “But a person is tempted when he is drawn away and trapped by his own evil desire. Then his evil desire conceives and gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15).

Obviously, then, these external rites which the Jewish leaders were so proud of, “*have no real value in controlling physical passions*” (see Col. 2:20-23). By what Jesus said here, he rendered *obsolete* and *canceled* all such distinctions between clean and “unclean” foods, material objects, and people. None of the religious ritual in the world, such as sacrifices, washing, fasting and penance, can in any way change the “color” of a person’s heart in God’s sight. Only the *one true sacrifice* which is the *Crucified Christ* (Heb. 10:9) promises God’s offer to *put men right with Himself*. Paul writes: “It was not because of any good deeds that we ourselves had done, but because of his own mercy that he saved us, through the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth and new life by washing us” (*by washing-of-regeneration-and-renewing of the Holy Ghost*) Titus 3:5. (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper cannot be classed in with purely external things. And physical actions can have spiritual results when the Lord is the source of authority for them. Look at C” (“color” of a person’s heart in God’s sight. Only the _ _ _ _ _

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Titus 3:5. (Baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot be classed in with purely external things. And physical actions can have spiritual results when the Lord is the source of Titus 3:5. (Baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot be classed in with purely external things. And physical actions can have Titus 3:5. (Baptism and the Lord's Supper cannot be classed in with purely external things. And physical actions **27** But Jesus answered, "Let us feed the children first; it isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

28 "Sir," she answered, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!"

29 So Jesus said to her, "For such an answer you may go home; the demon has gone out of your daughter!"

30 She went back home and found her child lying on the bed; the demon had indeed gone out of her.

The fact that Jesus confined his ministry to the Jewish people almost completely, may seem strange. He declared: "I have been sent only to those lost sheep, the people of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). In sending out the Twelve, Jesus said, "do not go to any Gentile territory or any Samaritan towns" (Matt. 10:5). Yet the lesson of the previous section would seem to cancel the dogma of "Jewish parochialism." Evidently Jesus was intent on calling the Jewish Nation to *renewal* (compare Matt. 23:37). In this account of a woman's faith, we see something of the universal nature of Christ's upcoming *sacrificial death* (and compare what James says in Acts 15:12-18). The real meaning is found in the words of this conversation. This woman is a Gentile (not part-Jewish as were the Samaritans), born in Phoenicia in Syria. She recognizes Jesus (which shows his fame even in other places) and comes pleading with him to help her daughter. Matthew gives some additional detail, and shows Jesus at first ignoring the woman. After his response to the disciples' statement, she comes and falls at his feet, begging "Help me, sir!" Jesus seems to give her a harsh refusal. "Let us first feed the children. It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Now, dogs were not "man's best friend" at that time and place. They thought of them as we think of vultures. Jews called Gentiles "dogs" to insult them. But certainly as Jesus says this, the expression on his face and the tone of his voice make the words gently ironic. He uses a word which means "little dogs" which were allowed in the house. She answers: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!" (The housedogs ate the leftovers even while the meal was in progress.) If Jesus had been trying to lead the woman to express faith, her response was immediate. She admits the priority of the Jews in being fed first, but she claimed the blessing of the "leftovers!" She has given the correct answer, and it is because of this, Jesus says, that the demon has gone out of her daughter. Matthew tells us, "And at that very moment her daughter was healed" (Matt. 15:28). This healing took place at a distance (compare Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; John 4:46-53). There must be deep meaning in the fact that Jesus arranged things in such a way for this woman (and others) to show her depth and faith.

Of course this did not solve the problem of Jew and Gentile. In giving the "Great Commission" for his church, Jesus sent them to everyone -- Jew first, then Gentile (Greek). But it would seem that the church today has mostly forgotten the part about the

“Jew.” Both Jews and Gentiles are to be put right with God through the *one true sacrifice* which is the Crucified Christ!!!

Jesus heals a deaf-mute

(Mark 7:31-37)

31 Jesus then left the neighborhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. 32 Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and begged Jesus to place his hand on him. 33 So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. 34 Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up!"

35 At once the man's ears were opened, his tongue was set loose, and he began to talk without any trouble. 36 Then Jesus ordered them all not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them, the more they told it. 37 And all who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they exclaimed. "He even makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

Jesus takes the most roundabout way to go from Tyre to Lake Galilee. If you will look at a map, he first went north to Sidon, then southeast across the Jordan River, then a wide sweep down to the territory of the Ten Towns (Decapolis), and on to Lake Galilee. This would be at least 150 miles, and may have been to escape the crowds. However he may have ministered to the people as he passed through.

Only Mark gives us this miracle. Alford says the miracle is important because it clearly distinguishes between the cases of demon possession and those who are merely diseased or deformed. Perhaps someone might think it more difficult to deal with a purely physical illness. Some have thought the man might be a Gentile (since this was in the territory east of Lake Galilee), but Jesus' use of Aramaic ("Ephphatha," Mark's vivid description preserves the original word used) seems strong evidence that he was Jewish. The man is deaf and "could hardly speak." Nothing is said about this being due to an evil spirit.

Jesus puts his fingers in the deaf ears, and touched the mute tongue. Johnson thinks Jesus did this to produce faith in the man. Also remember the man was deaf, and Jesus is indicating in "sign language" what He intends to do. The "deep groan" (more than a sigh) may be part of the "looking up to heaven" to show the source of the healing, and perhaps in prayer (compare Rom. 8:26; John 11:41-42); or as Farrar thinks, expressing sympathy for the millions who will never hear and never speak. Mark tells us: "*at once*" the man was able to hear and to speak. Notice Jesus orders *the people* (implying there were some who saw him do this) not to speak about the miracle to others. Jesus didn't try to impress people, nor did he try to honor himself. He was walking the road to the cross! Another question: Was this incident unique, or did Jesus work this way at other times??? No one can say for sure, but Jesus did many things which are not recorded for us (see John 20:30).

The key to this miracle lies in what the people there were saying. "How well he does everything! He even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." Compare Isaiah 35:5-6: "*The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy.*" This was a prophecy of the

coming *new age* of salvation, and so miracles such as these were a *sign* of the coming Kingdom. (Compare the language in Heb. 9:26; 1 Cor 10:11.) God was acting in history to set the whole world free!!! And so it becomes even more important to learn *who this is* who brings the signs of the age of the Messiah!!!

Also, there is something ironic in the fact that those who saw this miracle could not be silenced -- while we who have been told to spread the Good News to everyone everywhere, are tempted to refuse to speak.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 6:45 - 7:37)

1. Why the urgency in sending the disciples over the lake to Bethsaida?
2. Was there some special reason why Jesus wanted to be alone with God in prayer? Compare John 6:15.
3. When Jesus reached them on the water, how far and how long had they rowed?
4. Why doesn't Mark tell about Peter walking on the water also?
5. How appropriate were the words which Jesus spoke to reassure them?
6. When and why did the wind die down?
7. What is meant by "ritually unclean" or "defiled" hands?
8. Does verse three mean that every Jewish person followed the tradition (teaching of the ancestors)?
9. Wasn't it unkind for Jesus to call these men hypocrites? Compare Matt. 15:12-14.
10. In what sense had the Pharisees honored God with their words?
11. Why does Jesus say, "It is no use for them to worship me" (verse seven)? What kind of worship does God reject?

12. Is Jesus saying that they love man-made rules better than they love God's laws? Why?
13. Compare the idea of "ritually unclean" (defiled) as Jesus uses it in verse 15, with what the Pharisees say in verse five.

14. Jesus says, "Nothing that goes into a person" (verse 18). How much is included in the "nothing"? What about poisons, pollution, etc.?

15. The figure changes from food to ideas. Explain this.

16. Did Jesus expect the crowd to understand what he was saying?
17. Was Jesus canceling the Jewish dietary laws by that he said in verses 18-19? Explain.

18. Read Roman 14 and show how "love fulfills the law."

19. Discuss the twelve things which Jesus says make a person "unclean."

20. What could have been the purpose for Jesus wanting to stay hidden (verse 24)?

21. Give three facts about the woman who came to Jesus.

22. Who are the "children" in verse 27, and who are the "dogs"?

23. Explain the "leftovers" ("crumbs") in verse 28. What is she saying?

24. Was there ever any period of convalescence in the healings of Jesus?
25. Read Matt. 15:29-31 and compare it with the healing of the deaf-mute.
26. Show how Jesus adapted his words and actions to the one to be healed.
27. What did the deaf-mute think when Jesus “looked up to heaven”?
28. Why does Mark preserve the Aramaic word which Jesus spoke?
29. Did the deaf-mute *hear* the word “Ephphatha”? Why?
30. Who said, “How well he does everything”?

Lesson Seven

(Mark 8:1-9:29)

Jesus Feeds Four Thousand People

(Mark 8:1-10)

8 *Not long afterward, another large crowd came together. When they had nothing left to eat, Jesus called the disciples to him and said, 2 “I feel sorry for these people, because they have been with me for three days and now have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home without feeding them they will faint as they go, because some of them have come a long way.”*

4 His disciples asked him, “Where in this desert can anyone find enough food to feed all these people?”

5 “How much bread do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven loaves,” they answered.

6 He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves, gave thanks to God, broke them, and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the crowd; and the disciples did so. 7 They also had a few small fish. Jesus gave thanks for these and told the disciples to distribute them too. 8 Everybody ate and had enough -- there were about four thousand people. 9 Then the disciples took up seven baskets full of pieces left over. Jesus sent the people away, 10 and at once got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

It should be no surprise that during three and a half years of public ministry, Jesus would do similar miracles many times. It does seem strange that the disciples had so much trouble understanding what He could *do*, yet we all know how hard it is to overcome preconceived ideas. Mark and Matthew give almost identical statements of this miracle, with Mark adding in verse three, “because some of them have come a long way.” In the feeding of the five thousand, they sat down on the green grass. Here they sit on the ground. This implies it is later in the year when the grass has been dried up by the sun’s heat. This would be evidence that we are dealing with two separate events. Jesus settles this question by mentioning both in verses 19-20.

The crowd had been with Jesus three days. As the Jews counted time, this could mean one whole day and parts of preceding and following days (not necessarily 72 hours). This shows the intensity of their interest in him. But they have stayed so long that they have eaten up all their supplies and now have nothing left. Jesus could have sent them away to take care of themselves. But, once again, we see the sympathy of Jesus for us human beings. His concern for the well-being of his followers, indicates his concern for our spiritual health as well. As Jesus looks at the crowd, he is aware that some would faint from hunger if they attempted to return home without food.

The disciples ask, “Where in this desert can anyone find enough food to feed all these people?” This may be a hint to Jesus to perform another miracle. But it may also be evidence of their stupidity. Compare verses 17-21. This is the way it is in times of crisis. We forget the things which God has done in the past. Each new crisis seems impossible to deal with, and each new crisis makes it seem we have used up our allotment of God’s grace. God parts the waters of the Red Sea, and as soon as Israel is across, they begin to complain against God because there is no water to drink.

The mechanics of the miracle are quite similar to the feeding of the five thousand. The numbers of loaves and fish are different, but the result is the same. Everyone eats their fill, and once again the leftovers are gathered up, filling seven baskets. (These are large baskets this time, almost large enough to hold a man.) The identity of the people who make up this crowd remains a mystery. From the fact that Jesus and the disciples got into the boat and went to Dalmanutha (in the territory of Magadan), the feeding must have taken place in the territory of the Ten Towns (Decapolis). If this is correct, the crowd could have been Gentile, and the purpose of the account may be to show how Jesus fed Gentiles after He had fed Jews (compare Mark 7:27). This could also explain why Mark uses some of his precious space to record two such similar miracles. Dalmanutha (not otherwise identified) was evidently near Tiberias on the western shore, and might have been the same as Magdala.

Belief and Unbelief

(Mark 8:11-26)

11 Some Pharisees came to Jesus and started to argue with him. They wanted to trap him, so they asked him to perform a miracle to show God's approval. 12 Jesus gave a deep groan and said, "Why do the people of this day ask for a miracle? No, I tell you! No such proof will be given this people!"

13 He left them, got back into the boat, and started across to the other side of the lake.

14 The disciples had forgotten to bring any extra bread, and had only one loaf with them in the boat. 15 "Look out," Jesus warned them, "and be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod."

16 They started discussing among themselves, "He says this because we don't have any bread."

17 Jesus knew what they were saying, so he asked them, "Why are you discussing about not having any bread? Don't you know or understand yet? Are your minds so dull? 18 You have eyes -- can't you see? You have ears -- can't you hear? Don't you remember 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand people? How many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?" "Twelve," they answered.

20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand people," asked Jesus, "how many baskets full of leftover pieces did you take up?" "Seven," they answered.

21 "And you still don't understand?" he asked them.

22 They came to Bethsaida, where some people brought a blind man to Jesus and begged him to touch him. 23 Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. After spitting on the man's eyes, Jesus placed his hands on him and asked him, "Can you see anything?"

24 The man looked up and said, "Yes, I can see people, but they look like trees walking around."

25 Jesus again placed his hands on the man's eyes. This time the man looked hard, his eyesight came back, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus then sent him home with the order, "Don't go back into the village."

It is surprising that not even the miraculous feeding of hungry crowds was enough to satisfy and convince the Pharisees (compare John 6:25-31). But then the problem was not one of sufficient evidence (of which there was more than enough). They ask for some great sign in the heavens, which only God could do, to prove to them that Jesus is who he says he is. But they have already decided *not* to believe! Any faith which must be based upon great signs and wonders is no faith at all. Such faith doesn't involve any real change of attitude (compare Luke 16:30-31). Mark shows Jesus saying, "No such proof will be given to these people!" Matthew (on an apparently different occasion) has Jesus saying, "The only miracle you will be given is the miracle of Jonah." A Jewish person would understand this, and it was to be the *ultimate act* of Jesus. This would be *God's act in Christ to set us free!!!* Compare Acts 13:29-37. As the great fish finally gave up Jonah, so did death and the grave give up Jesus who was God the Son.

Jesus had performed miracles before this, and he did continue to do such things. What he says in verse 12 must be taken as meaning that he will make no attempt to *force* belief on those who refuse to believe. As we see him, he continued to bless those who were willing to believe and he healed and saved such people. Those who believed found plenty of evidence to confirm their faith!

Next we see Jesus warning his disciples against the evil influence of the Pharisees and Herod. Why is Herod included? Compare Luke 13:31-32. But the disciples have their priorities mixed up, and they think the most pressing problem is that they have no food in the boat. And so they mistakenly associate the mention of “yeast” (“leaven”) with the lack of bread. This is the third time, then, that they seem totally unaware that Jesus is an inexhaustible source of food, since he can work miracles. “Have ye your heart yet hardened?” is better translated, “Are your minds so dull?” They can see and hear; they can remember; they saw the miracles of feeding the five thousand and of feeding the four thousand. Have they so soon forgotten his ability to provide more than enough??? He sadly concludes: “*And you still don’t understand?*”

Why would Mark include a second miracle of healing the blind (compare Mark 7:31ff.)? This incident is clearly a different one, since mention is made of a “two-staged” healing. Why two stages??? Perhaps to symbolize a two-level understanding of who Jesus is. Certainly He is a prophet, but to see him as only this and nothing more is comparable to “see people . . . like trees walking around.” Vision, which has been blanked out, does not come back all at once. When sight is gained, it is still ineffective if the mind cannot interpret it. We may see the human side of Jesus, but be completely unaware of the *divine* (see 2 Cor. 5:16). He is the *perfect light*, and the haze and twilight will be overcome as we learn more of His real work and His teaching. He is God’s complete *Message* to us (see Heb. 1:1-2).

Peter’s Declaration About Jesus

(Mark 8:27-9:1)

27 Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Tell me, who do people say I am?”

28 “Some say that you are John the Baptist,” they answered; “others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets.”

29 “What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

30 Then Jesus ordered them, “Do not tell anyone about me.”

31 Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer much, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, and after three days he will rise to life.” 32 He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. “Get away from me, Satan,” he said. “Your thoughts are men’s thoughts, not God’s!

34 Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. “If anyone wants to come with me,” he told them, “he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 Does a man gain anything if he wins the whole world but

loses his life? Of course not! **37** There is nothing a man can give to regain his life. **38** If, then, a man is ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

9 And he went on to say, “Remember this! There are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power.”

The integrative center of the gospel is found in Peter’s declaration (confession): “You are the Messiah.” (“Christ” means “Messiah.”) At this point in time, the Messiahship was a *realized fact!* “*The Word became a human being. . .*” (John 1:14; compare 1 John 1:1-4). Even though the disciples were incapable of understanding the true meaning of this (see John 16:12-15), the Spirit would lead them into all the truth. Matthew shows Jesus answering Peter’s declaration by saying: “*For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven*” (Matt. 16:17). If we are to be truly biblical, then we must center our faith on “. . . the revelation of the secret truth which was hidden for long ages in the past, but now has been brought out in the open . . .” (compare Rom. 16:25-26; 1 Tim. 3:16).

It is important to know who Jesus is!!! The people were saying that He was John the Baptizer come back from the dead (compare Mark 6:14-15); or that He was Elijah (compare Malachi 4:5-6; but see Mark 9:11-13): or that He was one of the prophets who was to herald the coming of the Messiah. Peter identifies Jesus as *The Messiah*, and Jesus accepts this title as true. But it was not yet time to make a public claim of this fact. To do so would cause trouble with the authorities, lead to wrong ideas in the minds of the people, and precipitate a crisis before the proper time. Note that Jesus reveals a new fact about himself by using the title, “Son of Man.” This is one of Jesus’ favorite titles for himself (he uses it some 80 times in the Gospels). Note how the Jews thought of it (see Luke 22:69-70). “Son of God” identifies Jesus as the Great King. “Son of Man” shows God’s Holy One who is despised and scorned by everyone and who suffers punishment because of us (see Psalm 22; 69; 118; Isa. 50; 52; 53; Zech. 13:7). Jesus speaks of his coming death and resurrection. But this is too great a shock for Peter. It is ironic that the one who declared Jesus to be the Messiah, now rebukes Him for speaking of death. In doing so, Peter has assumed the role of Satan, and Jesus must rebuke him.

Jesus also speaks to the larger group of people and tells them that they must also expose themselves to suffering and rejection (and of course be raised from death) for his sake. So important is the *gift of life in Christ Jesus*, that if a person could gain the whole world for himself but lose his life, he would have nothing! One may save his life for eternity only by giving it away temporarily (compare Rom. 12:1-2). Who can set a price for a person’s life??? But God did this, by sending Jesus to be our sin-offering! The *price* God was willing to pay for *you* as an individual was *Christ-on-the-cross!!!* How does a person lose his life??? By refusing to reach out through faith to seize Jesus and hold on firmly to him. A person’s eternal destiny depends upon his or her seizing Christ by faith *in this present world*. (Note: PSUCHE is translated “life” in verse 35, and many think it should be so translated in verses 36-37, as the scholars of the TEV, RSV, NEB, NIV footnote, etc., have done. McGarvey renders it this way in *The Fourfold Gospel*.

The Bible presents man as a *unity* in 1 Thess. 5:23, and teaches the *resurrection of the body* in 1 Cor. 15, etc.)

In 9:1 Jesus predicts that the Kingdom of God would come within the normal lifespan of some who were in his audience at that time. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, Peter explained what had happened by saying, “*This is what the prophet Joel spoke about.*” Less than forty years later, Paul could say, “He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Compare the parallel accounts in Matt. 16:28; Luke 9:27.

The Transfiguration

(Mark 9:2-13)

2 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. As they looked on, a change came over him, 3 and his clothes became shining white, whiter than anyone in the world could wash them. 4 Then the three disciples saw Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter spoke up and said to Jesus, “Teacher, it is a good thing that we are here. We will make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6 He and the others were so frightened that he did not know what to say.

7 A cloud appeared and covered them with its shadow, and a voice came from the cloud, “This is my own dear Son -- listen to him!” 8 They took a quick look around but did not see anyone else; only Jesus was with them.

9 As they came down the mountain Jesus ordered them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has risen from death.”

10 They obeyed his order, but among themselves they started discussing the matter, “What does this ‘rising from death’ mean?”

11 And they asked Jesus, “Why do the teachers of the Law say that Elijah has to come first?”

12 His answer was, “Elijah does indeed come first to get everything ready. Yet why do the Scriptures say that the Son of Man will suffer much and be rejected? 13 I tell you, however, that Elijah has already come, and that people did to him what they wanted to, just as the Scriptures say about him.”

The high mountain must have been Mt. Hermon (10,000 feet), since Mt. Tabor had a town and a fortress on its top. Peter, James, and John, seem to be the inner circle of those closest to Jesus. These three men were eyewitnesses of the Divine Glory of this One who was the Son of Man. This confirmed the Messiahship of Christ which Peter had declared. Mark tells us: “*As they looked on, a change came over Jesus, and His clothes became shining white -- whiter than anyone in the world could wash them.*” This is symbolic of the supernatural, and of the Divinity of Jesus the Christ. (We also have a share in this as well, see 1 John 3:2.) Both Moses and Elijah were special in Jewish thinking. Elijah had not died at all (2 Kings 2:11). Moses, at the moment of death, was snatched bodily from the Devil’s power (Jude 9; Deut. 34:6). This was not a *vision*, but both had really come from the world of the dead (Hades) to be with Jesus at this time.

Note they were talking with Jesus. Luke tells us: “. . . and talked with Jesus about the way in which he would soon fulfill God’s purpose by dying in Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:31). God chose to make this *historical act* of Jesus’ death to be the focal point of his saving grace. Compare Heb. 9:15; 10:9-10; Col. 1:20.

In Jewish thinking, Moses was the representative of the law; Elijah of the prophets (compare Matt. 7:12). Peter has seen the spiritual power of a small piece of eternity here, and he thinks something ought to be done to honor the occasion. Small tents or booths were made for the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the time when the ancient Hebrews lived in tents. Perhaps Peter thinks that making three of these tents would keep Moses and Elijah from returning to the world of the dead, and that this would bring about the “earthly kingdom of the Messiah” that the Jews were expecting. Mark points out that they really did not know what they were saying (verse six). A shining cloud appeared, which would immediately be taken by the disciples as showing the presence of God. The same voice which spoke at Jesus’ baptism, now confirms what Peter had declared. “*This is my own dear Son -- listen to him!*” Luke tells us that when the voice stopped, there was Jesus all alone. In this way God was showing that Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) were fulfilled and superseded. “*But in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son*” (Heb. 1:2). The work of the Old Testament portion of the Bible was to prepare the world for the coming of Messiah. Jesus is the person around whom the entire Bible centers! Jesus is the “go-between” who arranges a new covenant between God and mankind (it is a “will” to us humans, see Heb. 9:15-18).

Jesus pointed toward a special resurrection of the Son of Man, and this they did not understand, nor could they until Jesus had in fact risen from death. The proper time for telling these things would be *after* Jesus had finished his work on the cross. John the Baptizer came in the “spirit and power of Elijah.” Compare Malachi 3:1; 4:5 with Mark 1:1-3. John was killed (Matt. 14:6-12), and Jesus was to be killed also. (Judaism was superseded in Christ and the new covenant. John fulfilled the prophecy, and we do not look for a “third Elijah.” If Christianity needed to be “restored,” a Jewish prophet would be out of place. One of the apostles would better fit the job.)

If You Yourself Can!

(Mark 9:14-29)

14 When they joined the rest of the disciples, they saw a large crowd there. Some teachers of the Law were arguing with the disciples. 15 As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were greatly surprised and ran to him and greeted him. 16 Jesus asked his disciples, “What are you arguing with them about?”

17 A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, because he has an evil spirit in him and cannot talk. 18 Whenever the spirit attacks him, it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth, grits his teeth, and becomes stiff all over. I asked your disciples to drive the spirit out, but they could not.”

19 Jesus said to them, “How unbelieving you people are! How long must I stay with you? How long do I have to put up with you? Bring the boy to me!” 20 They brought him to Jesus. As soon as the spirit saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a fit, so that he fell on the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 “How long has he been like this?” Jesus asked the father. “Ever since he was a child,” he replied. 22

“Many times it has tried to kill him by throwing him in the fire and in the water. Have pity on us and help us, if you possibly can!”

23 “Yes,” said Jesus, “if you can! Everything is possible for the person who has faith.”

24 The father at once cried out, “I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!”

25 Jesus noticed that the crowd was closing in on them, so he gave a command to the evil spirit. “Deaf and dumb spirit,” he said, “I order you to come out of the boy and never go into him again!”

26 The spirit screamed, threw the boy into a bad fit, and came out. The boy looked like a corpse, so that everyone said, “He is dead!” 27 But Jesus took the boy by the hand and helped him rise, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive the spirit out?”

29 “Only prayer can drive this kind out,” answered Jesus; “nothing else can.”

“Just as I am! Without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!” These familiar words were written in the last century by Charlotte Elliott, who “never knew a well day,” though she lived to see her eighty-second year. The song is particularly appropriate for this miracle of Jesus.

From the celestial glory of the Transfiguration we come back into the world of human need. Faith is the means by which we seize the promise and power of God in order to overcome the “world.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke each give independent versions of this healing, with Mark giving the most detail. Only Mark gives the key statement of verse 23: *“Yes, if you yourself can!”* (This follows the corrected Greek text.) DeWelt understands Jesus to be saying: “You have inquired about ability and whether any help is possible, but you have misplaced the question. The question of ability is in you, not in me. Faith is the secret of ability and of possibility. The power is sufficient on my part; is it on yours? I can give, but can you receive?” The father understands and immediately responds: *“I do have faith, but not enough. Help me have more!”* DeWelt understands the father to be saying: “I believe, and yet my faith is scarcely worthy of the name; I hardly dare to call it faith or to plead by it as a believing man. Yet do not wait for something better, but grant my prayer, even to this faith which is no faith. I do believe; but if my belief is no better than unbelief, still heal my son. Do not sternly judge my faith, but help me as I am.” There is no contradiction in this, since as the father stops to study his own faith, he is deeply aware of his great need for faith, and this is the beginning of his relationship with Jesus.

The boy has the symptoms of epilepsy, but the real cause in this case is an evil spirit. (In the language of King James, *lunatic* means *epileptic*.) There must be something unusual about this incident. Mark shows us the disciples and the teachers of the law arguing -- evidently about why the disciples failed to heal the boy. Probably they said that since the disciples couldn’t do it, neither could Jesus. But why did the disciples fail??? They had been given power (Mark 6:7). Remember that Peter, James, and John, the three leading disciples, had been with Jesus. It was the other nine who have failed. Alford says the rebuke in verse 19 is not specifically to either the disciples or the father,

but to people in general. In this we see the contrast between “heaven open and the sons of glory on the mountain,” and the “valley of misery, pain, and unbelief.” However, Matthew shows Jesus telling the disciples that the reason for their failure was *their unbelief* (Matt. 17:19-20). Mark shows him saying, “Only prayer can drive this kind out, nothing else can.” (“Fasting” is not in the corrected text.) This must be an extreme case, one which will yield only to faith which uses all the means of strength. Faith reaches out through prayer to seize the power of Christ. Prayer is the “spoken expression of faith and the active appeal to God for His help to give more faith.” Even when faith is weak, Jesus will help those who call upon Him!

Do not think of prayer (and fasting) as a *ritual of exorcism*, but rather as general principles of Christian growth. When *faith* focuses on God’s ACT in Christ, we forget self and can do many things through Christ. When *faith* turns inward to self, we cannot drive out the “evil spirits” of worldliness, selfishness, greed, immorality, etc. Compare Peter’s example in Matt. 14:29-30.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 8:1 - 9:29)

1. Would it make any difference if the accounts of feeding the five thousand and of feeding the four thousand were actually two versions of the same event?
2. Were the four thousand, Gentiles? Why?
3. Show at least three specific differences between the two feedings.
4. Why did the disciples ask the question of verse four?
5. Why didn’t Jesus ask the disciples to give the people something to eat, as he did before?
6. In what way does Mark show the stupidity of the disciples? Is that the way we act? What can we do about it?
7. Just what kind of sign did these Pharisees want from Jesus?

8. How was their spiritual blindness indicated?
9. What was the true sign which they failed to recognize? Compare Matthew 12:38-42.
10. Jesus asked three questions in verse 17. How do they relate to the disciples? How do they relate to us today?
11. Did Jesus actually spit on the eyes of the blind man? Why would he do this?
12. What could have been the purpose in the two stages of healing the blind man?
13. Why does Jesus ask what the people are saying about him? In what way could he be like John, Elijah, or the Prophet?
14. What did Peter mean by his use of the name “Messiah” (“Christ”)?
15. What meaning is in “Son of Man” which Jesus applies to Himself?
16. Why look at all the disciples and then rebuke only Peter? In what sense was Jesus *not* speaking to Peter?
17. Show how the whole ministry of Christ appeared to the disciples to contradict their Messianic hopes.

18. What “time frame” does Jesus use to describe the coming “Kingdom of God”?
19. Was there some reason for taking three men with Him up a high mountain? Why these particular men?
20. Please give your definition of “transfiguration.” How was Jesus “changed” (compare Phil. 2:6)?
21. In what form did Moses and Elijah appear? How did Peter, James, and John recognize them?
22. Read Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36 and tell what they discussed.
23. Why the declaration in verse seven at this time? What did it mean to those who heard it?
24. In what sense had Elijah already come? What was to be restored by Elijah?
25. Why had the teachers of the law followed the disciples? Why were they arguing?
26. The boy is described as an epileptic (Matt. 17:15). Is epilepsy always caused by evil spirits?
27. Who were the unbelieving people of verse 19?
28. Jesus used the words of the father to make a special appeal to him. What was this?

29. How did the father interpret the words of Jesus? In what sense did he believe? In what sense didn't he believe? How does the song, "Just As I Am" written by Charlotte Elliott, fit the father?

30. What rebuke and lesson for the disciples do you find in verse 29?

Lesson Eight

(Mark 9:30 - 10:31)

Who is the Greatest?

(Mark 9:30-37)

30 They left that place and went on through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where he was, 31 because he was teaching his disciples, "The son of Man will be handed over to men who will kill him; three days later, however, he will rise to life."

32 They did not understand what this teaching meant, but they were afraid to ask him.

33 They came to Capernaum, and after going indoors Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you arguing about on the road?"

34 But they would not answer him, because on the road they had been arguing among themselves about who was the greatest.

35 Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all." 36 He took a child and made him stand in front of them. Then he put his arms around him and said to them, 37 "Whoever in my name welcomes one of these children, welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes not only me but also the one who sent me."

Jesus is the Logos who became a human being. But how can we comprehend the nature and limitations which His humanity imposed on His divinity??? Compare Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. Ch. 2; etc. He certainly was aware of the death which was prepared for Him, even before the transfiguration. Even though He was nailed to the cross by the hands of wicked men, He permitted this to be done out of His own free will (compare John 10:17-18; Matt. 26:53-54). Try to visualize the feeling of the disciples at this time. They did not have the advantage which we have, of knowing beforehand how it all came out. For them it would be as Zechariah prophesied: "God will kill the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered" (Matt. 26:31; Zech. 13:7). They had to be prepared for the crisis which was to come upon them, so that when Jesus rose to life in triumph, they could fulfill the mission for which they had been chosen.

A perpetual problem created by their faulty understanding of the coming kingdom, was the question of who would be the most important in what they saw as the political government of the new age. Jewish thinking expected the Messiah to bring back

the golden age of David and Solomon (in political terms). Contrast this with how James uses the prophecy of David's kingdom being rebuilt (Acts 15:13-18). Jesus was well aware why they were arguing among themselves, and the disciples were embarrassed by his question, because they don't want him to know what they have been doing. But Jesus has something important to tell them, and it is in the context of their argument. No doubt Jesus has said this many times. *"Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of all and be the servant of all."* In God's kingdom, greatness is not measured by normal human standards. See how Jesus said it in Matt. 20:26-28. Paul also said, "For it is not ourselves that we preach; we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

In order to emphasize this, Jesus takes a child and has him stand in front of the disciples -- as a parable. In the first century world, children were thought of as the property of the father. This shows the importance of the way in which Jesus treated both children and women as *real people*. The disciples (and we ourselves) are being given a command *which they must do for themselves*. Little children are humble, teachable, without selfish ambition, without sinful pride, do not hold grudges, etc. If the disciples want to enter the kingdom of heaven, they should not waste time arguing about who is the greatest, but rather think about whether they would even be allowed in!

In the Kingdom of God, there are no second class citizens. The Jewish leaders believed themselves to be the elite and thought the common people not worth saving. Therefore they were shocked when Jesus mixed freely with the common people (Matt. 9:10-13; 11:19). God's act in Christ makes salvation available to *everyone* who will listen and come!!!

Jesus makes it even stronger in verse 37. Welcoming the Father depends upon already having welcomed the Son, and welcoming the Son depends on already having welcomed a child (that is, one who is insignificant). One learns Christ and even God the Father through what he learns in serving his fellowman. See how Jesus pictures the day of Judgment in Matt. 25:31-46.

Hard Teaching (Mark 9:38-50)

38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group."

39 "Do not try to stop him," Jesus told them, "because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon after to say bad things about me. **40** For whoever is not against us is for us. **41** Remember this! Anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to Christ will certainly receive his reward."

42 "If anyone should cause one of these little ones to turn away from his faith in me, it would be better for that man to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea. **43** So if your hand makes you turn away, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. [**44** There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'] **45** And if your foot makes you turn away, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. [**46** There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'] **47** And if your eye makes you turn away, take it out! It is better

for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye, than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 There 'their worms never die, and the fire is never put out.'

49 "For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Human nature runs to extremes, and is often more strict than necessary. Jesus was much more tolerant than his disciples. The incident of the exorcist which Mark records here, teaches a valuable lesson in tolerance. Jesus had taught them that welcoming anyone, even a little child, *in His name*, is welcoming Him. This makes John remember something that had happened, and he asks Jesus, "Were we doing right when we told this man to stop driving out demons? He was using your name, but doesn't belong to our group." Note that this man was actually doing what the Apostles had been given a special commission to do. This means that he was a true believer in Christ, because otherwise he could not have made use of the *name* of Jesus (compare the sons of Sceva, Acts 19:13-17). Jesus tells them not to stop this man, and he neither praises or condemns the man for going his own way. Jesus explains: "*because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me.*" Alford says: "See 1 Cor. 12:3. 'The very success of the miracle will awe him, and prevent him from soon or lightly speaking evil of Me.' We must beware of supposing that the application of this saying is to be confined to the *working of a miracle* -- verse 40 shows that it is general -- a weighty maxim of Christian toleration and charity, and a caution to men how they presume to limit the work of the Spirit of God to any sect, or succession, or outward form of church: compare Phil. 1:16-18. . . This saying is not inconsistent with that in Matt. 12:30. They do not refer to the same thing. This is said of *outward conformity* -- that, of *inward unity of purpose* -- two widely different things."

Verse 40 is illustrated in verse 41. Nothing done for God by a true believer is without value. Even such a small thing as a drink of water *in the spirit of Christ* is worthy of reward. One may honor Christ in even the smallest of ways, and genuine Christianity will express itself in action. The spirit of service brings both the giver and receiver to a greater awareness of Christ himself. Compare James 2:14-26.

In dealing with the subject of temptation, Jesus emphasizes that it would be the best of the bargain to sacrifice a hand, or foot or eye (if that would help), to escape from God's wrath. *Fire* symbolizes pain, suffering, punishment, persecution, etc. *Salt* symbolizes permanence, prevention of spoilage, etc. Everyone, good or bad, must and does suffer. Fire will test and show the quality of each person's works (1 Cor 3:13). The apostles, especially, would be *salted with fire* (1 Cor. 4:9-13). Verse 49 is more correctly translated: "*Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt*" (4th ed. Text). Compare Lev. 2:13; Ezek. 43:24. "*Have the salt of friendship among yourselves.*" "Salting with fire" (compare Heb. 12:5-11) helps produce the spirit of self-sacrifice and humility. This allows peace with each other, and removes any need for a power struggle to determine *who is the greatest*.

Marriage *(Mark 10:1-12)*

10 *Then Jesus left that place, went to the region of Judea, and crossed the Jordan River. Crowds came flocking to him again and he taught them, as he always did.*

2 *Some Pharisees came to him and tried to trap him. “Tell us,” they asked, “does our Law allow a man to divorce his wife?”*

3 *Jesus answered with a question, “What commandment did Moses give you?”*

4 *Their answer was, “Moses gave permission for a man to write a divorce notice and send his wife away.”*

5 *Jesus said to them, “Moses wrote this commandment for you because you are so hard to teach. **6** But in the beginning, at the time of creation, it was said, ‘God made them male and female. **7** And for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and unite with his wife, **8** and the two will become one.’ So they are no longer two, but one. **9** Man must not separate, then, what God has joined together.”*

10 *When they went back into the house, the disciples asked Jesus about this matter. **11** He said to them, “The man who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against his wife; **12** in the same way, the woman who divorces her husband and marries another man commits adultery.”*

The purpose of Jesus here is not to tell how to dissolve a marriage, but rather to show God’s whole intent in the relationship of a husband and wife. The Pharisees had no interest in learning new truth (they thought they already knew it all). They wanted to put pressure on him and get him to incriminate himself by what he said. Would his answer offend King Herod as John the Baptizer had done??? Would he contradict the law of Moses??? Jesus answers by throwing the whole question back to the authority of the Old Testament portion of the Bible. God’s divorce law in Deut. 24:1-4 was not the ideal for mankind, but was intended to prevent worse situations. It was their *imperfection* which made such things necessary, and divorce was to be thought of as an extreme measure (such as radical surgery to treat cancer). Human sin and weakness does exist, however, and God’s divorce law was intended to regulate it and keep it in check. Notice that a divorced person who had been married to another, could not remarry the original spouse, even if the second spouse had died. Mark does not mention the “exception clause” which Matt. 5:32; 19:9 gives. However, the “exception” is strongly implied in the answer to the disciples’ question in verses 11-12.

God’s original marriage law is found in Gen. 2:18: “It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him” Or as Zamenhof expresses it: “*I will create him a companion-counterpart to him.*” In the beginning, one man and one woman were joined in marriage for life. The marriage bond is stronger than the bond between parents and children (as Gen. 2:24 says). The husband and wife become “one flesh” in the *sex act* (compare 1 Cor. 6:16). It is God’s plan that the man and the woman form a unity which would continue unbroken until the death of one. (God’s plan provides for unity of male and female into a *oneness*. This would be impossible for two males or two females.) God has not specified forms and rituals for a wedding ceremony, but he does back up the marriage bond with his own authority.

Mark shows the disciples asking further questions about what he had said. "Except for fornication" applies to the entire statements in verses 11-12. Fornication is a broader term than adultery, and includes any sex act with someone *other than* the spouse. DeWalt says: "The sexual element in marriage makes of the two one flesh -- i.e., it was meant that sexual union should be inseparable from permanent personal unity -- and only by sexual unfaithfulness can the unity, once established, be broken." (For an apparent exception to this, see the Pauline privilege, 1 Cor. 7:15. But desertion can be understood as a breaking of the sexual bond.) As Alford shows us in his Greek Testament, a man who divorces his wife in spite of the fact that she has not been unfaithful to him, and marries another, commits adultery because he is still married to his former wife; also, if anyone marries this divorced woman, *who was not unfaithful*, he marries another man's wife (with the exception of 1 Cor. 7:15). An example of this is Herod and Herodias in Mark 6:18. Also, Jewish thinking had a double standard for men and women, with men's misdeeds not being really thought of as sins. But Jesus placed men and women on exactly the same level and required the same standard of conduct from both.

To Receive Eternal Life?

(Mark 10:13-22)

13 Some people brought children to Jesus for him to touch them, but the disciples scolded those people. 14 When Jesus noticed it, he was angry and said to his disciples, "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

15 Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

16 Then he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on each of them, and blessed them.

17 As Jesus was starting again on his way, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not lie; do not cheat; honor your father and mother.'"

20 "Teacher," the man said, "ever since I was young I have obeyed all these commandments."

21 Jesus looked straight at him with love and said, "You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me." 22 When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face and he went away sad, because he was very rich.

Jesus blessing the little children serves as an introduction to the incident with the rich man. The disciples think the children are wasting his time, and this makes Jesus angry! "*Let the children come to me*" gets to the heart of the matter. What Jesus says here shows: 1) children (and infants) are not "totally depraved" (as the term is popularly used); 2) children can come to Christ (as soon as they have faith and are accountable); 3) no one should forbid them from coming; 4) parents should bring them to Jesus. The

love, humility and trust of a child should be the qualities of the one who claims to follow Christ. This is illustrated by the case of the rich young man.

This young man is evidently honest and righteous (at least consistent with what he knows). Mark tells us: “*Jesus looked straight at him with love.*” He had kept the commandments. He was not a hypocrite. Yet this young man is to some degree a religious fanatic who is self-righteous. He feels some *need* within himself, and so he comes to Jesus seeking answers. “Good Teacher” is not the usual way to address a rabbi, and shows some intention to *flatter*. “*Why do you call me good?*” is Jesus’ way of pointing out to the young man that his words are only conventional flattery. What Jesus says does not deny His divinity. Jesus, in the flesh, shared our weak human nature (Phil. 2:7) yet without ever sinning (1 Pet. 2:22). Jesus had not died yet and the law was still in effect. Obeying the law would bring eternal life -- yet no one could obey the law (James 2:10), so that in fact, no one could be “good” but God Himself. Jesus did fulfill the law, but this was not completed until the triumph of the resurrection (see Acts 13:29-39). The Christian’s “*goodness*” comes through Christ (see Rom. 8:1-4). (God does take his own Law seriously. There is only one way in which a fully personal and truly just God can realize his purpose in such a world as this. That is, by himself bearing the suffering of the world and the consequences of our transgression. How can he be the just God unless he suffers more than any man in total innocence? Compare Heb. 4:15-16.)

Jesus then points out the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments, and adds, “*do not cheat.*” The young man says that he has done this. The man is sincere in wanting to obey God. Yet there is ignorance in what he says, and Jesus strikes at the heart of the problem. What Jesus now tells him brings out the fact that this young man has made an “idol” out of his riches (it is the *love* of money which is a sin, 1 Tim. 6:10). “*Go and sell all you have. . .*” Jesus did not give this command to the rich who had not made money their “god” (such as Zacchaeus, Luke 19:8). But for this man, his riches stood between himself and God. Gloom spreads over his face and he goes away sad. He really did want to follow Jesus, but he thinks the price is too high to pay. Later Paul was to tell us to *give ourselves* as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2). When you capture a person’s mind, you can capture his heart, and when you capture his heart, you can capture his financial resources, and when you have captured his financial resources, you have captured the whole person! You cannot *buy* that kind of loyalty!!! Giving ourselves as a *living sacrifice* includes all our worldly possessions. It is no longer “mine,” but rather “God’s,” which he gives to me to use for His glory!!! (Jesus does not ask us to take a vow of poverty, but he does ask us to put *him* first in our lives. In order to do this, we will take an interest in the well-being of others. Compare Matt. 25:31-46. Some of the spiritual giants of the Bible have been wealthy people, yet they put God first in everything. Think of Job, Abraham, David, etc.)

Who, Then, Can be Saved?

(Mark 10:23-31)

23 Jesus looked around at his disciples and said to them, “How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!”

24 The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, "My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! 25 It is much harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

26 At this the disciples were completely amazed, and asked one another, "Who, then, can be saved?"

27 Jesus looked straight at them and answered, "This is impossible for men, but not for God; everything is possible for God."

28 Then Peter spoke up, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

29 "Yes," Jesus said to them, "and I tell you this: anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me, and for the gospel, 30 will receive much more in this present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields -- and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life. 31 But many who now are first will be last, and many who now are last will be first."

There is no merit in being poor, and Jesus does not require everyone to give up their wealth in order to be his disciples. Yet there is more opportunity for a rich man to be "possessed by his possessions." Jesus says it will be very difficult (but not impossible) for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. The problem is that we all tend to trust in material things. Only Mark includes the information in verse 24. The disciples were shocked by what he said, because Jewish people believed a person's material wealth was some indication of his spiritual condition (even though they were aware that this was not always true). Jesus answers by showing that it is *hard* for *anybody* to enter the kingdom of God! ("For them that trust in riches" does not appear in the corrected text of verse 24.) For emphasis he again states how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom, and uses a proverbial saying about a camel and a needle. We believe in "free grace," yet this is not a clever way to get around God's law. DeWelt says: "It is so hard for sinful men, rich or poor, to enter the kingdom, that for a rich man -- one who is especially involved in the unchildlike habits of the world -- to enter is harder than for a camel to go through a needle's eye." We must "pay a price" to follow Jesus. Compare Luke 13:24; 14:26-33.

With such high standards, how could anyone get into the kingdom??? They ask, "*Who, then, can be saved?*" Jesus makes it even stronger: "*This is impossible for man. . .*" On the basis of human merit and human abilities, no salvation would be possible! Mankind does not have the ability to save themselves! Only when this fact is understood does a person become willing to accept God's way of putting people right with himself (compare Rom. 10:1-4). God, however, is not limited in what He does. Before we even knew it, He acted in Christ Jesus to allow us a way to escape the sentence of death which sin brought on the whole human race!!! Compare Rom. 8:1-4; 5:1-21. W.N. Clarke says: "He can make new creatures of men; he can impart the spirit of the kingdom. He has command, too, of all means, earthly and heavenly. So he can bring into his kingdom men who are spiritually incompatible with it. See 1 Tim. 1:12-17; 1 Cor. 15:9-10." God does *call* everyone as evidence of His desire that all should be saved. "*Everyone will be taught by God*" (John 6:45). It is a paradox that when we choose Him, we find that He has already chosen us!!!

Peter speaks up and says: "*Look, we have left everything and followed you.*" Perhaps there is a note of despair in this. The disciples still expect a political kingdom at

this time, and what Jesus has just said has shocked them all deeply. Peter is saying: “We have done what this young man would not do. We have accepted the kingdom on the right terms and at great personal sacrifice. Are we all right??? We have given up our personal possessions to follow you.” Not “salvation,” but “reward.” Jesus promises that all who take this step will begin receiving their reward right now “*in this present age*” as Mark records (Compare John 10:10). Matthew gives part of the promise which speaks about the “New Age” (“regeneration”) which is the “messianic community,” the “kingdom\church” which was still future at this time. It could not begin until he died and raised from death. The Twelve were to do a special work in this kingdom\church. We all gain new brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers through our new relationship in Christ! God will bless in this present world, as well as in eternity! Only Mark preserves the phrase: “*and persecutions as well.*” This will come from those outside the group (compare Acts 8:1-3; 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Jesus also gives the warning not to make the *reward* the goal. Those who try to make themselves *first*, will finish *last*! Christ’s church is just the opposite from the world. Compare Luke 22:24-27.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 9:30 - 10:31)

1. Why was it so difficult for them to reconcile what Jesus said about his death with what they knew of his life?
2. Why were they afraid to ask him to explain?
3. Had anything happened in the experience of the Twelve which would suggest the topic of “greatness” in the kingdom?
4. What confession was made by the silence of the Twelve?
5. Show how the very nature of the wish to be important would place such a person last in the kingdom of Christ.
6. What motive is at work in the one who wants to serve others that makes him important in the kingdom of Christ?
7. Name two qualities of a child that should be seen in one who follows Christ.

8. How does welcoming a child relate to welcoming Christ?
9. Was it wrong for the man to be driving out demons? Why did John think it was wrong? (v.38)
10. What principle is being taught in verses 39-41? How does this apply to us today?
11. In verses 42-47 Jesus seems to advise drastic action to avoid sinning. In what sense does he mean this? How do you apply this to us today?
12. Discuss the ways Jesus uses the word “salt” in verses 49-50. How does this relate to what He has just said?
13. How did the practice of marriage originate?
14. Both Jesus and the Pharisees referred to Moses but with very different results. Why is this?
15. Was Moses compromising God’s law when he wrote the provision for dissolving a marriage?
16. Just how do the husband and wife become *one*? In what sense do they become one flesh? How does this new relationship relate to father and mother?
17. Is Jesus forbidding all divorce? Read the parallel account in Matthew.

18. Can marriage ever become adultery? When? Would either person in this be innocent?

19. Is it true that Jesus saw in children his own image, and because of this used them as a “parable” to teach his disciples?

20. Note three unusual things about the man who came running to Jesus.

21. In what sense is God the only one who is “good”? How does this relate to Christ-before-the-cross?

22. Show how both ignorance and sincerity were in the answer of the young man.

23. What wonderful opportunity did Jesus offer this young man?

24. Why couldn't this young man keep his money and still follow Jesus?

25. Why is it that Christian men often become rich, but rich men rarely become Christians?

26. Did the disciples think -- “if a rich man cannot be saved no one can be saved”? Why would they think this?

27. What was impossible and possible in the salvation of a rich man?

28. Did Peter feel he and the other apostles had done what Jesus asked the young ruler to do?

29. How is it possible to receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, etc., with persecutions? How does this apply to you personally?

30. Why the warning of verse 31? What does this mean? How does Matt. 20:1-16 relate to this?

Lesson Nine

(Mark 10:32 - 12:12)

He Came to Serve

(Mark 10:32-45)

32 They were now on the road going up to Jerusalem. Jesus was going ahead of the disciples, who were filled with alarm; the people who followed behind were afraid. Once again Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and spoke of the things that were going to happen to him.

33 "Listen," he told them, "we are going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and then hand him over to the Gentiles. 34 These will make fun of him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him. And after three days he will rise to life."

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "there is something we want you to do for us."

36 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked them.

37 They answered, "When you sit on your throne in the glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left."

38 Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?"

39 "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup I must drink and be baptized in the way I must be baptized. 40 But I do not have the right to choose who will sit at my right and my left. It is God who will give these places to those for whom he has prepared them."

41 When the other ten disciples heard about this they became angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them all together to him and said, "You know that the men who are considered rulers have power over the people, and their leaders rule over them. 43 This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; "and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people."

How very human is the picture which Mark shows us of the Twelve. Still thinking in political terms, they compete with each other over the question of rank in the coming Kingdom. The context of this passage is a prediction of the crucifixion. The key verse is 45. Compare Matt. 20:20-28.

This is the third formal prediction of Christ's impending death. The disciples may have understood what Jesus said in terms of a "messianic battle" to seize control of the country. This they would be willing and ready to fight for, and they could see themselves winning glory and honor. Yet the time does not seem right just yet. The Jewish leaders intend to kill Jesus, and this they can understand. But why is he placing himself in such danger by going to Jerusalem at this time? They are afraid of what might happen! Mark shows Jesus leading the way, the disciples filled with alarm, and the people who follow are afraid!

Jesus takes the Twelve aside to give explicit details of what is about to happen. The language seems too plain to misunderstand. Yet as we have already seen, understanding correctly doesn't depend upon the plainness of the language, but on the principles of interpretation. If they were thinking in mystical or figurative terms, they would distort the meaning to fit their preconceived ideas. Since the disciples seemed to be convinced that Jesus was building a political organization, it would be natural to think of position, authority, rank, etc. This, then, would make them interpret the things Jesus was saying, in the wrong way.

The "cup of suffering" and the "baptism" of the cross were figures of speech rooted in the Old Testament. ("Cup of suffering" symbolizes wrath and retribution. See Psalm 75:8; Isa. 51:17; 22; compare Mark 14:36; Rev. 14:10; 16:19. "Baptism" symbolizes being overwhelmed by calamity. See Psalm 69:1-3; compare Luke 12:50) James and John, obviously thinking of the glory of battle, answer, "We can," to the Lord's question in verse 38. They thought they were able to share in the Lord's suffering, but they had no idea what it involved. Notice they would indeed share in the "cup" and the "baptism," not just now, but later. They would experience much suffering during their ministry and in their death. Compare what Paul says in 2 Cor. 11:23-33. All the apostles died violently, with the sole exception of John.

Kings and rulers command people and receive service. This is the normal routine of life. But the kingdom of God is different. Leaders serve! This is not a formula for success -- it is a command from our Lord. We are to serve *instead of* being served, and to love *instead of* commanding. This does not mean there is no discipline, but rather that it is done in a different way. Compare 1 Peter 5:1-7. Peter shows the example of Christian living in the suffering of Christ, "*so that you would follow in his steps*" (1 Peter 2:18-25).

Christ emphasizes *result* in verse 45. What we could never achieve for ourselves has been done through One who loved us and gave himself for us! His greatest act of service was to give his life to redeem many people! In Jewish usage, “many” means “all.” This shows that salvation is universally available to all who will reach out through faith to seize what is offered to them.

The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

(Mark 10:46 - 11:11)

46 They came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving with his disciples and a large crowd, a blind man named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road, begging.

47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!”

48 Many scolded him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted even more loudly. “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, “Cheer up!” they said. “Get up, he is calling you.”

50 He threw off his cloak, jumped up, and came to Jesus.

51 “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. “Teacher,” the blind man answered, “I want to see again.”

52 “Go,” Jesus told him, “your faith has made you well.” At once he was able to see, and followed Jesus on the road.

11 *As they came near Jerusalem, at the towns of Bethphage and Bethany they came to the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead 2 with these instructions, “Go to the village there ahead of you. As soon as you get there you will find a colt tied up that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 And if someone asks you, ‘Why are you doing that?’ tell him, ‘The Master needs it and will send it back here at once.’”*

4 So they went and found a colt out in the street, tied to the door of a house. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders asked them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?”

6 They answered just as Jesus had told them, so the men let them go. 7 They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the animal, and Jesus got on. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches in the fields and spread them on the road. 9 The people who were in front and those who followed behind began to shout, “Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 God bless the coming kingdom of our father David! Praise be to God!”

11 Jesus entered Jerusalem, went into the temple, and looked around at everything. But since it was already late in the day, he went out to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

Mark’s account explains the apparent contradiction between Matthew and Luke on this miracle. Jesus was ahead of the crowd and went into Jericho. The noise of the crowd disturbed the blind men (Mark and Luke mention only Bartimaeus and say nothing

of the other man); and as Jesus is coming out of Jericho, this healing takes place; and then the meeting with Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

Bartimaeus was deeply aware of his personal need, and he would not take “no” for an answer! His actions show that he knows something of Jesus, and “Son of David” is a messianic title (see Isa. 11:1-5; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 34:23-24; Mark 12:35). He continues to shout until Jesus stops and calls him (calls them). Bartimaeus jumps up and comes to Jesus (contrast John 5:6-7). Probably the other blind man did this as well, and Jesus healed both of them. At once they were able to see; and both of them joined the group that was following Jesus to Jerusalem.

From Jericho the road rises 3000 feet in 18 miles to reach Jerusalem. Coming up the mountain pass to Jerusalem, he stopped at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany, stayed there during the Sabbath (Saturday), and on Sunday morning, made his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem (see John 12:12-19). As they come near to Bethphage, Jesus makes his plans for the symbolic entry into Jerusalem. Certainly the detail given shows supernatural knowledge in sending the two into Bethphage to get the colt. The owner was likely a disciple of Jesus. Note that every Jew expected the Messiah to come riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey (Zech. 9:9). Only animals that had never been ridden were thought of as being proper for holy uses (Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7).

The Law required Jewish people to come to Jerusalem for the Passover. From what Josephus says, more than three million people were probably there at this time. Some thousands of Galileans who had seen Jesus perform miracles were there, and they thought of Jesus as the Messiah-King. (If Jesus had wished to be a political king, this would have been the opportunity to seize power, and the Jewish leaders would have been helpless.) As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the people shout: *“Praise God! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the coming kingdom of King David, our father! Praise be to God!”* (“Hosanna” literally means, “Save, I pray;” but was used in the sense of *praise*. Many say “Hallelujah” without knowing they are saying, “Sing praise to Jehovah.” What these people are saying comes partly from Psalm 118:25-26, which was commonly used to speak of the Messiah.)

John 12:16 shows that even the disciples did not understand the meaning of this Triumphant Entry. Jesus’ mission as Messiah was quite different from the popular idea of the Jewish people. He came to die as our “sin-offering” (John 9:31; Heb. 9:15); and his kingdom was spiritual (Luke 19:11; John 18:36). Jesus had given a clear, understandable sign to the Jewish nation. When he went into the temple (verse 11), he was the Passover Lamb, presenting himself as the law required (that the sacrifice should be set apart four days before the day of Passover). As far as we know, Jesus spent each night in Bethany during this last week, except for Thursday night. This could have been to avoid the Jewish leaders, but certainly to be with his loving friends who lived there, and to be with the Twelve.

The Second Cleansing of the Temple

(Mark 11:12-19)

12 The next day, as they were coming back from Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 He saw in the distance a fig tree covered with leaves, so he went to it to see if he could find any figs on it; but when he came to it he found only leaves, because it was not the

right time for figs. **14** Jesus said to the fig tree, “No one shall ever eat figs from you again!”

And his disciples heard him.

15 When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple and began to drive out all those who bought and sold in the temple. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the stools of those who sold pigeons, **16** and would not let anyone carry anything through the temple courts. **17** He then taught the people, “It is written in the Scriptures that God said, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all people.’ But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!”

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, so they began looking for some way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples left the city.

During festival times the city of Jerusalem would be crowded with people. Jewish people from all over the world would come to Jerusalem for Passover and remain for Pentecost before returning home. Practically the whole Jewish nation were on the scene for these last days of Jesus, for his death and resurrection, and for the birth of the church on Pentecost. God was acting in history for all to see plainly!

Jesus cursing the fig tree is a parable against the Jewish nation. The fig tree bears its main crop in April to June, but bears small edible knobs before sprouting leaves. Although it was too early for figs, it was too early for leaves also, and the leaves should have been evidence of edible fruit. However, Jesus acted in this strange way to call attention not only to the power of prayer, but to indict the Jewish nation for failing to produce the fruit it should have produced. (Compare Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10-17; Micah 7:1-6; Luke 13:6-9.)

This parable of the fig tree links closely with what Jesus does in the temple. Many think of Jesus as meek, mild, and colorless, but here we see something of the more radical side of his personality. Cleansing the temple is a symbolic act -- much like the Triumphant Entry. (The first cleansing is found in John 2:13-22.) It is an act of authority. The priests had made a monopoly out of the Temple worship. They had set up business in the Courts of the Gentiles and were selling all the various needs for sacrifices (this in itself would not be wrong), and exchanging the Greek and Roman money for the authorized Jewish coins which the temple required. Certainly this gave opportunity for corruption and graft, and was making a fortune for those involved in it. (Many think that religion is a way to become rich. See 1 Tim. 6:5.) What Jesus did here was aimed directly at the priests. (Only Mark adds the information in verse 16. This apparently results from Jesus’ feeling of the sacredness of the Jewish temple. Dr. South says: “We must know that the least degree of contempt weakens religion; because it is absolutely contrary to the nature of it; religion properly consisting of reverence for things sacred.” Compare Mal. 3:1-5. God’s true temple is the flesh and blood body of the believer, 1 Cor. 3:16-17.)

Jesus was saying: 1) The Jewish temple was not to be made into a hideout for thieves (Jer. 7:11); 2) The Jewish temple was to be a “house of prayer for the people of all nations,” obviously including the Gentiles (Isaiah 56:7); 3) This was Jesus’ claim to Messiahship (compare Mal. 3:1-5; Ezek. 45:16-17; Hos. 9:15; Hos. 11:10-11; Zech.

14:21). It was not the Jewish religion itself which was being condemned (“*the Law itself is holy*” Rom. 7:12-13), but only the abuses of it (Rom. 10:1-4). Jesus used the language and imagery of the prophets to express his anger and his claims. Perhaps the most impressive fact is that he was so much one of the prophetic tradition. However Jesus’ warnings were not taken seriously by the Jewish leaders and the prophecy of chapter 13 followed inevitably.

Mark tells in verse 18 that the leaders were “*afraid of him.*” Their fear was linked to the fact that his teaching strongly influenced the people. (This fact was mentioned as early as Mark 1:22.) The leaders saw in Jesus a serious threat to their own security. Not surprisingly, they struck out in fear and anger to destroy Jesus (compare Mark 3:6).

The Question About Jesus’ Authority (Mark 11:20-33)

20 Early next morning, as they walked along the road, they saw the fig tree. It was dead all the way down to its roots. 21 Peter remembered what had happened and said to Jesus, “Look, Teacher, the fig tree you cursed has died!”

22 Jesus answered them, “Remember this! If you have faith in God, 23 you can say to this hill, ‘Get up and throw yourself in the sea.’ If you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will happen, it will be done for you. 24 For this reason I tell you: When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you ask for. 25 And when you stand praying, forgive anything you may have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins. [26 If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your sins.]”

27 They came back to Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders came to him 28 and asked him, “What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you the right to do them?”

29 Jesus answered them, “I will ask you just one question, and if you give me an answer I will tell you what right I have to do these things. 30 Tell me, where did John’s right to baptize come from: from God or from men?”

31 They started to argue among themselves, “What shall we say? If we answer, ‘From God,’ he will say, ‘Why, then, did you not believe John?’ 32 But if we say, ‘From men. . .’” (They were afraid of the people, because everyone was convinced that John had been a prophet.) 33 So their answer to Jesus was, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you, then, by what right I do these things.”

The next day after Jesus cursed the fig tree, it was “dead all the way down to the roots.” This surprises Peter. (Matthew gives the words of the others: “How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?”) Jesus responds with the command: “Have faith in God.” Faith is the summary of Christ’s ministry. His entire life was devoted to creating faith in God in those who followed him. Faith grows out of the facts of the Incarnation (compare John 20:30-31).

If the barren fig tree and the cleansing of the temple are to be interpreted in terms of each other, how will we view the symbolism? The key is certainly Jesus’ words about faith and prayer. Chadwick writes: “And Jesus drove the lesson home. He pointed to

‘this mountain’ in front of them, with the gold and marble of the Temple sparkling, and declared that faith is not only able to smite barrenness with death, but to remove it into the midst of the sea; to plant among the wild and storm-swept races of the pagan world, the glory and privilege of the presence of the Lord . . . One who truly relies on God, whose mind and will are attuned to those of the Eternal, cannot be selfish, or vindictive, or presumptuous.” Like the fig tree, the Jewish nation had made grandiose claims of fruit-bearing, but without actually producing anything. They claimed to be holy, but they had defiled their temple. Some of the saddest words in the Bible are those of Christ in Matt. 23:37-39.

In a sense, we *command* God by our prayer (but of course we cannot obligate him). The key to this is in verse 24: “*believe that you have received it.*” Compare James 1:6-8. Confidence is evidence of faith. However, belief and prayer cannot be used for selfish purposes (compare James 4:1-5). Power in prayer depends upon our own attitude, since God deals with us in much the same way we relate to others (see Matt. 7:1-6). We are obligated to love our “brothers,” since it is impossible to hate them and still love God (1 John 4:20).

Cleansing the temple had been an act of authority. Matthew tells us that during the cleansing, the blind and the crippled came to Jesus and he healed them (Matt. 21:14). This also showed authority. Therefore the religious leaders challenge Jesus: “*What right do you have to do these things?*” But of course they had already made up their minds that He had no right to do these things. The conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities flared up in a series of incidents which lead to their decision to do away with Him. (This had been their plan for some time, but now they were becoming so determined that they were forgetting their fears.)

As he so often did, Jesus turns the question into a dilemma for the challengers. “*Where did John’s right to baptize come from?*” (Jewish custom often substituted “heaven” for “God.” “God” is the correct meaning: “*God or from man?*”) Note how Jesus places himself in the same classification with John the Baptizer. They were not rivals but co-workers. The religious leaders had refused to believe John, but the people considered him to be a great Prophet. They knew public opinion would judge their answer, and they were afraid of the consequences. These leaders can neither admit John’s authority nor deny his words. Since they refuse to decide John’s authority, Jesus will not allow them to decide the question of His authority. Yet Jesus does not allow them to drop the whole matter. Matthew records the parable of the Two Sons, which contrasts the Jewish people (who did accept John) with the Jewish leaders (who refused to accept John). Then in Mark 12:35-37, Jesus again raises the question of who he is.

Tenants in the Vineyard

(Mark 12:1-12)

12 Then Jesus spoke to them in parables, “There was a man who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to tenants and left home on a trip. 2 When the time came for gathering the grapes, he sent a slave to the tenants to receive from them his share of the harvest. 3 The tenants grabbed the slave, beat him, and sent him back without a thing. 4

Then the owner sent another slave; the tenants beat him over the head and treated him shamefully. 5 The owner sent another slave, and they killed him; and they treated many others the same way, beating some and killing others. 6 The only one left to send was the man's own dear son. Last of all, then, he sent his son to the tenants. 'I am sure they will respect my son,' he said. 7 But those tenants said to one another. 'This is the owner's son. Come on, let us kill him, and his property will be ours!' 8 So they took the son and killed him, and threw his body out of the vineyard.

9 "What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do?" asked Jesus. "He will come and kill those men and turn over the vineyard to other tenants. 10 Surely you have read the scripture?

'The very stone which the builders rejected turned out to be the most important stone.

11 This was done by the Lord; how wonderful it is!'"

12 The Jewish leaders tried to arrest Jesus, because they knew that he had told this parable against them. They were afraid of the crowd, however, so they left him and went away.

Under Jewish Law there were cases in which the property of a foreigner or Gentile converted to Judaism could pass to anyone who would occupy it. These tenants seem determined to be the ones who benefit from it. Yet there is no doubt that this is a parable about the way Israel had treated God's messengers and would treat God's Son. Both love and hate influenced the history of Israel (as it does us ourselves). Perfect love drives out all fear (1 John 4:18); so ultimately does "perfect" hate. The Jewish leaders were determined to kill Jesus, yet fear of public opinion held them back -- until their hate reached such an intensity that they were no longer afraid of the consequences. The doom which they brought on themselves is a dire warning about trying to "get even with someone," or to take revenge. "Returning good for evil" is the way of Christ.

When Jesus began to teach this parable, the Jewish leaders would immediately think of Isaiah's parable about the Lord's vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7). Isaiah was clearly speaking about the nation of Israel, and the Jewish leaders did not have to guess that Jesus was speaking about them (verse 12), or at least they knew it after the parable was finished. Whether they understood the implications of the "son" in the parable is not important (although we can easily see that Jesus meant himself). His main purpose was to show the consequences of continually rejecting God's messengers, and of rejecting God's last Messenger (compare Heb. 1:1-2).

The details of the parable show how God had worked with Israel. He had placed them in the rich and fertile land of Palestine, given them the law which preserved their identity, and protected them. The "tenants" are the Jewish leaders, who should have managed the vineyard and produced a profit for the Owner. The Owner sent representatives to receive his share of the harvest, but the tenants did violent things to them. The central idea is that the Jewish leadership rejected everyone whom God sent to them. Some of the prophets they did murder (compare Matt. 23:29-36). Over the centuries, God sent many prophets, kings, and holy men in his name. Compare the list in Hebrews 11:35-38. The climax was God's final offer of mercy to them. (But note that mercy was offered through *Christ's death* -- Heb. 9:15. This is the greatest of heaven's wealth; it is the fullness of their sin -- Matt. 23:35-36; 1 Thess. 2:14-16.) The leaders

made their plans to kill Jesus (John 11:53), because they saw him as a threat to their ownership of the vineyard.

At the climax of the parable, Jesus asks what the owner will do with the tenants. Matthew shows the Jewish leaders answering, "He will certainly kill those evil men, etc." Mark shows Jesus repeating their words. Luke shows that as they suddenly realize the full meaning of what Jesus has repeated, they say, "Surely not!" Jesus confirms what He has just said by quoting Psalm 118:22-23. This speaks of a stone being thrown aside by the builders, who then discover it to be the most important stone. The rejected Son is God's Messenger and will be given the highest honor by God himself (compare the song of praise in Phil. 2:6-11). Matthew records these words of doom: "And so I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people who will produce the proper fruits." Compare Heb. 8:7-13.

The Owner of the vineyard did come and kill those tenants in the siege of Jerusalem, 70 A.D. Over a million people died, and it was far more terrible than the flood, because these people killed each other! While the Romans surrounded the city, the Jews inside fought and killed each other and destroyed their food supplies. Women killed and ate their own children (compare Deut. 28:49-57). But note that *no Christian Jews were lost* -- they all left the city when they saw the things which Christ had prophesied (Luke 21:20-22).

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 10:32-12:12)

1. How was it possible for Jesus to be so plain in what He said about His coming death and still be misunderstood by His disciples?
2. James and John wanted to sit at His right and left in His "glorious Kingdom." What type of glory were they thinking of?
3. What was the "cup" and "baptism" of verse 38?
4. When did James and John drink the "cup" and experience the "baptism?"
5. Why does Jesus call Himself the "Son of Man"?
6. In what sense was Jesus' life "to redeem many people"?

7. How can we reconcile the three different accounts of the healing at Jericho of Blind Bartimaeus and the other man?

8. Why does he call Jesus, “Son of David”?

9. Why would the colt’s owner be so willing to comply with Jesus’ request?

10. What was the symbolism of spreading the cloaks and branches on the road?

11. Why would Jesus permit such a public demonstration?

12. In what sense did Jesus restore the kingdom of David? (Compare Acts 15:12-18.)

13. In what way are leaves an indication of fruit on a fig tree?

14. In what sense are baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and church attendance “nothing but leaves”?

15. Is the cleansing of Mark 11 the same cleansing as the one recorded in John 2:13-22? Why?
16. Was it completely wrong to buy and sell in the temple? (Compare Jer. 7:1-15.)

17. How could the Jewish temple be a “house of prayer for the people of all nations”?

18. Why would Jesus’ words and actions especially anger the chief priests and teachers of the law? (Verse 18)

19. Was there a special need for faith at this time (when they saw the fig tree was dead)?

20. Compare the faith which Jesus talks about, with the special power which the apostles used during their ministry.

21. Why were Jesus and His disciples in the temple when he was challenged by the religious authorities?

22. Why did Jesus ask the question about John the Baptizer?

23. Show how their answer sealed the doom of their influence as leaders of the people.

24. Why did Jesus refuse to answer the question of his authority -- or did he refuse?

25. Show how the parable of the vineyard fit in with the people and general conditions.

26. Why was the owner of the vineyard so extremely patient with the tenants?

27. Who were the "other tenants" to whom the vineyard was to be given?

28. If they wanted to seize and kill Jesus, why didn't they do it immediately?

29. In what one act are all the resources of heaven's love exhausted and all the measures of a person's sin filled up?

30. When did the owner of the vineyard come and destroy the tenants?

Lesson Ten

(Mark 12:13 - 13:8)

The Question About Paying Taxes

(Mark 12:13-17)

13 Some Pharisees and some members of Herod's party were sent to Jesus to trap him with questions. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you tell the truth, without worrying about what people think. You pay no attention to a man's status, but teach the truth about God's will for man. Tell us, is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor? Should we pay them, or not?"

15 But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, "Why are you trying to trap me? Bring a silver coin, and let me see it."

16 They brought him one and he asked, "Whose face and name are these?" "The Emperor's," they answered.

17 So Jesus said, "Well, then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to him, and pay to God what belongs to God." And they were filled with wonder at him.

"Politics makes strange bedfellows," as the saying goes. We see the amazing combination of the pro-Roman Herod's party and the anti-Roman Pharisees. "Taxes" is "kenos" (from which we get "census"), a poll-tax imposed on all the people and which was paid directly into Rome's treasury. This was one of the most hated evidences of the Roman occupation forces, and there had been riots when it was introduced (compare Acts 5:37). These people were not looking for information, but rather trying to get Jesus to incriminate himself. If Jesus said not to pay taxes to the Emperor, they could accuse him to the Romans on a charge of sedition. If Jesus said it was proper to pay taxes, they

believed they could use this to turn the people against him. They thought Jesus was in their trap, no matter which answer he gave.

Jesus' answer was based on the fact that they themselves use Roman money in their everyday life. He asked *them* to bring him a silver coin. (The coin was a silver denarius, worth a day's wages. The Emperor's head was pictured on one side, and the goddess of Peace on the other, with the words: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus, High Priest." These words were especially offensive to the Jews, and also to the later Christians.) There could be no doubt as to whose authority the money represented. The fact that they used Roman coins was proof they were under Roman rule. "*Pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor*" pleased the members of Herod's party. "*Pay to God what belongs to God*" pleased the Pharisees. What Jesus says shows that civil government and God each have their own sphere and certain things that belong to them. Compare how Paul deals with this in Romans 13:1-7. But when there is a clash between the two, "*we must obey God, not men*" (Acts 5:29).

What Jesus said here does not go into the relative relationships of "Caesar" and God. But He does stress that the children of God do have a responsibility to the society of which they are part. Since we cannot possibly live without being involved in the benefits (and consequences) of the social structure, each must make his or her contribution to it, even though we may strongly disapprove of it. The Roman government was to some extent a vicious and cruel thing, and at times it persecuted God's people. Yet the apostle Paul, one who was a special representative of God, did not hesitate to call upon its powers for protection and assistance when it was necessary to do so. When the Jewish opposition wanted to kill him, Paul appealed to the Roman government as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29; 23:11; 23-30; 25:10-12). Concerning this same godless Roman government, Paul could write: "Everyone must obey state authorities, because no authority exists without God's permission, and the existing authorities have been put there by God" (Rom. 13:1). The Book of Revelation shows us that *every* government serves *both* God and Satan simultaneously. The point is that human governments are necessary to preserve moral order.

Those who are sons and daughters of the one true God are citizens of two worlds. "*We, however, are citizens of heaven.*" ("Conversation," KJV, means "citizenship" in this passage), as Paul tells us in Phil. 3:20. We humans are "God's coinage," with his image stamped on us, and we have an obligation to *pay back* to him those things which belong to him. In fact as Paul tells us, we are to voluntarily make ourselves (our flesh and blood bodies, 1 Cor. 6:15-20), a *sacrifice* (a praise-offering) to live Christ's life here in this present world (Rom. 12:1-2; Matt. 25:31-40; Rom. 5:1-5).

Rising from Death

(Mark 12:18-27)

18 *Some Sadducees came to Jesus. (They are the ones who say that people will not rise from death.)* **19** *"Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote this law for us: 'If a man dies and leaves a wife, but no children, that man's brother must marry the widow so they can have children for the dead man.'* **20** *Once there were seven brothers; the oldest got married, and died without having children.* **21** *Then the second one married the woman, and he died without having children. The same thing happened to the third*

brother, 22 and then to the rest; all seven brothers married the woman and died without having children. Last of all, the woman died. 23 Now, when all the dead rise to life on the day of resurrection, whose wife will she be? All seven of them had married her.”

24 Jesus answered them, “How wrong you are! And do you know why? It is because you don’t know the Scriptures or God’s power. 25 For when the dead rise to life they will be like the angels in heaven, and men and women will not marry. 26 Now, as to the dead being raised: haven’t you ever read in the book of Moses the passage about the burning bush? There it is written that God said to Moses, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ 27 That means that he is the God of the living, not of the dead. You are completely wrong!”

Next we see some Sadducees take their turn at trying to trap Jesus. They were a small Jewish religious party, whose importance was out of proportion to their size. It is amazing that most of the priests were of this group. They were materialists who worshipped wealth and power, and they strongly denied that the dead would be raised to life again or that there were such things as spirits and angels (Acts 23:8). They were aristocratic traditionalists, mostly political, and not religious at all. But the High Priests came from their group, and this fact placed them at the highest point in Jewish power.

Arguing religion was one of their favorite pastimes, and in the process they had developed this made up story which they felt exposed the “absurdity” of resurrection. Under certain circumstances, a man was obligated to marry his brother’s widow to carry on the family-line (see Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5-6). It would be theoretically possible for the things mentioned in their story to happen. (Some today ask what will happen in the resurrection to a man who had been eaten by cannibals?) In his reply, Jesus gives two important principles (verse 24).

The Sadducees based their disbelief of the resurrection on the fact that it is not specifically mentioned in the first five books of the Old Testament. (They rejected the other Old Testament books and would not use them.) These first five books were called “the books of Moses” (since he wrote them down, compare Luke 24:27, 44). But Jesus shows that there is evidence that death will be repealed, in the statement of God to Moses. God said: “*I am the God of Abraham, etc.*” Notice He does not say, “*I was the God, etc.*” (In Exod. 3:6, Zamenhof translating from the Hebrew Masoretic Text translates “*I am*” in the present continuous tense, as Jesus does also in His quotation of the passage.) Jesus shows them that the fact that these men were still alive because He was still their God. Alford says: “It is an assertion which *could not be made of an annihilated being of the past*. And notice also, that Abraham’s (etc.) body, having had upon it *the seal of the covenant*, is against the so-called ‘sleep of the soul’ in the intermediate state.” Compare also Luke 16:19-31.

The other part of Jesus’ answer views God’s power to create a new order of life in which marriage no longer plays a part. Marriage implies birth, and birth implies death. When death is abolished, birth and marriage vanish as well. Angels are a separate order of creation. The dead do not become *angels*, but become *like the angels*. The “new heavens and a new earth” which Peter mentions (2 Peter 3:13) will not be Eden restored, but something entirely new. Paul speaks of continuity between what we are now and what we will become (1 Cor. 15:35-58). Perhaps the little green worm which turns into a beautiful butterfly is a prophecy of our change (compare 1 John 3:1-3). Robert

Brinsmead says: "Like righteousness, (Martin) Luther viewed immortality as something which stood outside of man. This did not mean that he concluded that a dead man ceases to exist. He whom God wishes to speak to, either in love or anger, cannot cease to exist. The immortality does not reside in the nature of man but in Christ and in His word of promise."

The Great Commandment

(Mark 12:28-37)

28 A teacher of the Law was there who heard the discussion. He saw that Jesus had given the Sadducees a good answer, so he came to him with a question, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

29 "This is the most important one," said Jesus. "'Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is the only Lord. 30 You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31 The second most important commandment is this: 'You must love your fellowman as yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these two."

32 The teacher of the Law said to Jesus, "Well done, Teacher! It is true, as you say, that only the Lord is God, and that there is no other god but he. 33 And man must love God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength; and he must love his fellowman as himself. It is more important to obey these two commandments than to offer animals and other sacrifices to God on the altar."

34 Jesus noticed how wise his answer was, and so he told him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

After this nobody dared to ask Jesus any more questions.

35 As Jesus was teaching in the temple he asked the question, "How can the teachers of the Law say that the Messiah will be the descendant of David? 36 The Holy Spirit inspired David to say:

'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit here at my right side, until I put your enemies under your feet.'

37 David himself called him 'Lord'; how, then, can the Messiah be David's descendant?"

The large crowd heard Jesus gladly.

This man was a "teacher of the law" (a scribe or rabbi). He asks a question that had come up many times in the discussion among religious leaders. The Jewish scholars had studied the commandments and "discovered" the total of 613 commandments in the law. There was some thinking that by obeying the most important commandment, one was given credit for having obeyed all the commandments. (But compare James 2:10-11.) Therefore they spent a lot of time trying to decide which was the most important. Hillel, a famous teacher of the law, had said: "What you hate for yourself do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole law: the rest is commentary; go and learn." This is a negative way of saying what Jesus said in the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). But here Jesus gives an answer that goes deep into the heart of the matter.

Jesus quotes the basic statement of faith of the religious Jew, the *Shema* ' (which means "hear") which is found in Deut. 6:4-5. They would recite this statement daily, and there was some sense of *superstition* in the way in which they thought of it as a "good luck charm." Jesus plainly shows that *loving his God* is the most important element in one's religious life. He immediately adds a second element, that one should *love his neighbor* as he loves himself (Lev. 19:18). Then Jesus sums up by saying: "There is no other commandment more important than these two." Matthew records Jesus as saying, "The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments." The first command sums up man's obligation to God. The second sums up man's obligation to his fellowman. One who loves God will not rebel against him, but will live to please him. One who loves his fellowman will try to help him.

Jesus was really saying nothing new in his answer. This agrees with the moral and spiritual insight to be found in the Old Testament portion of the Bible (compare 1 Sam. 15:22; Hosea 6:6). Religious Jews had already reached this conclusion (compare Luke 10:25-28). Yet there is a new element here as Jesus tells him: "*You are not far from the Kingdom of God.*" This teacher of the law must fulfill these two commandments by learning to follow Jesus (compare Mark 10:21). Unless one enters the kingdom through Christ the *door*, being *near* is no better than being *far off*.

The teachers of the law taught that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. This is true, but not the whole truth. Jesus asked a question to force them to rethink what they already knew. If David by inspiration could call the Messiah, "my Lord," (Psa. 110:1), how could the Messiah be simply David's descendant? The Pharisees thought Jesus was only a human being, nothing more. Jesus showed them that: "Messiah, the descendant of David in human terms, is the Son of God -- the Eternal Logos -- who has appeared in history as a human being" (see 1 Tim. 3:16; Gal. 4:4). To understand the *mission* of Jesus, you must first understand *who he is*. It is important that He is a human being, but this is not all -- he is God as well! If he were *only* divine, and not human as well, he could not have died as our sin-offering.) But since He is *both* God and man, his death becomes the *infinite sacrifice* for sin and the *gift of life!* You must believe this to be in the kingdom. (Faith implies obedience.)

False and True Religion

(Mark 12:38-44)

38 As he taught them he said, "Watch out for the teachers of the Law, who like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted with respect in the market place; 39 who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts. 40 They take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and then make a show of saying long prayers. Their punishment will be all the worse!"

41 As Jesus sat near the temple treasury he watched the people as they dropped in their money. Many rich men dropped in much money; 42 then a poor widow came along and dropped in two little copper coins, worth about a penny. 43 He called his disciples together and said to them, "I tell you that this poor widow put more in the

offering box than all the others. 44 For the others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had -- she gave all she had to live on."

This is the official close of his public ministry. (It came in the second year). This is more than a scolding, it is a tongue-lashing rebuke of the anti-God actions of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (These are called "the Jews" in some verses). These were the only religious teachers which the people had. They did teach the law of Moses, but they distorted it by adding their own traditions (compare Mark 7:9-13). They were correct when they did teach the law, but their actions taught a lie.

Mark condenses Matt. 23:1-36 into just three verses. Only Mark gives the phrase: "*who like to walk around in their long robes.*" These long robes, sweeping the ground, imitated those of the priests of Rome. The teachers of the law wore these to impress people with their importance. When Jesus sent his apostles to preach, he specifically told them to dress in the clothes of the common, ordinary people (Mark 6:9). The Jewish leaders wanted people to know they were not just *ordinary people*, but that they were *important!* This was not to honor their status as teachers, but to get the glory for themselves! Rather than pointing people to God, they were seizing the honor for themselves. There were a few good men among these leaders (such as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and perhaps Gamaliel, etc.). But we must not ignore the lesson that zealous faith can be distorted into a *pride* which feeds on itself and proudly holds itself up to the world. A good question which we must ask ourselves is: "When does 'Christian witness' become exhibitionism???"

Jesus especially emphasizes that these religious leaders "*take advantage of widows and rob them of their homes,*" and then make a show of saying long prayers to impress people with their righteousness. The sin of showing off (ostentation) was the root of the Pharisees' other sins. Jesus rebukes all who use (misuse) religion as a means of domineering people. W.N. Clarke writes: "Our Lord's denunciations of the representatives of Judaism in his day seem terribly severe and almost cruel; but what is shown of the absurd and heartless refinements of the Pharisism of that age fully supports the strong language that he used. What must have been the indignation of such a soul as his at such perversion of the religion of his Father!"

For a contrast to the attitude of the Jewish leaders, Mark shows us the widow's offering. In the world in which Jesus lived, widows had almost no job opportunities, and so were extremely poor. The very religious leaders who should have been their protectors, rather were the ones who often victimized them. As Jesus sat near the temple treasury (in the women's court), he watched as people dropped their free-will offerings into the thirteen trumpet-shaped boxes. (Free-will offerings were made in addition to the temple tax, before the Passover.) Many rich men dropped in a lot of money (some of them ostentatiously and loudly), and it cost them little to do this because of their wealth. The poor widow gave almost the smallest gift possible to give -- two small copper coins worth about a penny. But Jesus said she had given more than all the rest! How could this be??? Because she had given everything that she had! The two coins were all she had to live on, and to give them meant self-sacrifice and doing without some things she needed. This showed her love for God, and her faith. Jesus praises her for it.

Termination

(Mark 13:1-8)

13 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said, “Look, Teacher! What wonderful stones and buildings!” **2** Jesus answered, “You see these great buildings? Not a single stone here will be left in its place; every one of them will be thrown down.”

3 Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, across from the temple, when Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him in private. **4** “Tell us when this will be,” they said, “and tell us what will happen to show that the time has come for all these things to take place.”

5 Jesus said to them, “Watch out, and don’t let anyone fool you. **6** Many men will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and fool many people. **7** And don’t be troubled when you hear the noise of battles close by and news of battles far away. Such things must happen, but they do not mean that the end has come. **8** Countries will fight each other, kingdoms will attack one another. There will be earthquakes everywhere, and there will be famines. These things are like the first pain of childbirth.

Jesus prophesied: “He will come and kill those men and turn the vineyard over to other tenants” (Mark 12:9). God was going to terminate His relationship with the Jewish leaders (but not necessarily with the Jewish people, compare Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 11:1-12). This chapter is the most difficult for the interpreter, as it speaks of strange future events and signs. Verses 30-32 set the time-frame, as much of the things would happen in the *normal life-time* of those who heard him predict these things (verse 30). “*That day or hour*” (verse 32) is obviously still in our future, and Jesus points out that *only the Father* knows when it will take place.

Jesus probably said these things to his disciples many times. This may be the climax as he repeats these things, and Luke identifies the “Awful Horror” (“abomination of desolation,” KJV) as armies surrounding Jerusalem. Luke also speaks of the destruction of Jerusalem as *The Days of Punishment* (compare Matt. 23:35-39; 1 Thess. 2: 14-16).

This was the third temple standing in Jerusalem, rebuilt by Herod in such splendor that it would not be finally completed until some thirty years after Jesus’ death. It was built of white marble and was nineteen acres in size. Josephus describes some of the larger stones in it as being between 68 and 80 feet in length. The temple was so worshipped by the Jewish people, that the disciples associate the destruction of the temple with the Coming of Christ and the end of the age. Jesus had predicted: “*And so your temple will be abandoned and empty*” (Matt. 23:38). This was a double prophecy. It says that when Jesus would leave the temple, God would also desert it and no longer accept its worship. It also says that God would remove his protection and allow the city to be totally crushed (Zech. 11:6). Other great temples stand in ruins, still showing their splendor. The Jewish temple would vanish completely from the face of the earth.

Jesus warned that many false messiahs would come to delude the people. They would claim to be his representatives, or to be the Messiah himself. Josephus, the Jewish historian, shows that these things happened just as Jesus said. DeWelt says: “As the destruction of their holy city drew near, and the Messianic hopes of the Jews were at fever-heat, many fanatics arose, and awakened false expectations, and drew large

numbers after them (compare Acts 5:36-37; 1 John 2:18). Josephus says that in the reign of Claudius (who died 54 A.D.), the land was overwhelmed with deceivers who pretended to be in the Christ (the Messiah).”

Jesus warns of wars and earthquakes. Rumors of an expected invasion are often worse than the invasion itself, as people react in terror. All the world seemed to be at war at this time. Tacitus, the Roman historian, writes of the years preceding 70 A.D.: “It was full of calamities, horrible with battle, rent with seditions, savage in peace itself.” At least five major earthquakes took place during these years; along with epidemics of disease in which thousands died; and famines (see Acts 11:28).

These things would persuade some that the end had already come, and so turn their minds away from Jesus. For others, these same events would tempt them to believe that God had forgotten them and that the end would never come. Such events must be accepted as part of the “Plan,” and must be viewed as part of the pain that precedes the joy of birth. The birth and growth of the kingdom/church of our Lord would be during the death-agony of the Jewish age. Compare Rev. Ch. 6.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 12:13-13:8)

1. Did the enemies of Jesus really believe that He told the truth and taught God’s will for man?
2. Why ask about the inscription on the coin?
3. Where is the emphasis? On the thing to be paid, or the person to receive it?
4. Did Jesus recommend paying taxes to the government?
5. What things belong to God -- are they the same things that belong to the Emperor (Caesar)? Discuss this.
6. What guidance does the Bible give to the concerned Christian who feels he cannot approve of the purpose for which his taxes are being used (such as developing nuclear weapons; for abortions; etc.)?

7. Since the Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, why ask a question involving it?

8. Was this a real case or a made-up one? What does their choice of question imply about their character?

9. Jesus states two things absolutely essential to escaping religious error (verse 24). What are they?

10. Why not marry in heaven? Will we lose our identity as husband and wife? Discuss.

11. Do angels have *identity* -- that is, can they be recognized as separate and distinct individuals?

12. Show how the reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob proves the immortality of man. Discuss.

13. What was the *Shema*' and how and why was it used?

14. Why preface the greatest commandment with a statement about the nature of God?

15. Show how love includes all that God wants us to be and to do.

16. How does Jesus view this second commandment as the result or counterpart of the first?

17. Specify areas of love involved in loving our neighbor as ourselves.

18. In what sense was the Messiah to be both the son of David and the Lord of David?
How was this possible?

19. What does the reference to “long robes” imply?

20. How was it possible to rob someone and pray to God in the same day?

21. Wasn't Jesus unnecessarily severe with the religious leaders?

22. Discuss the deadly danger of hypocrisy in prayer today.

23. If the widow had two coins, why didn't she keep one? Wasn't she being foolish in her generosity?

24. How does Jesus evaluate our gifts? Show how this principle is reasonable.

25. Jesus said: “and so your temple will be abandoned and empty.” How does this fit in with Mark Ch. 13?

26. Jesus was answering at least three questions (see Matt. 24:3). What shows us how to divide the time-frame of his prediction?

27. In what year was his prediction about the temple fulfilled?
28. Why would the disciples associate the second coming with the destruction of the temple?
29. What caused the Messianic hopes of the Jews to rise to fever-heat?
30. When was verse 8 fulfilled, or is it still in the future? Compare Rev. 9:13-21 with verses 5:8.

Lesson Eleven

(Mark 13:9 - 14:31)

Strength and Patience

(Mark 13:9-23)

9 *“You yourselves must watch out. You will be arrested and taken to court. You will be beaten in the synagogues; you will stand before rulers and kings for my sake, to tell them the Good News. **10** The gospel must first be preached to all peoples. **11** And when they arrest you and take you to court, do not worry ahead of time about what you are going to say; when the time comes, say whatever is given to you then. For the words you speak will not be yours; they will come from the Holy Spirit. **12** Men will hand over their own brothers to be put to death, and fathers will do the same to their children; children will turn against their parents and have them put to death. **13** Everyone will hate you because of me. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved.”*

14 *“You will see ‘The Awful Horror’ standing in the place where he should not be.”*
*(Note to the reader: understand what this means!) “Then those who are in Judea must run away to the hills. **15** The man who is on the roof of his house must not lose time by going down into the house to get anything to take with him. **16** The man who is in the field must not go back to the house for his cloak. **17** How terrible it will be in those days*

for women who are pregnant, and for mothers, who have little babies! **18** Pray to God that these things will not happen in wintertime! **19** For the trouble of those days will be far worse than any the world has ever known, from the very beginning when God created the world until the present time. Nor will there ever again be anything like it. **20** But the Lord has reduced the number of those days; if he had not, nobody would survive. For the sake of his chosen people, however, he has reduced those days.

21 "Then, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' -- do not believe him. **22** For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear. They will perform signs and wonders for the purpose of deceiving God's chosen people, if possible. **23** Be on your guard! I have told you everything ahead of time."

The lesson of the first part of chapter 13 is: "Don't let anyone fool you." The lessons of the second part is: "Hold out to the end!" The disciples must not allow the *signs of the times* to mislead them and turn them away from Christ. It is also very important that they hold out to the end no matter how difficult circumstances become and no matter how much it may look like the cause is lost! (The events of the *cross and resurrection* would be Christ's victory over Satan.) The disintegration of the Jewish Nation would be a severe trial for the Jewish Christians. Their own relatives would accuse them to persecute them. Compare Matt. 10:34-39; 1 Thess. 2:14-16. Every synagogue had three men with the authority to punish, and Christians who had been at first tolerated, would be beaten by them. The persecution would bring some before rulers and kings (such as Felix, Festus, Gallio, Agrippa, Nero, etc.) and give them the opportunity to speak the message of Christ to them. Compare Acts 26:19-29; 28:16-20. "Witness" in the New Testament is always used in the legal sense of "to give evidence; to furnish proof." The correct meaning in verse nine is: "to tell them the Good News." Verse ten is probably parallel to the thought in Romans 11:25. *The gospel must be preached to all peoples* -- the full number of Gentiles must be called into the Kingdom -- the Jewish leaders would continue their suicidal opposition to God -- and then the end did come. The gospel was preached, as Paul shows us (Col. 1:23). The miraculous gifts from the Spirit granted *instant maturity* which helped make it possible to do and say the right thing to best seize the opportunity of the moment. When all these things had been accomplished, and Jerusalem destroyed, the unbelieving Jewish people as a persecuting force were no longer a threat to the Christian religion.

The "Awful Horror" ("desolating sacrilege," RSV) is clearly the Roman armies, as Luke shows us. The prophecy of Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 was considered fulfilled by Antiochus of Syria in 168 B.C., as recorded in 1 Maccabees 1:54 ("*On the fifteenth day of the month Casleu, in the hundred and forty-fifth year, king Antiochus set up the abominable idol of desolation upon the altar of God. . .*") The idol was the statue of Jupiter Olympius. Now a further fulfillment is prophesied, and Luke 21:20 tells us it will be Jerusalem (the Holy City) surrounded by armies. The Roman armies of Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem in 66-67 A.D., then went back to Caesarea. This was the signal to the Christian Jews, who immediately escaped to Pella in the north of Perea. Not one Christian Jew lost his life in the siege of Jerusalem!

Floods would come in winter making travel impossible. The city gates would be closed and locked on the Sabbath, and no one could get out. History records that the surrounding of the city by the Romans, and the panic that caused their sudden pullback,

took place on a Tuesday in October. So the prayers of the Christians were answered. But for the unbelieving Jews trapped in the city, conditions were unbelievable. (When the final stage of the siege began with the Roman armies under Titus, the Jews had come from all over the world to be at Jerusalem for Passover. The previous retreat of the Roman armies had made them feel God was protecting them and they were invincible.) As the Romans stood outside Jerusalem, civil war raged among the people inside! They destroyed their own food supplies and they killed each other. And even while all this was happening, false messiahs and false prophets told lies to the people in the city. Josephus says that as Titus viewed the putrid bodies and the blood flowing around them, he groaned heavily, and raising his hands, called God to witness that it was none of his work. These were the “days of punishment” as Luke calls them. But God in His mercy did not destroy all the unbelieving Jewish people. One million one hundred thousand were killed, and one hundred thousand sold as slaves.

The Coming of the Son of Man

(Mark 13:24-37)

24 “In the days after that time of trouble the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, 25 the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses. 26 Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 27 He will send out the angels to the four corners of the earth and gather God’s chosen people from one end of the world to the other.”

28 “Let the fig tree teach you a lesson. When its branches become green and tender, and it starts putting out leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that the time is near, ready to begin. 30 Remember this! All these things will happen before the people now living have all died. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away; my words will never pass away.”

32 “No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come -- neither angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows. 33 Be on watch, be alert, for you do not know when the time will be. 34 It will be like a man who goes away from home on a trip and leaves his servants in charge, each one with his own work to do; and he tells the doorkeeper to keep watch. 35 Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming -- it might be in the evening, or at midnight, or before dawn, or at sunrise. 36 If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. 37 What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!”

The first part of this difficult passage must be understood according to verse 30 -- which puts it at the time of the siege. Then this must refer to a “spiritual coming” of Jesus, rather than the Second Coming at the end of time. This ties in with what Peter says about judgment beginning with God’s own people (see 1 Pet. 4:17-18). A. B. Bruce writes in the *Expositor’s Greek Testament*: “It seems to me that in true prophetic Oriental style the colossal imagery of the physical universe is used to describe the political and social consequences of the great Jewish catastrophe: national ruin, breaking up of religious institutions and social order. The physical stands for the social, the shaking of heaven for the shaking of earth (Haggai 2:6); or in the prophetic imagination

the two are indissolubly blended: stars, thrones, city walls, temples, effete religions tumbling down into one vast mass of ruin.”

The “lesson of the fig tree” shows that there would be *signs* pointing to the things Jesus predicted about the doom of Jerusalem. Josephus says: “At one time, when a star very like a sword stood above the city, as also a comet that continued to be seen a whole year, at another, when before the rebellion and the commotion that preceded the war, whilst the people were collected at the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth of the month of April, about the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone around the altar and the temple, as to seem a bright day. To the ignorant this appeared a good omen, but by the scribes it was immediately judged to refer to the events that took place at the issue.” Josephus tells much more about these signs.

But Jesus seems to say that no signs will show the end of the world is near! In verse 35 he says, “Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming. . .” It will be like a “thief in the night,” at a time completely unsuspected. Jesus says in verse 32: “*No one knows, however, when that day or hour will come -- neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son; only the Father knows.*” So we must make a careful distinction between the destruction of Jerusalem (in 70 A.D.) which the “fig tree” was pointing toward; and the end of time, which only the Father knows. *This is all that is revealed!* Jesus says nothing about any future age of “millennium.” He gives no encouragement to speculate about the fate of unbelievers (that is, in this prediction). Even though Jesus stood in his human body, and he said he did not know the day or hour of his coming, he did know that what he had prophesied was all part of God’s final intervention in history. *Therefore, be prepared. Watch, he says, he must not find you asleep.*

What difference does a belief in the second coming of Christ make to the life of a Christian??? Isn’t it enough simply to have the fact of his living presence with us??? The question is always raised: “*He promised to come, didn’t he? Where is he?*” (2 Pet. 3:4). We can imagine Peter saying something like this: “Do not listen to those who say the fact that Christ has not come yet proves he will not come at all. God is not limited by time as we are, and both one day and a thousand years are the same thing to him!” God delays until his purpose is completed (compare Rev. 6:9-11). Oecuminius writes: “The time of the end is deferred, that the number of them who are saved may be filled up.” *You should always be prepared for the Lord to come!!!*

The Plot Against Jesus

(Mark 14:1-11)

14 *It was now two days before the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and put him to death. 2 “We must not do it during the feast,” they said, “or the people might riot.”*

3 Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper, in Bethany; while he was eating, a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of a very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on Jesus’ head. 4 Some of the people there became angry, and said to each other, “What was the use of wasting the perfume?

5 It could have been sold for more than three hundred dollars, and the money given to the poor!” And they criticized her harshly.

6 But Jesus said, “Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a fine and beautiful thing for me. 7 You will always have poor people with you, and any time you want to you can help them. But I shall not be with you always. 8 She did what she could; she poured perfume on my body to prepare it ahead of time for burial. 9 Now, remember this! Wherever the gospel is preached, all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went off to the chief priests in order to hand Jesus over to them. 11 They were greatly pleased to hear what he had to say, and promised to give him money. So Judas started looking for a good chance to betray Jesus.

With the long prediction of chapter 13, Jesus’ ministry to the people and to his disciples had come to a close. Now we see events moving swiftly to their climax. The question for the Jewish leaders was not *whether* to kill Jesus, but how and when. They believe their problem is solved when Judas *volunteers* to help them capture Jesus quietly and so avoid the confrontation with the people that they feared (see verse two).

The chronology of these days is very complicated. Part of this is due to the Jewish custom of counting the new day from 6 p.m. Thus Sunday began for them at 6 p.m. *Saturday* by our way of counting, and there was a six-hour overlap. Also there is a three year error in the calendar which we use. Therefore Jesus made his Triumphant Entry on Sunday, April 2, 30 A.D. The second cleansing of the temple took place on Monday, April 3, 30 A.D. Jesus was crucified Friday morning, April 7, 30 A.D., and rose from the grave Sunday morning, April 9, 30 A.D. The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were closely linked together. Since it had become the custom to eat only unleavened bread the day *before* the Passover, this may have been considered the beginning of the feast. (This would explain the statement in verse 12.) Alford believes Jesus ate the Passover on Thursday (a day early) and died on Friday about the time the Passover lambs were being killed (compare John 19:14).

Mark gives us the anointing at Bethany out of sequence. It had already taken place the previous Saturday, April 1, 30 A.D. (see John 12:1). The woman is Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha (see John 12:1-7). This anointing is to be carefully separated from the one mentioned in Luke 7:36-50 (the woman there was a “sinner”). Only a person of wealth could have done what Mary did. The perfume was worth more than three hundred silver coins. (This would be equivalent to 300 day’s wages in the current job market since, in the ancient world, a silver coin was a day’s wage to a worker.) Thus the value of the perfume was equal to three hundred working days! Viewed in this context, it seemed like an extravagant act. Why does Mark mention this? Probably to help account for what Judas did. This was the last straw as far as that person was concerned! John points out that it was Judas who complained the loudest about this “waste.” Luke 22:3-6 implies that it may have been Judas’ anger at losing the money which the perfume represented which caused him to go to the chief priests and offer to betray Jesus. John 12:6 points out that Judas was a thief. (His character prepared him to be the one who would *volunteer* to betray Jesus.)

We do not know whether Mary was aware of the full meaning of what she was doing. Jesus views her action as a “fine and beautiful thing.” It was an act of devotion to

Him personally. But Jesus also sees it as an anointing in preparation for His burial (compare John 19:40). The fact that Jesus makes special mention of this act, and said the fame of it will spread “all over the world,” shows that it has special meaning. Notice that Jesus measured the moral quality of the act by Mary’s *motive*; the disciples measured by its seeming usefulness (as they judged by their own standards).

Jesus Eats the Passover Meal

(Mark 14:12-21)

12 On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the day the lambs for the Passover meals were killed, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and get your Passover meal ready?”

13 Then Jesus sent two of them out with these instructions: “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him 14 to the house he enters, and say to the owner of the house: ‘The Teacher says, Where is my room where my disciples and I will eat the Passover meal?’ 15 Then he will show you a large upstairs room, fixed up and furnished, where you will get everything ready for us.”

16 The disciples left, went to the city, and found everything just as Jesus had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

17 When it was evening, Jesus came with the twelve disciples. 18 While they were at the table eating, Jesus said, “I tell you this: one of you will betray me -- one who is eating with me.”

19 The disciples were upset and began to ask him, one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, do you?”

20 Jesus answered, “It will be one of you twelve, one who dips his bread in the dish with me. 21 The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will; but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of Man! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!”

Abbott gives this as the probable order of events (the Gospels do not always list things in the precise sequence). Jesus sends two of his disciples with directions to prepare the Passover meal for himself and the twelve (Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13). When it is evening, they meet at the place, and an argument breaks out over who will be the most important (Luke 22:24-30). Christ rebukes their argument by washing their feet as an example of humility (John 13:1-20). Then all take their places at the table (Matt. 26:20). Christ predicts his betrayal (Matt. 26:21-25; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:27-30). Judas learns that his treachery is known, and goes out to do it (John 13:27-30). The interrupted meal now continues and climaxes with the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). Either during or just after this meal, Jesus gives them the instructions and the prayer of John Ch. 14 to 17.

Many scholars believe Jesus ate the Passover on Thursday, a day early, and that he died at the same time the Passover lambs were being killed. This seems to be a contradiction, yet they think it is necessary to harmonize with John’s Gospel. (Alford spends five columns of print discussing the matter.) The unleavened bread was prepared on Thursday (Nisan 13), and this was considered the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Mark plainly says that the apostles prepared the last supper on “the day the lambs

for the passover meals were killed.” There really is no need for any theories about a different day for Jesus and his disciples to eat the Passover.

A “sign” would identify the man who owned the house. McGarvey thinks it was done this way so that Judas would not know the location in time to tell the Jewish leaders. The upper room may link with the one mentioned in Acts Ch. 1, and could be Mary’s house (Acts 12:12), the mother of John Mark, an established center for the disciples (see Mark 14:51-52). This Passover would be especially important to Jesus and his disciples. Note the room was “fixed up and furnished,” and the disciples need only prepare the Passover meal. The meal began with a giving of thanks. Then Jesus interrupts with the shocking words: “*One of you will betray me.*” No one questions the truth of this prophecy. No one accuses someone else. Each asks: “*Surely you don’t mean me, do you?*” Jesus answers, “*It will be . . . one who dips . . .*” But he said this quietly to John alone (see John 13:23-29). Matthew shows Judas identifying himself (Matt. 26:25), and this also must have been spoken quietly, or the others would have mobbed Judas. The meal must have taken place in a context of tension and suspicion, all the more grievous because it meant the breaking up of the fellowship of the Holy Meal (compare Psalm 41:9; John 13:18).

The New Testament does not speculate on the reason why Judas did what he did. Scripture prophesied the way God had appointed for the Son of Man to follow. Note that at the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about this coming death at Jerusalem (see Luke 9:31). Yet this in no way takes away the guilt nor diminishes the responsibility of the one who chose of his own free will to betray him. “*It would have been better for that man if he had never been born*” is a proverbial statement showing the doom of the person who refused God’s mercy. *Divine sovereignty* and *human responsibility* are brought together here in a way that denies the reality of neither but simply states the mystery of their interface. It is more important to see how Jesus freely chose to follow the mission which God gave him. *The highest use of free will is to do the will and purpose of God!*

The Lord’s Supper (Mark 14:22-31)

22 While they were eating, Jesus took the bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, “Take it,” he said, “this is my body.”

23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks to God, and handed it to them; and they all drank from it. 24 Jesus said, “This is my blood which is poured out for many, my blood which seals God’s covenant. 25 I tell you, I will never again drink this wine until the day I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God.”

26 Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

27 Jesus said to them, “All of you will run away and leave me, because the scripture says, ‘God will kill the shepherd and the sheep will all be scattered,’ 28 But after I am raised to life I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

29 Peter answered, “I will never leave you, even though all the rest do!”

30 “Remember this!” Jesus said to Peter, “Before the rooster crows two times tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.”

31 Peter answered even more strongly, "I will never say I do not know you, even if I have to die with you!"

And all the disciples said the same thing.

Jesus is himself the fulfillment of the Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). In the context of the Passover meal, Jesus instituted a new Holy Meal which supersedes the Passover meal. The normal sequence of the Passover meal was: 1) to begin with a blessing and prayer, followed by a dish of bitter herbs (such as horseradish) and sauce and the first of four cups of wine; 2) the history of the Passover was given, Psalm 113 was sung, and a second cup of wine was drunk; 3) after a prayer of thanks, the main meal of roast lamb with unleavened bread (such as matzos) was eaten, and after a further prayer, the third cup of wine was drunk; 4) Psalms 114-118 were sung, and the fourth cup of wine was drunk.

Mark does not mention the symbolism and ceremony of Passover, but concentrates on how Jesus used certain elements of the meal (unleavened bread eaten with the lamb, and the third cup of wine) to institute a formal religious rite (a "sacrament") to be perpetually *celebrated* by his church. He took a piece of bread (*bread* and *loaf* are the same word in Greek), gave a prayer of thanks (*eucharistos* means both a "giving of thanks" and a "blessing"), broke it, and gave it to his disciples. "*Take it, this is my body*" (the KJV adds, *eat*) is certainly symbolic, since Jesus himself stands before them as he says this. The Jews said of the Passover lamb: "*This is the body of the lamb which our fathers ate in Egypt.*" Jesus had in mind the fact that he was being offered in sacrifice like the Passover lamb on behalf of the disciples (see 1 Cor. 11:24). The wine symbolizes the bloody-death of Jesus. (Note Christians were forbidden to drink blood, Acts 15:29, so the "fruit of the grape" is symbolic, rather than literal, blood.) Three thoughts are bound up with it. First, it is "*my blood,*" the blood of the Servant of God who lays down his life to redeem *many* people -- that is, for all people (Isa. 53:12; Mark 10:45; Heb. 9:15). Christ's blood was *poured out* as an unlimited sacrifice, which must be seized through faith (see Rom. 5:17-19). Second, it is the blood which "*seals God's covenant.*" That is, the *blood* of Christ's own sacrifice was substituted for the blood of *every other sacrifice* (Heb. 10:9). The disciples symbolically eat the body and drink the blood of the *sacrifice* in which God and man were made friends again (i.e., reconciled). Third, it is *covenant* blood (compare Exod. 24:8), symbolic of the *new covenant* which Jeremiah prophesied (see Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13).

Jesus makes a vow in verse 25, in which he looks forward to the full coming of the kingdom of God. This would only be possible through his death (compare John 7:39). The supper is a foretaste of the holy meal (Lord's Supper) in which "*you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26). This Holy Meal is both a memorial of Christ-on-the-cross, and a prediction of the future. The "*new wine*" in the Father's kingdom is symbolic of the wedding feast of the Lamb and his church (see Rev. 19:7-8). In the beginning, Christians ate this holy meal every Sunday. (Sunday was the *Lord's Day*, because he arose from death on that day.)

This period of time closes with them singing a hymn. This may have been one of the appointed Psalms, or it could have been a completely new song of praise given to them by the Holy Spirit. Singing was given a new importance in the messianic community (i.e., the church). Christianity is uniquely a "singing religion." As they go

out to the Mount of Olives, only two or three hours will pass until Jesus is betrayed and seized.

The humiliation, suffering, and death of the messiah was to be a great shock to the disciples, especially Peter. Peter seemed to be the most confident, and therefore had the farthest to fall. (Only Mark gives complete details.) yet we see him as Christ's servant on Pentecost. All would be changed by their contact with the risen Lord!

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 13:9 - 14:31)

1. Show from the Scriptures that every nation had heard the gospel of Christ before Jerusalem was destroyed. Compare Col. 1:6, 23; 2 Tim. 4:17.
2. Show how Acts 4:19-20; 5:20-32; and 22:3-21 fulfill verse 11.
3. How could the "Awful Horror" possibly refer to the end of the world when those involved are to run away from Judea to the hills?
4. Are we to believe the destruction of Jerusalem was worse than dropping an atomic bomb on a city? Compare verse 19.
5. Why were there so many Jews in Jerusalem when the Roman army under Titus attacked? Why were there no Christians?
6. To whom is verse 23 being said?
7. What is the time-frame of verse 24?
8. Is this "Coming of the Son of Man" a prediction of literal events, or is this symbolic language?

9. How was the lesson of the fig tree fulfilled?

10. Why was it important to say that no one except the Father knew the day or the hour?

11. Has the Lord given each of us a specific mission to carry out? List ten separate areas of work for the Lord.

12. What was the one sin against which the Lord warned? Compare Matt. 25:1-13.

13. Please read John 12:2-8. When did this anointing take place? Isn't this a break in chronology? Discuss.

14. Read Luke 7:36-50 and point out the differences between the two anointings.

15. We know the identity of the woman by reading John's account. Who was she?

16. This was the act of a wealthy person. Was this waste justifiable? Discuss.

17. Jesus says something about good intentions versus good works in verse seven. What is it?

18. What possible motive or motives did Judas have in the betrayal? Suggest at least two.

19. Who were the two disciples whom Jesus sent into the city?

20. Why was the owner of the house so willing to allow his large upstairs room to be used by them?
21. Why did Jesus predict his own betrayal? Be specific in your reasons.
22. Did any of the disciples feel they were capable of betraying him?
23. The answer of verse 20 was not given to all of them. To whom? Why? Did Judas know?
24. If Jesus was betrayed in fulfillment of prophecy, why blame the one who did it?
25. Was the Passover meal finished before Jesus instituted his Supper? Discuss.
26. What is the symbolic meaning of the “broken bread”?
27. What symbolism do we find in the cup of wine? Which is important, the container or the contents?
28. Did the apostles have any idea what “covenant” (“testament”) was meant by Jesus (*“my blood which seals God’s covenant”*)?
29. What hymn was sung? Why? Read the hymn for an answer.

30. Why did Jesus predict the multiple denial of Peter?

Lesson Twelve

(Mark 14:32-15:15)

The Cup of Suffering

(Mark 14:32-42)

32 They came to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

33 Then he took Peter, James, and John with him. Distress and anguish came over him, 34 and he said to them, "The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and watch."

35 He went a little farther on, threw himself on the ground, and prayed that, if possible, he might not have to go through the hour of suffering. 36 "Father!" he prayed, "my Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But not what I want, but what you want."

37 Then he returned and found the three disciples asleep, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Weren't you able to stay awake for one hour?" 38 And he said to them, "Keep watch, and pray that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

39 He went away once more and prayed, saying the same words. 40 Then he came back to the disciples and found them asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. And they did not know what to say to him.

41 When he came back the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come! Look, the Son of Man is now handed over to the power of sinful men. 42 Get up, let us go. Look, here is the man who is betraying me!"

The overriding theme of the Old Testament portion of the Bible is the living God, the strict Judge, punishing the sinner, loving the penitent and guiltless and evoking fear and awe, utterly ethical and moral, the righteous One leaping out of those pages and demanding our obedient response. If God is truly righteous, and if we are truly to let God be God and his righteousness be revealed in a world of tragedy and suffering and moral failure, there is only one way in which this can happen. There is only one way in which a fully personal and truly just God can realize his purpose in such a world as this. That is, by himself bearing the suffering of the world and the consequences of our transgression. How can he be the just God of the Bible unless he suffers more than any man in total innocence? This is the only way in which his justice can be realized, and his compassion and his righteousness meet perfectly. The *wounded Man* in the heavens (the crucified Christ) becomes the fulfillment of the inner logic of the Bible. God becomes *God-in-history*. Compare Rom. 8:1-4; Acts 13:26-39.

Gethsemane was an olive grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Jesus came here with the intention of praying. The time of his death was drawing close, and he experienced the same agony that we would feel in similar circumstances (compare Heb. 4:15). *This was no make-believe!!!* Jesus said: *“The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me.”* Compare Heb. 5:7-10 (note verses seven and eight are being spoken about Jesus). As the *temptation* of these last hours came to Jesus, he had to resist it with all the strength he had! He speaks to his Father in the tender, confident language of a child: *“Father, my Father!”* All things are possible with God, yet the cup of suffering had to be drunk to the fullest. He was not exempt from suffering just because he was God’s Son. He learned first-hand how difficult it is for men to obey God. He learned this by experience, and he also learned what kind of help humans need to help them *stand in the whirlwind*. But more than just suffering was involved. Christ drank the cup of God’s wrath as our *proxy* (*“but for our sake God make him share our sin . . .”* 2 Cor. 5:21). Certainly the fact that Christ was taking on himself the sins of all mankind from the beginning to the end of time -- was the bitterest factor of all in the cup of suffering. Added to this was the treachery of Judas, the desertion of the disciples, Peter’s denial, the trail before the council, the trial before Pilate, the whipping, the soldiers making fun of him, the cruel death by crucifixion, etc. Christ prayed to the Father and he heard him (Heb. 5:7).

But the question was not: “What do I want?” It was: “What You want.” Jesus had said: *“But that is why I came -- so that I might go through this hour of suffering”* (John 12:27). His whole life on earth has been preparation for this *hour*. His death will fulfill God’s purpose (compare Luke 9:31). Without His death, He would be a seed preserved but not planted, and therefore *fruitless!*

Luke explains the strange action of the three disciples by saying they were “worn out by their grief” (Luke 22:45). Had Jesus expected them to pray with Him??? His words to them (verse 38) show that they were not able to face temptation either then or later. *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* (Only Mark records the personal rebuke to Peter in verse 37.) Twice more Jesus repeats this prayer. Then he says: *“Get up, let us go.”* The traitor and the enemy are here!

The Arrest of Jesus

(Mark 14:43-52)

43 Jesus was still speaking when Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived. With him was a crowd carrying swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders. 44 The traitor had given the crowd a signal: “The man I kiss is the one you want. Arrest him and take him away under guard.”

45 As soon as Judas arrived he went up to Jesus and said, “Teacher!” and kissed him. 46 So they arrested Jesus and held him tight. 47 But one of those standing by drew his sword and struck at the High Priest’s slave, cutting off his ear. 48 Then Jesus spoke up and said to them, “Did you have to come with swords and clubs to capture me, as though I were an outlaw? 49 Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must come true.”

50 Then all the disciples left him and ran away.

51 A certain young man, dressed only in a linen cloth, was following Jesus. They tried to arrest him, 52 but he ran away naked, leaving the linen cloth behind.

Did God answer Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane??? Heb. 5:7 says he did! Luke says an angel came and strengthened him. A prayer to remove a crisis may be answered in two ways: 1) the crisis is taken away, and we remain the same; 2) we are made so strong that the crisis ceases to be such a problem. With strength won by prayer, Jesus goes confidently to meet those who have come to arrest him.

We can only look in amazement at the sins of Judas. He was one of the Twelve; he spoke to Jesus as "Teacher" (literally Rabbi) he gave Jesus a kiss of greeting (the Jews kissed as we would shake hands); and he did these things voluntarily -- of his own free will. Mark makes no attempt to cover up what Judas did, nor to explain it. We can only guess at the motives behind his action. Probably he was most disappointed that Jesus had not led an armed uprising against the Romans. Since the others clearly did not understand what Jesus had come to do, certainly Judas would still be thinking in political terms. Money was also a factor. Thirty pieces of silver would be the wage of 30 days for a working man! He may have thought that Jesus was not going to be killed anyway. The rulers could not overcome such a miracle worker as Jesus. He may have thought that if Jesus was killed, he would never get to be treasurer of the earthly kingdom he expected, and so he ought to get what he could out of the situation. But only the Lord knows all the motives which drove Judas.

Judas had come with a large crowd made up of soldiers and temple guards (see John 18:3, 12). These had instructions to arrest only Jesus, and they make no attempt to seize any of the disciples, even though Peter cut off the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's slave (see John 18:10). Mark records the protest of Jesus at being treated as an *outlaw* (verses 48-49). "Thief" is now an incorrect translation. The word means "outlaw" or "insurrectionist," and would likely be "armed terrorist" in the newspaper. It is ironic that Jesus was charged with being an insurrectionist, and Barabbas, who was an insurrectionist, was set free. Compare Luke 23:2; Mark 15:7.) When Jesus said the Scriptures must come true, he may have been thinking of Isaiah 53, especially verses three and twelve. As soon as the crowd captured Jesus, the disciples all ran away into the darkness. They had been quick to promise their loyalty (verse 31), but they panicked and fled like sheep! Mimiriss writes: "This statement of the desertion of Jesus by all the disciples is one of the most remarkable instances of that honesty which led the evangelists to record facts, though to their own dishonor."

Only Mark records the incident in verses 51-52. This points to his own self being the "certain young man." Mark's mother lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12, 25), and some think the Passover was eaten and the Lord's Supper instituted in the upstairs room of her house. Perhaps he had been sleeping and had risen quickly from bed to follow Jesus and the others out to the garden. The "linen cloth" was a nightgown which only the wealthy would wear. Mark was not an apostle, but he was very close to them. This whole incident shows the panic of the disciples when the attack suddenly struck them.

The Jewish Trial *(Mark 14:53-65)*

53 Then they took Jesus to the High Priest's house, where all the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the Law were gathering. 54 Peter followed from a distance and went into the courtyard of the High Priest's house. There he sat down with the guards, keeping himself warm by the fire. 55 The chief priests and the whole Council tried to find some evidence against Jesus, in order to put him to death; but they could not find any. 56 Many witnesses told lies against Jesus, but their stories did not agree.

57 Then some men stood up and told this lie against Jesus, 58 "We heard him say, 'I will tear down this temple which men made, and after three days I will build one that is not made by men.'" 59 Not even they, however, could make their stories agree.

60 The High Priest stood up in front of them all and questioned Jesus, "Have you no answer to the accusation they bring against you?"

61 But Jesus kept quiet and would not say a word. Again the High Priest questioned him, "Are you the messiah, the Son of the Blessed God?"

62 "I am," answered Jesus, "and you will all see the Son of Man seated at the right side of the Almighty, and coming with the clouds of heaven!"

63 The High Priest tore his robes and said, "We don't need any more witnesses!

64 You heard his wicked words. What is your decision?"

They all voted against him: he was guilty and should be put to death. 65 Some of them began to spit on Jesus, and they blindfolded him and hit him. "Guess who hit you!" they said. And the guards took him and slapped him.

The scene here takes place at night. The Jewish council (Sanhedrin) of seventy-two (presided over by the High Priest) was made up of representatives from the priestly families, the teachers of the law, and elders of the people. Lawyers and judges have studied this trial, and have said that it flagrantly violated the rules of Jewish law! The accused was deprived of his rights and treated worse than a criminal! His arrest was at night (illegal); he was tied-up as an outlaw; he was beaten before his arraignment before the court; he was abused in open court during the trial. His trial was on a "feast-day" (illegal) and before sunrise (illegal). He was forced to incriminate himself (illegal) and this under the solemn oath (charge) of the court. He was convicted, sentenced, and executed the same day. All this was contrary to Jewish law.

Here is the order of events after the arrest: 1) Jesus is taken before Annas, ex-high priest (Pilate had appointed Caiaphas, see Luke 3:2), for a preliminary hearing (see John 18:13). 2) Next to Caiaphas, with Peter and John following along (John 18:15, 24). Alford says both Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same *great building*, which must have been the Castle of Antonia -- a "city within a city." 3) First stage of Jewish trial before Caiaphas (John 18:19-24). It is possible that Jesus was shuffled from room to room, since both Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same castle. The Jewish trial was illegal by their own law, since it took place at night. 4) Peter's three denials during the Jewish trial (Matt. 26:69-75). 5) After condemning Jesus to death, the council recessed until dawn. 6) It is implied that Jesus was cruelly treated during the recess (Mark 14:65). 7) The council reconvened at dawn (Matt. 27:1). This would be the third stage of the Jewish trial -- to *legalize* the whole thing. 8) Jesus is again questioned and officially condemned to death (Luke 22:66-71). 9) Jesus is tied with chains and taken to Pilate (Mark 15:1).

The purpose was simple. They had already decided to put Jesus to death. But they had to do it in such a way that they could *justify* what they had done. Jewish law

required the testimony of at least two witnesses, and their testimonies had to agree. It had to be a charge which would “hold up in court; that is, something which would convince the Roman ruler that he should condemn the prisoner to death. (The Roman government reserved the right of capital punishment for themselves. They did not permit the Jews to execute a prisoner on their own.) But their lying witnesses could not get together on their stories (verse 56). Finally two bring up the charge about destroying the temple. This gives the High Priest an idea (compare 2 Sam. 7:13; Zech. 6:12-13). What Jesus had said could be taken as a claim to *divinity*. The High Priest puts Jesus on oath (see Matt. 26:63) to tell the truth: “*Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed God?*” Jesus’ answer means: “*You have declared the truth in what you said.*” At the greatest moment of crisis in his life, Jesus breaks his silence to declare himself the Son of God! -- at the cost of his life. Then he emphasized his declaration by using the words of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7:13. Verse 62 should not be taken as a prediction of the Second Coming. Rather, what they were doing right then would raise Jesus to glory on the *cross*, bring the victory of the Resurrection, and seat him at the right side of God in heaven. Their places would shortly be reversed, with Jesus on the throne, and them standing to be judged by him!!!

Peter Denies Jesus

(Mark 14:66-72)

66 Peter was still down in the courtyard when one of the High Priest’s servant girls came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked straight at him and said, “You, too, were with Jesus of Nazareth.”

68 But he denied it. “I don’t know . . . I don’t understand what you are talking about,” he answered, and went out into the passageway; just then a rooster crowed.

69 The servant girl saw him there and began to repeat to the bystanders, “He is one of them!” 70 But Peter denied it again.

A little while later the bystanders accused Peter again, “You can’t deny that you are one of them, because you, too, are from Galilee.”

71 Then Peter made a vow: “May God punish me if I am not telling the truth! I do not know the man you are talking about!”

72 Just then a rooster crowed a second time, and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows two times you will say three times that you do not know me.” And he broke down and cried.

The brief mention of Peter in verse 54 is to remind us that he was present (along with John, see John 18:15-18) throughout the trial, and to prepare us for the denial. It isn’t a very pretty record that the disciples had during this crisis. They continually misunderstood the things that Jesus taught, one of them had turned traitor, they had all left him and run away at the arrest, and now the “leader” of the group openly denies his Lord.

The Castle of Antonia had a courtyard in the center, enclosed by rooms built around it. Doors and windows opened into the courtyard from the rooms (they had no window glass), so Peter and John could sit and watch the things which were happening inside. Luke gives the most complete account of the denial. Peter sits warming himself at the fire, along with the guards and servants. One of the High Priest's servant girls (John identifies her as the girl at the gate) recognizes Peter in the dim light, as one who had been with Jesus of Nazareth. (Nazareth was a "hick-town," and *Nazarene* was an insult, see John 1:46.) Just a few hours earlier, Peter had been ready to die with Jesus! Now he is on the spot. A wrong word will place him up there in front of the High Priest also, or at least this is how Peter must see it. He takes the easy way out (Would we do any differently???) and denies that he knows anything at all about this Jesus. Then he moves away to escape any more questions. At this point the rooster crows the first time. But the servant girl will not give up and she continues to accuse Peter. He again denies that he has anything to do with Jesus. (Matthew shows Peter using an oath or vow to strengthen his denial this second time.) The third time the bystanders join in also in accusing him. Luke says this was about an hour later, and John says the man who spoke was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. Each language has its dialects, and Peter's accent clearly identifies him as a Galilean. The man says this is proof that Peter is one of *them*! (Eleven of the Twelve were Galileans.) This time Peter makes his statement as strong as he can! He calls down God's curse on himself to witness the truth of what he is saying (but of course he is telling a lie). The TEV reconstructs the language so we will not misunderstand what Peter is doing. "*I swear that I am telling the truth! May God punish me if I am not! I do not know the man you are talking about!*" Just then a rooster crows the second time, and Peter remembers it all in a flash! Jesus had predicted. "*Before the rooster crows two times, you will say three times that you do not know me.*" Luke says the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter at this time. Peter breaks down and cries. He has sinned greatly! His heart is broken!

The Scriptures reveal all the "warts and wrinkles" of the great men of faith (and also the great women of faith). This is a vital lesson for those under persecution. Even such a sin as this *can be forgiven!* "*If we are not faithful, he remains faithful, because he cannot be false to himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13). But notice carefully the important difference between the actions of Peter and Judas. Peter's sorrow makes him turn away from his sin (i.e., repent) and turn back to Christ. Judas' sorrow makes him despair and kill himself. Compare 2 Cor. 7:10. Peter basically *loved God*. The fact that he sinned in a weak moment did not destroy that love, and so he came back! Judas, however, *did not love God*, and so he could not find it in himself to return to God and ask forgiveness. The opposite of *love* is *fear* (compare 1 John 4:18). Fear drove Judas to suicide.

The Roman Trial (Mark 15:1-15)

15 *Early in the morning the chief priests met hurriedly with the elders, the teachers of the Law, and the whole Council, and made their plans. They put Jesus in chains, took him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2 Pilate questioned him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"*

Jesus answered, "So you say."

3 The chief priests accused Jesus of many things, 4 so Pilate questioned him again, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they accuse you of!"

5 Again Jesus refused to say a word, and Pilate was filled with surprise.

6 At every Passover Feast Pilate would set free any prisoner the people asked for.

7 At that time a man name Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder in the riot. 8 When the crowd gathered and began to ask Pilate for the usual favor, 9 he asked them, "Do you want me to set free for you the king of the Jews?" 10 He knew very well that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.

11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask, instead, for Pilate to set Barabbas free for them. 12 Pilate spoke again to the crowd, "What, then, do you want me to do with the one you call the king of the Jews?"

13 They shouted back, "Nail him to the cross!"

14 "But what crime has he committed?" Pilate asked. They shouted all the louder, "Nail him to the cross!"

15 Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he set Barabbas free for them. Then he had Jesus whipped and handed him over to be nailed to the cross.

The ancient world got up early in the morning, and it could have been no later than 6 a.m. when the council met to put the official stamp of approval on what they had done in the night. The Jewish council had charged Jesus with blasphemy (*but He really was the Son of God!*). This would not do in the Roman court, however, and the charge was reframed. A sentence of death had to be cleared with the Roman court, and so the charge is made that Jesus was a political danger to the Roman government. It is ironic that Barabbas was such a danger (verse seven). *Zealots* (at least some of them) were *vigilante-outlaws* who used the cloak of "freedom-fighter" to cover their hoodlum activities. This helps to explain why the Jewish leaders would make such a charge against Jesus. They felt it would hold up in the Roman court. (The choice of Barabbas was prophetic of the doom of the Jewish nation. The ferment generated by the Zealots created the Jewish wars which terminated in the destruction of Jerusalem. During the last siege, bands of zealots roamed inside the city looting and killing and burning.)

There is no excuse for what Pilate did, yet we can understand something of why he did it. Jerusalem was crowded with perhaps three million people, and only a small Roman garrison (about 1000) was on hand to keep order. He knew he was executing an innocent man, and he probably could have done something about it. But human life was cheap, and Pilate took the easy way out (as so many do).

"*Crucify him!*" is the decision of the Jewish leaders and the people they represent. Jesus, the innocent man, will receive the punishment which Barabbas should have received for his crimes. Matthew shows Pilate washing his hands as a symbolic act. Pilate says: "*I am not responsible for the death of this man! This is your doing!*" The whole crowd answers back: "*Let the punishment for his death fall on us and on our children!*" They understood what Pilate has said, and they are willing to accept the guilt. But later they try to escape from what they have done (see Acts 5:28). Luke 11:50 records this prediction of Jesus: "*So the people of this time will be punished for the*

murder of all the prophets killed since the creation of the world.” Compare Luke 23:27-31; Deut. 28:49-57; 1 Thess. 2:14-16.

As was customary, Pilate had Jesus whipped before handing him over to the soldiers. The whip was made of leather strips, and had small sharp pieces of bone or stone tied into the ends, and would cut the skin. This was done cruelly to drain the strength of the condemned man before nailing him to the cross.

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 14:32-15:15)

1. Why did Jesus go to Gethsemane? What need did this fill?
2. In what way is the inner logic of the Bible fulfilled in Jesus?
3. Where and what was “Gethsemane”?
4. Didn’t Jesus know what the Father wanted? Why then the prayer in verse 36?
5. Who were the “sinful men” to whom the Son of Man was being handed over?
6. How do we “share in His sufferings” (Phil 3:10; Col. 1:24)? Does the event in Gethsemane teach us anything about this?
7. How did God answer Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane?
8. Why the need for a signal? Why use a kiss as a sign?

9. What was right and wrong in Peter's defense of Jesus (verse 57)?

10. How did Jesus plainly show that no one could arrest him without his consent (verses 48-49)?

11. What scripture came true in the betrayal and capture of Jesus?

12. Why the incident of the young man in verses 51-52?

13. The Jewish leaders were very concerned about ethical behavior. Did they carefully follow the rules of procedure in the Jewish trial?

14. Why was the whole council so eager to condemn Jesus to death?

15. Why did the High Priest personally try to get Jesus to answer the charges?

16. Why did Jesus answer the second question, but not the first one?

17. Just what was the specific charge of *blasphemy*?

8. Why did Jesus say what he did in verse 62?

19. Where was Peter during the Jewish trial?

20. Where was this courtyard and how were the surroundings arranged?

21. Why was Peter so quick in his denial? Wouldn't it have been easier to just ignore the whole thing?

22. Did Peter have reason to be ashamed of his association with Jesus?
23. What was Peter doing in verse 71? It was not "profanity."

24. Both Judas and Peter *denied* Jesus and in effect, both *betrayed* Him. What was the difference between the two? Why was Peter forgiven, but not Judas?

25. Why were the Jewish leaders so anxious to bring Jesus before Pilate?

26. Why did they reframe the charge against him?

27. Did Pilate believe Jesus was guilty as charged?
28. Why did the crowd demand that Barabbas be released instead of Jesus?

29. Pilate really tried to set Jesus free. What was the great sin of Pilate?

30. In what ways do the four Gospels show Jesus as the innocent victim who is forced to suffer unjustly?

Lesson Thirteen

(Mark 15:16 - 16:20)

Christ on the Cross

(Mark 15:16-32)

16 The soldiers took Jesus inside the courtyard (that is, of the governor's palace) and called together the rest of the company. 17 They put a purple robe on Jesus, made a crown out of thorny branches, and put it on his head. 18 Then they began to salute him: "Long live the King of the Jews!" 19 They beat him over the head with a stick, spat on him, fell on their knees, and bowed down to him. 20 When they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him out to nail him to the cross.

21 On the way they met a man named Simon, who was coming into the city from the country, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (This was Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.) 22 They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull." 23 There they tried to give him wine mixed with a drug called myrrh, but Jesus would not drink it. 24 So they nailed him to the cross and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing dice to see who would get which piece of clothing. 25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed him to the cross. 26 The notice of the accusation against him was written. "The King of the Jews." 27 They also nailed two bandits to crosses with Jesus, one on his right and the others on his left. [28 In this way the scripture came true which says, "He was included with criminals."]

29 People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the temple and build it up in three days! 30 Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of Jesus, saying to each other, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! 32 Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

Also the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

*"As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles" 1 Cor. 1:23). This must be understood as "God's ACT in Christ to set men free!" CHRIST-ON-THE-CROSS is THE sacrificial ACT which allows God to forgive sins and accept the believer as righteous. (Forgiveness takes place in the *mind* of God rather than in the heart of man.)*

Not a warrior Messiah, flashing signs of great power from the sky, but a Messiah dying helplessly in shame and disgrace. Compare 2 Cor. 4:10; 13:4. The Jewish Talmud calls Him HATTALUY --*the hanged* (compare Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). This is offensive to the Jews, because they expected a warrior Messiah who would liberate them from Roman occupation. This was nonsense to the Gentiles, because the Eternal Logos dying helplessly on the cross was an impossible idea to them. Mark gives us the details in stark simplicity. He makes no attempts to interpret the event as a "sacrifice," but

simply records the things as they take place. Yet for those who know the Old Testament portion of the Bible, the interpretation stands out clearly in certain words and phrases. Compare Isa. 50:6-7; 53:3-5; Prov. 31:6; Psa. 69:21; 22:18; Lam. 2:15; Psa. 22:7-8. Mark has already made it clear that he was to give his life for many (see Mark 10:45; 14:24). Christ's death (and resurrection) was in accordance with God's own plan (Acts 2:23).

Before killing Jesus, the soldiers made fun of him (verses 16-20). They dressed him up in a scarlet/purple robe (probably a worn-out robe thrown away by Herod). Scarlet and purple were the "royal colors." Then they "crown" him as "king" with thorny branches -- all to make fun of his claim to be the king of the Jews (this was the official charge against him). The greatest insult was to spit on him, but they were no worse than the Jewish council (Matt. 26:67). John shows us that after this had taken place, Pilate tried again to set Jesus free (John 10:5-16). Since Pilate was staying in Herod's palace (see John 18:28), this must have been the location of these things.

A condemned man carried his own cross to the place of execution. But Jesus is now too weak from all that has happened to him and he must have fallen underneath its weight. Simon of Cyrene in north Africa was forced by the soldiers to carry it (Luke 23:26 may imply that Simon carried only one end of the cross). Mark mentions Simon's sons because they were well known to his readers, and the Rufus of Rom. 16:13 may be one of them. (Some think Simon was a black man.) *Vinegar* in Bible times was a sour wine made out of grapes. This wine mixed with myrrh (Matthew says "gall," that is, a *bitter substance*, and both words probably refer to the same thing) was a drug to kill pain. The condemned man's clothes were usually given to the executioners. The way they divided the clothes fulfilled Psalm 22:18. He was crucified between two bandits ("armed terrorists," compare verse 27), and Luke says this fulfilled scripture (see Luke 22:37). The written notice of accusation said simply: "*The King of the Jews.*" Luke says this was written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, so that everyone would be able to read it. To the crowd, the crucifixion was proof of Jesus' "self-delusion." But for those who believe, the words are proof of *Who He Is!!!* "*For even though it was in weakness that he was put to death on the cross, it is by God's power that he lives*" (2 Cor. 13:4a). Compare 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

The Death of Jesus

(Mark 15:33-39)

33 *At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. 34 At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"*

35 *Some of the people who were there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" 36 One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"*

37 *With a loud cry Jesus died.*

38 *The curtain hanging in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 The army officer, who was standing there in front of the cross, saw how Jesus had cried out and died. "This man was really the Son of God!" he said.*

The ancients had no means to precisely measure time. Thus Mark says it was nine o'clock (the third hour) when they crucified Him, and John says almost noon (the sixth hour). But since time was measured in quarters of three hours, John's "almost noon" would not contradict Mark's "nine o'clock." Crucifixion was the most hideously cruel death known to the ancient world. The victim might hover between life and death for two days or more. It was painful and drawn-out, with the victim suffering from fever and dehydration, but death did not usually come in less than 36 hours. Jews did not crucify Jews, nor did Romans crucify Romans. Intense hate is shown by the Jewish leaders demanding that Jesus be crucified!

At noon (the sixth hour) the whole country was covered with a supernatural darkness. Since it was *full moon* at the time (Passover was keyed to the full moon), this could not have been an eclipse of the sun *in the ordinary sense*. Alford says: "Those whose belief leads them to reflect WHO was then suffering, will have no difficulty in accounting for these signs of sympathy in Nature, nor in seeing their applicability." Perhaps three million Jewish people crowded Jerusalem at this time, and they were eyewitnesses of the darkness and the other signs. The heavy curtain (veil, KJV, a heavy tapestry of double thickness) which divided the "Holy of Holies" from the "Holy Place" was torn *from top to bottom*, showing this to be an act of God and therefore symbolic (see Heb. 10:19-21). Matthew mentions an earthquake, which would also be a sign at this time. (The raising of some dead at this time, Matt. 27:51-53, properly belongs with the resurrection of Jesus, and will be studied there.)

The loud shout of Jesus in verse 34 uses the word of Psalm 22:1. The question is: how would a Jewish person understand these words??? When some said: "Listen, he is calling for Elijah," they were probably *deliberately misunderstanding* what He said. (There was a tradition that Elijah would come to the aid of a devout Jewish person). Some were claiming that Jesus was praying to Elijah. They were making fun of Jesus when they said to wait and see if Elijah would come (verse 36b). (The offer of sour wine was a rough kindness, and this time Jesus drinks. See John 19:30.)

Why did Jesus shout: "*My God, my God, why did you abandon me?*" Some think God had to briefly withdraw his *presence* from Christ, so he could experience death. Some think the fact that Jesus "shared our sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) caused God to briefly turn his back on Jesus as he held the world's sins on the cross. The words show that Jesus felt he hung on the cross *alone*. Yet He calls: *My God, my God.*" his inner consciousness of union with God must have been complete and indestructible. Chadwick says: "The only explanation is in his own words, that his life is a ransom for many, Mark 10:45. The chastisement of our peace, not the remorse of our guiltiness, was upon him." This was no *make-believe*, no *play-acting*. It was a true sacrificial act of death. It had been *pictured* by all the animals killed on Jewish altars (compare Heb. 9:23 - 10:9).

The army officer (centurion standing in front of the cross, who was in charge of the execution squad, made a declaration of faith. Although a Roman, he could not fail to know something of Jewish life, and he was aware of the charges against Jesus (see John 19:7). Certainly then he knew what he was saying: "*This man was really the Son of God!*"

The Burial of Jesus

(Mark 15:40-47)

40 Some women were there, looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joses, and Salome. 41 They had followed Jesus while he was in Galilee and helped him. Many other women were there also, who had come to Jerusalem with him.

42-43 It was getting on toward evening when Joseph of Arimathea arrived. He was a respected member of the Council, who looked for the coming of the Kingdom of God. It was Preparation day (that is, the day before the Sabbath); so Joseph went in bravely to the presence of Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. He called the army officer and asked him if Jesus had been dead a long time. 45 After hearing the officer's report, Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. 46 Joseph bought a linen sheet, took the body down, wrapped it in the sheet, and placed it in a grave which had been dug out of the rock. Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance to the grave. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching, and saw where Jesus was placed.

In an age when women had no more status than a slave, Jesus was unique in the fact that he treated them with respect. Some of his disciples were women (compare Luke 8:1-3; Acts 1:14), and the very first person to see him after the Resurrection was a woman (Mark 16:9). Women were first at the tomb, and first to announce that Jesus had risen from death. There were many women at the cross. Perhaps they felt less threatened by the Jewish leaders, because they were women. Alford thinks there was another group of disciples within sight of the cross, but at a distance.

Mark mentions three women in verse 40, and again in 16:1. They were eyewitnesses of the crucifixion, two of them saw the burial (verse 47), and the three came to the tomb at the resurrection. There would be no possibility that they were mistaken as to where Jesus was buried. They would know the fact of his death, and we see them come on Sunday morning to complete embalming the body. Mary the mother of Jesus was also at the cross, but Alford thinks she was led away by John (compare John 19:27).

Preparation Day was Friday (Thursday sunset to Friday sunset, as the Jews counted). Usually the bodies of the crucified were allowed to hang on the cross for some days before being thrown in a common grave. But because this was an especially holy Sabbath, soldiers were sent to take sledge-hammers and crush the legs of the victim to speed up their death (see John 19:31-37). The Jewish leaders wanted to get it over with quickly to avoid defiling their Sabbath. But Jesus was already dead and not a single bone was broken (compare Psalm 34:20; Exod. 12:46)! To be certain of Jesus' death, the soldier plunges his spear into Jesus' side. John tells us *both* blood and water poured out. This must have some special significance, since John puts so much emphasis on the fact.

Joseph of Arimathea was a believer in Christ, as well as a member of the Jewish council. (Probably he hadn't been notified of the Jewish trial, since he would have been favorable to Jesus.) John says he was a "secret believer" (John 19:38) but the death of Jesus brings him "out into the open." Only John tells that Nicodemus also helped with the burial (John 19:39). It is important that Jesus was wrapped in a new linen sheet and buried in a new unused tomb. Jews believed that the spirit of a dead man (a demon)

could come into a dead body and *animate* it (i.e, a zombie). The new tomb made it impossible to claim this. Pilate no doubt felt relieved to give the body to Joseph for burial. And so Jesus was given a decent burial according to Jewish customs. Mark carefully describes the whole thing for his Gentile readers.

Matthew shows the Jewish leaders going to Pilate the next day and asking for a guard to be placed on the tomb. Pilate gives them an armed guard of Roman soldiers. Since Pilate did not expect Jesus to rise from death, there was no irony in his statement: “*go and make the tomb as secure as you can.*” The grave was a cave dug in the rock, with a large stone rolled across the entrance to block it. It was sealed by stretching a string across the rock and fastening it at each side with wax. Moving the stone would break the seal. The guard is posted and everything humanly possible has been done to prevent the body from being stolen. All these things happened while Jerusalem was crowded with people.

The Resurrection

(Mark 16:1-8)

16 *After the Sabbath day was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. 2 Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the grave. 3-4 On the way they said to one another, “Who will roll away for us the stone from the entrance to the grave?” (It was a very large stone.) Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back. 5 So they entered the grave, where they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe -- and they were filled with alarm.*

6 *“Don’t be alarmed,” he said, “I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was nailed to the cross. He is not here -- he has been raised! Look, here is the place where they placed him. 7 Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: ‘He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you.’”*

8 *So they went out and ran from the grave, because fear and terror were upon them. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

The Sabbath had ended at sundown Saturday, and it was still dark as Sunday morning is dawning and the sun is just about to rise (see John 20:1). This is the third day since Jesus was buried. (In Jewish usage, “three days and three nights,” “on the third day,” and “after three days” all mean the same period of time. Compare 2 Chron. 10:5, 12; Esther 4:16; 5:1). Christ was buried Friday evening before sundown, was in the grave Saturday, and was raised from death very early Sunday morning. The fact that they had brought spices to anoint the body shows they really were not thinking in terms of a resurrection. They think their biggest problem will be to find someone to roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb. They would not have known about the guard and the seal. Matthew shows that as they were still on the way to the tomb, there was a strong earthquake, and an angel rolled the stone away and sat on it. Mark shows them arriving after the stone has been moved, and the angel speaking to them to quiet their fears. But they were terrified and dumfounded by all that had taken place. The fear and amazement

which these first witnesses felt is in sharp contrast to what we today would expect. But this day was unique in all of time and eternity!!! Matthew says they were afraid yet filled with joy. They run to tell the disciples! (From what Mark says, the women must have first been driven by fear as they ran, but this changed to joy as they began to realize the meaning of what had happened.)

Scholars have tried to reconstruct the events of that day from the Gospel records. Both Mark 16:9 and John 20:11 say that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. The sequence of events must go like this: 1) The women go very early to the grave, with Mary Magdalene taking the lead. 2) She arrives at the grave while it was still dark, just after the earthquake, sees the stone taken away, and runs back to the city by a different route, to tell the apostles. 3) The other women arrive at the grave, see the angels, are told Jesus has risen, and run to tell the disciples. 4) Peter and John, followed by Mary Magdalene, run to the grave, and then return to the city. 5) Mary Magdalene remains, sees the angels, and is the first person to see the risen Christ. 6) A few minutes later, Jesus appears also to the other women before they reach the homes of the apostles. (The women had left the grave on their way to the city before Peter, John, and Mary Magdalene came to it.)

The Gospels place before us the fact of the empty tomb. If the Jewish leaders had stolen the body, they certainly would have produced it to quash the preaching of the apostles. If the believers had stolen it, how would we account for the faith and boldness which they showed from then on??? Only the *bodily resurrection* fits the facts. And the fact that the disciples found it so difficult to believe that Jesus had risen from death is proof that they did not invent the story.

Appearances of Jesus

(Mark 16:9-20)

AN OLD ENDING TO THE GOSPEL

9 After Jesus rose from death, early on Sunday, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons. 10 She went and told it to his companions. They were mourning and crying: 11 and when they heard her say that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe her.

12 After this, Jesus appeared in a different manner to two of them while they were on their way to the country. 13 They returned and told it to the others, but they would not believe it.

14 Last of all, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He scolded them, because they did not have faith and because they were too stubborn to believe those who had seen him alive. 15 He said to them, "Go to the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 Believers will be given these signs of power: they will drive out demons in my name; they will speak in strange tongues; 18 if they pick up snakes or drink any poison, they will not be harmed; they will place their hands on the sick, who will get well."

19 After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God. 20 The disciples went and preached everywhere, and the Lord

worked with them and proved that their preaching was true by giving them the signs of power.

ANOTHER OLD ENDING

9 The women went to Peter and his friends and gave them a brief account of all they had been told. 10 After this, Jesus himself sent out through his disciples, from the east to the west, the sacred and ever-living message of eternal salvation.

Time has confirmed both endings to Mark's Gospel, even though someone other than Mark may have written them. Since the New Testament writers wrote through the power of the Holy Spirit, this is no problem at all. Both endings must have been in existence at the end of the First Century. Both are considered authentic. The Regius and Athos manuscripts, along with others, give both endings, as do all the Greek New Testaments since (and including) Westcott & Hort.

Here is the sequence of appearances: 1) Jesus was first seen by Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18). 2) Then he was seen by the two women returning from the grave (Matt. 28:9-10). (There must be some special meaning to the fact that the first two appearances were to the three women who were at the cross and saw him die.) 3) He was seen by Simon Peter alone (Luke 24:34). 4) He was seen by two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). 5) He was seen by the apostles at Jerusalem, with Thomas absent (John 20:19). 6) By the apostles at Jerusalem, with Thomas present (John 20:26-29). 7) He was seen at Lake Tiberius (Galilee) by seven disciples (John 21:1). 8) He was seen by eleven disciples, on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16). 9) He was seen by five hundred followers in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6). (This might have been the same time as #8.) 10) He was seen by James only (1 Cor. 15:7). 11) He was seen by all the apostles on the Mount of Olives (Luke 24:51). 12) He was also seen by Paul, to offer him a commission as an apostle (Acts 9:3-6; 1 Cor. 15:8). 13) He was seen by John on Patmos (Rev. 1:12-13).

Remember that Jerusalem was crowded with people at this time. They had come from all over the world for Passover. Certain of Jesus' appearances were to qualify certain people to be legal witnesses of his resurrection (see Acts 10:40-42). If he appeared to others besides those mentioned, we are not told (but see Acts 1:3; 13:31, which may imply that he did). However, Matthew records an amazing sign, in Matt. 27:51-53. Part of the supernatural and symbolic signs that accompany the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the resurrection of many of God's people who were dead and buried in the area of Jerusalem. Matthew states it in such a way as to show that it was not Jesus who raised them from death, but that as Jesus himself was raised to life, they were raised also. (Col. 1:18 shows Christ was the first one to conquer death -- rising from the dead never to be recaptured by death. This implies that all who had been raised from death before this, had died again later. See also 1 Cor. 15:20-28.)

Note also that the Risen Christ could be touched and handled (see Matt. 28:9), and that he ate food to show that he was not a ghost (see Luke 24:39-43). Yet he could pass through locked doors (see John 20:19). His *resurrection body* showed the proofs of his death and his love! Some sixty-five years later at Patmos, John saw "The Lamb" which appeared to have been killed. Jesus must have taken his *body* with him when he

ascended to the Father. It may be that Jesus in Eternity continues in this BODY which shows the evidence of the cross. If so, the Redeemed will be eternally reminded of God's act in Christ which set them free!!!

Verses 14-20 parallel the Great Commission as given in Matt. 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-53. Mark emphasizes baptism as an *initiation* into Christ. Faith is *obedient*. One who lacks the faith to obey Christ, does not have enough faith to be saved (compare Acts 22:16). Jesus works through his followers to send out "*from the east to the west, the sacred and ever-living message of eternal salvation.*" These things *had happened*, and the early Christians took this as their mandate to tell all the world the Good News of Christ Jesus!!!

Questions for Discussion

(Mark 15:16-16:20)

1. How did the soldiers and Pilate think of the title, "King of the Jews"? Why?
2. Since wicked men crucified Jesus (Acts 2:23), in what sense could it have been *God's act*? Was this death only "make-believe"?
3. What interpretation do the Old Testament scriptures put on the death of Christ?

If Jesus had come down from the cross, what would have been the reaction of those who made fun of him? Would they really have believed? Why didn't they believe before this?

5. Who forced Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross? Do you think he carried only one end? Why was Simon coming to Jerusalem?

6. Did both outlaws continue to insult Jesus (Luke 23:39-43)?

7. Have those who deny the resurrection any grounds for saying that Jesus never really died?

8. How do we know the darkness was not an eclipse of the sun?

9. When Jesus gave the loud shout of 15:34, was he quoting scripture intentionally or was this a spontaneous expression of his deep need? Did God abandon him?

10. Why did some say he called for Elijah?

11. Did Jesus control his own death -- that is, chose the time his *spirit* would exit from his body? Compare John 10:17-18.

12. Why did the death of Christ have more effect on the army officer (centurion) than on the Pharisees?

13. Why does Mark mention the women of 15: 40? What status did women have at that time?

14. Which day was Preparation day? What relation did it have to the Sabbath? What day was the Sabbath?

15. How many of Jesus' bones were broken during the crucifixion (Psa. 34:20; Exod. 12:46)?

16. Was Joseph of Arimathea a follower of Christ? What kind of disciple was he? Why does he act at this time?

17. Why is it important that Jesus was buried in a new tomb?

18. How was the tomb closed? How sealed? Why the guard?

19. What time was it when the women came to the tomb?

20. How would you describe the thoughts of the two Mary's as they come to the open tomb?

21. Why call Him, "Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified"?

22. Why promise to meet them in Galilee? When was this promise kept?

23. Mark says the women were afraid and said nothing to anyone (16:8). How long were they quiet?

24. Whom did Mary Magdalene tell about his resurrection? Why did they find it so hard to believe?

25. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Christ. Describe her activities from her first visit to the tomb until Jesus appeared to her.

26. When and where did Jesus appear to the “other women”?

27. Jesus did not first appear to his apostles. Why would this be?

28. Jesus had much unbelief to overcome in the minds of his apostles. How did he prove He was not a ghost or disembodied spirit?

29. Read the following and see who performed the miracles: 1) Acts 8:7; 16:18; 2) Acts 2:4-11; 3) Acts 28:5; 4) Acts 3:7; 5:12-16; 9:34.

30. Mark 16:20 summarizes the theme of which New Testament book?