

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

STUDY BOOK

FALL 2023



**LOVE IN
ACTION**

The Book
of Mark



Thru-the-Bible
Book by Book

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

is organized according to a systematic, sensible plan that will take you through every book of the Bible.

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	Philippians, Colossians	Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	Revelation	Ezekiel, Daniel
2023/24	Mark	Psalms	Galatians, Ephesians	Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
2024/25	Acts	Genesis	1, 2 Thessalonians, Jude	Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah
2025/26	Luke	Exodus	1 Corinthians	Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
2026/27	Hebrews	Joshua	2 Corinthians	Isaiah
2027/28	Matthew	Judges, Ruth	1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon	Jeremiah, Lamentations
2028/29	Romans	1, 2 Samuel	1, 2 Peter	Nah., Zeph., Hab., Obad., Hag., Zech., Mal.
2029/30	John	1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles	James 1, 2, 3 John	Proverbs

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Next quarter:
Psalms

The Gospel of Mark

Lessons

1. Jesus Begins His Ministry (Mark 1:1-34) —————	7
2. Jesus Responds to Human Needs (Mark 1:35—3:6) —————	15
3. Jesus Selects and Trains His Disciples (Mark 3:7—4:34) —————	23
4. Jesus Demonstrates His Power (Mark 4:35—5:43) —————	31
5. Jesus Prepares His Followers to Lead (Mark 6) —————	39
6. Jesus Ministers among Jews and Gentiles (Mark 7) —————	47
7. Jesus Helps People Understand Him (Mark 8:1—9:8) —————	55
8. Jesus Further Trains the Twelve (Mark 9:9—10:52) —————	63
9. Jesus Enters Jerusalem (Mark 11:1—12:12) —————	71
10. Jesus Answers Questions (Mark 12:13 -44) —————	79
11. Jesus Predicts Near and Distant Events (Mark 13) —————	87
12. Jesus Lets Himself Be Taken (Mark 14) —————	95
13. Jesus Lays Down His Life—And Takes It Up Again (Mark 15—16) —	103

Features

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark —————	4
How to Use the Study Book —————	6
Chart: Christ's Earthly Ministry —————	111
Map: Lands Jesus Knew —————	112
Art Credits —————	114
Bible Study Series Schedule —————	115

The Gospel of Mark

It would be hard to imagine a better introduction to the essence of Christianity than the Book of Mark. This book is a concise, vivid, and moving presentation of "the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

As a Gospel, Mark belongs in the same category of Bible books as Matthew, Luke, and John. Mark is especially similar to Matthew and Luke. The first of these three Gospels to have been written may have served as a source for the other two. Or perhaps all three had the same sources.

A popular misconception about the Gospels is that their main purpose is to tell the life story of Jesus. In fact, the main purpose of the Gospels is to convey the message that Jesus brought into the world. That message is also called the Gospel,

meaning "good news." But since the Good News is tied up with the life of Jesus Christ, His life is what the Gospels primarily describe. And the Holy Spirit led each Gospel author to communicate Jesus' message in different ways, emphasizing different aspects of it.

In writing the Gospel of Mark, its author carefully selected and arranged material he had gathered from others. It suited his purposes to ignore all the events of Jesus' life prior to His baptism. But the author described at length many of the later words and works of Jesus. Remarkably, he devoted nearly the entire second half of his Gospel to Christ's last days. Apparently the author believed that Jesus' ministry, especially His dying for sinners,

was most important for the communication of his message.

Author

From quite early in church history the second book of the New Testament has been called "The Gospel of Mark." However, that title is not a part of the book itself. The book doesn't contain the name of its author, yet nearly all New Testament scholars agree that most likely the author was John Mark.

Mark (as he was usually called) was a cousin of Barnabas and the

son of a Christian woman named Mary. When Mark was a youth, his mother's home in Jerusalem served as a meeting place for Christ's followers. It may even have been where Jesus held the Last Supper.

Some Bible scholars have suggested that Mark's conversion came through the ministry of Peter, since Peter called him "my son" (1 Pet. 5:13). The two men evidently

maintained a close friendship until Peter's death.

Mark must have heard Peter tell about many of his experiences with Jesus. Around A.D. 175 the church leader Irenaeus called Mark "the disciple and interpreter of Peter," and said that he "transmitted to us in writing the things preached by Peter." Although Mark had other sources of information for his Gospel, Peter's reminiscences appear to have contributed a great deal.

Peter was not the only apostle Mark knew. While still young, Mark accompanied Paul on his first mis-

sionary journey. But for some reason Mark turned back partway through the trip. Because of Mark's lack of commitment, Paul refused to take Mark with him on his second missionary journey. Eventually, however, Mark became a trusted ally of Paul's and an important church leader.

If you care to read more about Mark, take a look at these verses: Mark 14:51, 52; Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; Colossians 4:10; II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24; and I Peter 5:13.

Date, Place, and Occasion of Composition

Not only does the Gospel of Mark not tell us who wrote it, but also it neglects to mention when, where, and why it was written. New Testament scholars have attempted to fill in the missing information.

Many dates have been suggested for the Gospel's composition. Some scholars, especially those who think Matthew and Luke were based on Mark, believe that Mark was written between A.D. 50 and 65. However, more likely it was written somewhat later, between A.D. 65 and 70.

If the later time period is the correct one, then we can be relatively confident that the Gospel of Mark was written in Rome for Roman Christians. From biblical references we know Mark was with Peter and Paul in Rome during the A.D. 60s. Furthermore, several passages in

the Gospel appear to have been written with Gentile, and specifically Roman, readers in mind. For instance, in some places Latin technical terms are used (see Mark 15:16).

Mark may have written his Gospel to encourage Christians facing persecution after having been falsely blamed for the A.D. 64 burning of Rome. Several passages in the Gospel pointedly show that Jesus experienced persecution, or warn that Jesus' followers will suffer persecution.

More specifically, the martyrdom of Peter (thought to have occurred in A.D. 67) may have spurred Mark to write the Gospel. Perhaps after Peter was gone, Mark felt someone needed to preserve in writing the apostle's memories of Jesus.

Characteristics

Mark's sources were excellent; his literary skills were fine; and most importantly, he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We can trust what Mark wrote.

But despite this reliability, modern ideas of impartial history writing have little in common with Mark's motivation for writing his Gospel. He bent all his efforts to the task of convincing and affecting his readers.

This motivation shows up in a number of ways. His writing style (in Greek) was simple and straightforward. He used popular language and explained terms that could have been misunderstood by his first readers. He often used the present

tense and applied a word translated "immediately" to many of the actions he recorded. He noted the emotional responses of Jesus and others in the stories. He used precise details in his descriptions so that they would leave an impression in the readers' minds. Occasionally he addressed his readers directly or presented rhetorical questions they could answer for themselves.

These characteristics of Mark's writing enhance the naturally powerful effect the events in the Gospel have on us. Who can study the Gospel of Mark with an open mind and not be changed?

How to Use the *Study Book*

This *Study Book* is meant to be used with a Bible opened beside it. Before studying one of the lettered sections within a lesson, read the corresponding Bible passage. Then refer back and forth between your Bible and the *Study Book* until you

understand the meaning of the passage. Also think about your personal answer to each of the Ask Yourself questions. Finally, come to class prepared to discuss the Bible passage and raise any questions that have occurred to you.

1

Jesus Begins His Ministry

Mark 1:1-34

a John Prepares the Way (1:1-8)

It is written in Isaiah the prophet:
"I will send my messenger ahead
of you, who will prepare your
way."
—Mark 1:2

Mark stated at the outset that the Gospel is about Jesus (Mark 1:1). Yet the first person Mark presented in his book was not Jesus but John the Baptist (vss. 2-8). That may seem odd. However, in Mark's view, the Gospel of Jesus had its beginning in the ministry of John.

God chose John for an important task. He was to "prepare" the way for the Lord, as foretold by Malachi (Mal. 3:1) and Isaiah (Isa. 40:3).

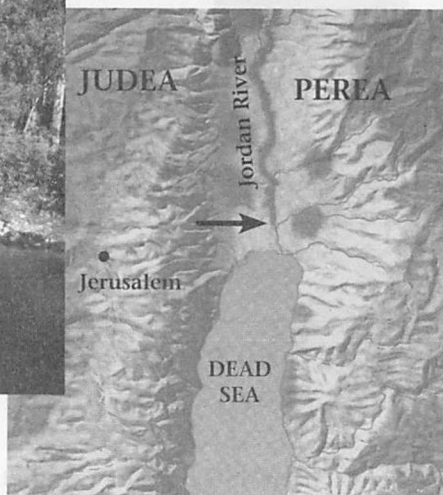
In Bible times there were no superhighways. When an important dignitary was expected to travel through the country, a messenger would go out in advance to tell the people to prepare the way for the dignitary's coming. This meant they had to improve roads by cutting down trees, leveling steep hills, and generally clearing away obstacles.

Figuratively speaking, this was the ministry of John. He was a messenger preparing the hearts of people for the coming Messiah.

Ask Yourself . . . How was my heart prepared to receive Christ? How am I helping to prepare someone else's heart?

'Son of God'

The title "Son of God" in verse 1 is the author clearly proclaiming Jesus' identity and making a dramatic and controversial statement about Him. In the Roman world, coins were sometimes engraved with the title "son of God" (*theo huios*) next to the Roman emperor's name, and the birthday of Augustus Caesar was proclaimed to the Roman world as "good news" for the empire. Who was the true "son of God," and who had the real "good news"? Not the emperor, Mark is saying. Even the demons know Jesus is the "son of God" (3:11; 5:7), and a Roman centurion, at the foot of the Cross, cried out, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39).



The arrow marks the likely site where John baptized.

John was not the kind of person one might expect to get the job of Messiah's forerunner. As far as we know, John never served as a priest even though he was born into a priestly family. Neither did he serve as a scribe, Pharisee, or Sadducee.

John avoided cities, taking his message instead into the wilderness. He spent most of his time in the rugged area near where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea.

John was eccentric in his dress and behavior. He wore a garment of camel's hair, which he tied at his waist with a leather strap. His diet included locusts and wild honey.

But despite his peculiarities, John was tremendously popular with the masses. People came from Jerusalem and other parts of Judea to hear him.

John's popularity was a mark that he was doing a real work of God. It is rare enough for people to flock to someone who tells them they need to repent. But these people even went along with John about their need for baptism. In those days, non-Jews who wanted to make

Judaism their religion were baptized as a symbol of spiritual cleansing. But Jews were not used to hearing that they needed to be baptized.

People in our day have some of the same hesitations about repentance that John's contemporaries must have had. It can seem embarrassing to admit that we need to change. Yet it is only the humble who receive God's forgiveness.

Besides calling people to repentance and baptism, John pointed them to Jesus. John did not come to establish a movement or build an institution of his own. Even with all his popularity, John knew Christ was infinitely superior to him in status and work.

John expressed Christ's superior status by declaring his own unworthiness to untie Christ's sandals. John shrank from assuming the position of even the lowliest servant

to Christ. He was Jesus' forerunner, not His competitor.

John went on to outline Christ's superior work by saying, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). John offered a symbol (water) that held no real power to cleanse sin. Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, providing an actual cleansing from sin.

b Jesus Is Baptized and Tempted (1:9-13)

A voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." —Mark 1:11

A great number of people were coming to John for baptism as a testimony of repentance. John was preoccupied with his work. But when he lifted his eyes, he stood face-to-face with the Messiah!

Why did one who was already pure want the symbol of cleansing? Here are two probable reasons:

First, Jesus wished to identify with sinners. Others came to John to confess their sins; Jesus came because He loves to associate with those who hunger for righteousness. This act was typical of His entire life. The love that put Him in line with the baptismal candidates is the same love that led Him to the Cross.

Second, Jesus sought baptism to

represent sinners. His baptism was not for His own sake, but for ours. He was baptized as the representative of all people, demonstrating that we all need repentance, we all need cleansing.

As Jesus came out of the water, God publicly affirmed Him in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. This was a visible anointing, revealing that Jesus is the Messiah ("Anointed One"). Second, the Father audibly identified and endorsed Him. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (vs. 11).

Thus the entire Trinity became involved in the mission of Jesus. The Spirit and the Father identified themselves with the Son as He identified Himself with sinners. All three members of the Trinity are committed to the redemption of the lost.

Jesus' first public appearance lasted only until the completion of His baptism. Afterward, He went alone into the desert, where "the Spirit sent him" (vs. 12). One thing more was necessary before Jesus could begin His ministry: He had to endure 40 days of tempting. The Son of God was not fully equipped to serve sinners until He had felt—and triumphed over—the temptations that lead us astray.

In the desert, Jesus became the object of Satan's personal assaults. This was no task for a lesser demon. If the Son of God was to be drawn away from obedience to the Father's will, it would require the most diabolical efforts from the Prince of



Much of the land between Jerusalem and the Jordan River is as barren today as when Jesus was tempted there.

darkness himself. So Satan assaulted Jesus with his worst—but without success. Jesus emerged triumphant.

Afterward, angels ministered to Him.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways have personal testings prepared me for my tasks?*

C Jesus Begins His Ministry (1:14-20)

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

—Mark 1:15

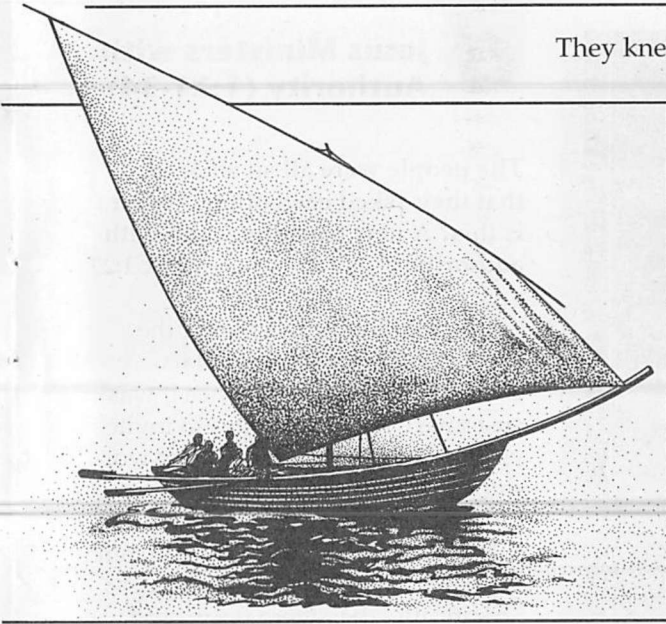
John the Baptist was many things, but a diplomat was not one of them.

He boldly confronted evil, no matter who was involved. For speaking out against sins committed by the ruler Herod Antipas, John was cast into prison.

With John in prison, Jesus assumed His position as the prominent spiritual leader. In Galilee He introduced His ministry with the words "The time has come" (vs. 15). A new era had begun. And when that era reaches its completion, the kingdom of God will have come in all its fullness.

It is essential to our Christian hope that we keep a good sense of history. History is not in the unbroken grip of evil. Satan is powerful and active now, but his doom is certain.

Neither is history moving in pointless circles, with all things being as they always have been and always will be. God is moving



They knew how it feels to catch fish—the thrill of hauling in a full net. Now they were being called to a task that offered deeper fulfillment: fishing for people. It was a call to make a difference in this world. That's a call every person finds challenging.

Jesus' words went straight to the hearts of Peter and Andrew. Here was what the brothers had been longing for! So they immediately followed Jesus, laying aside the nets they had used in their daily work

history toward a just conclusion.

Like John, Jesus preached repentance. Yet He took His listeners beyond repentance to faith in Himself. This is the distinctively Christian message.

Ask Yourself . . . *Whom should I urge to "repent and believe the good news"?*

After announcing the start of a new era, Jesus set out to call His disciples. He did—and does—eternal work through human hands.

First, He called Simon (Peter) and Andrew. These brothers certainly were not perfect. But Jesus did not call them because of who they were. He called them because of who they could become. Such people are the raw material with which Christ builds His kingdom.

Jesus spoke to the brothers in language they could understand.

as fishermen.

We must do the same with everything that would keep us from following Christ. Nets are not evil. Neither are possessions or careers. But we must cast aside anything that hinders us from following Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *What "net" should I cast aside to follow Christ better?*

Jesus continued walking until He found James and John at work with their father, Zebedee. Jesus called this pair of brothers too. They followed Him. Zebedee had the help of hired servants, and therefore presumably was able to maintain his fishing business without his sons.

We should note that in calling the first disciples, Christ required radical commitment. He didn't suggest that they express an occasional

Follow Me More

From reading only Mark's Gospel, we might conclude that Jesus' first contact with Peter, Andrew, James, and John was when He said "Follow me" (Mark 1:17). However, John's Gospel suggests that at least some of these fishermen were part-time followers of Jesus already (John 1:35-42). Therefore, when Jesus said "Follow me," He was asking the men for full-time commitment.



interest in Him and His teachings. He said, "Follow me."

Following Christ part-time is never enough. Some people believe that Christian faith can be just one among several interests in life. But in fact, following Jesus must come first all the time. Then the other interests can assume their proper places in one's life.

d Jesus Ministers with Authority (1:21-34)

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!"
—Mark 1:27

One Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum, His Galilean headquarters. Since it was customary for synagogues to invite visiting teachers to address the worshipers, this synagogue's leaders invited Jesus to speak.

We don't know what He said, but the people were astonished by it. Specifically, they were impressed by the authority with which Jesus taught. In that day, religious teachers usually tried to validate their teaching by naming respected scholars who agreed with their position. But Jesus offered no such validation. He spoke as though what He said mattered simply because He said it. Immediately, it was clear to everyone that this was not just another teacher.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I been obeying Jesus as one who believes in His authority?*

While the worshipers were still buzzing about Jesus' teaching, something happened to astonish them even more. Jesus demonstrated His authority in a powerful way.

A man in the synagogue was possessed by an evil spirit. The evil spirit recognized Jesus and called out, identifying Him by name and



Partially reconstructed Capernaum synagogue.

Capernaum Reveals Its Past

Archaeologists working in Capernaum have uncovered a large portion of a second- or third-century synagogue. Beneath it are the remains of an earlier structure, suspected to be the synagogue Jesus visited (Mark 1:21).

Nearby is what's left of an octagonal church building erected about the fifth century. This building had been constructed on the site of an enlarged home that held Christian services as early as the first century. Perhaps it was Peter's home.

proclaiming Him "the Holy One of God" (vs. 24). This may seem unaccountable, coming as it did from a demon, the Lord's enemy. But it was not said to praise Jesus. It was said to gain control of Him, in keeping with the ancient belief that to know a person's name gave one power over him. But the attempt was futile.

Jesus ordered the evil spirit to be quiet. To put it in our language, He

said, "Shut up!" Then He told the demon to leave the man. It obeyed; it had no choice.

This brief incident deepened the amazement of the spectators. They were astounded by (1) this new teaching, which was like nothing they had heard before; (2) the authoritative manner in which Jesus spoke; and (3) Jesus' ability to demand obedience, even from demons. As a result of this and

similar events, Jesus' fame spread throughout Galilee.

Jesus and His new disciples walked from the synagogue to Peter's home in the same town. Part of the reason for this visit was the illness of Peter's mother-in-law. She was in bed with a "fever" (vs. 30). At that time a fever was considered to be an illness itself, rather than a symptom of many kinds of illness.

We don't know precisely what was wrong with Peter's mother-in-law, but Jesus knew what to do. He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. In the process, He healed her.

Later that Saturday evening many local people came to Jesus, bringing the sick and the demon possessed. According to Jewish law, now that the Sabbath was over (having ended at sunset) the people could travel.

The crowd was so large that it looked as though the entire town had turned out. Jesus healed the sick and drove out demons. However, He would not allow the demons to identify Him. He didn't need the testimony of the demonic world to establish His credibility.

We should not assume from Jesus' apparent popularity that He was

widely received as the Messiah.

Most of those who came to Him at this stage were not seeking Him because they appreciated who He is. Some just wanted to be healed, while most of the rest were curiosity seekers. Jesus was calling them to His eternal kingdom, but they were chiefly interested in a comfortable existence within the kingdom of this world.

We face the same temptation. Often our goal for ourselves is an easy life. But Jesus' goal for us is to transform us, making us fit for His kingdom. And usually that transformation involves hardship and suffering which enables us to grow spiritually.

Ask Yourself . . . *Am I willing to follow Jesus regardless of whether my problems are fixed?*

As we continue to study the deeds of Christ, we must look beyond the events themselves and ask ourselves what those events mean in light of Jesus' stated mission: "The Son of Man [came] to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). Jesus' mission was not simply to provide earthly happiness. He came to offer eternal life.

2

Jesus Responds to Human Needs

Mark 1:35—3:6

a Jesus Prays and Heals (1:35-45)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

—Mark 1:35

In the previous lesson we saw that Jesus was concerned with human needs, such as demon possession and illness. But as we

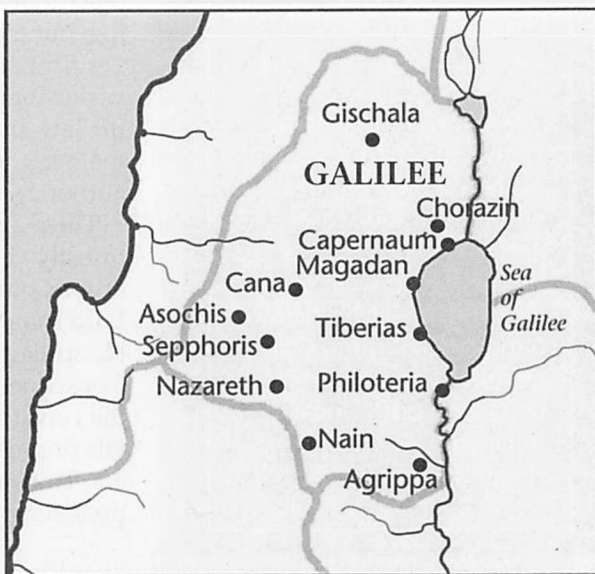
continue our study of Mark's Gospel, we'll understand much more about how Jesus accomplished His mission in the world by identifying people's needs and then meeting those needs.

First, though, we find Him in prayer. The demands of His ministry were already pressing upon Him, so He rose early in the day to spend time alone with the heavenly Father.

The disciples interrupted Jesus' prayer,

exclaiming, "Everyone is looking for you!" (vs. 37). They could not understand why He would ignore the call of the crowd, even for prayer. They assumed the success of His mission required approval from the masses. Jesus knew better. The success of His mission required approval from the Father.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I more like the disciples, who sought action at the expense of prayer, or like Jesus, who was committed to prayer no matter what?



Jesus insisted on moving to another place. His mission was to confront people with the Gospel, and the Gospel could not be confined to one place. So leaving the crowds behind, He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching and casting out demons.

Before long Jesus' popularity began limiting His access to the towns of Galilee. The main reason for His popularity was the testimony of a former leper.

Leprosy

Modern skin specialists who have studied Leviticus 13 and 14 believe Jews applied the term "leprosy" to many chronic skin diseases. One of these was the disease that today is called leprosy: Hansen's disease.

Whatever his precise illness, the man Jesus met deserved pity. Besides enduring the disease itself, he was required by the law to wear torn clothing, to let his hair hang loose, and to warn anyone who came near by calling out "Unclean, unclean." He was isolated as well as ill.

This man had heard of Jesus' power, but evidently knew little about His compassion. That seems likely from the way he phrased his request: "If you are willing, you can make me clean" (vs. 40). He knew Jesus could heal him, but was not sure Jesus would want to.

Jesus did want to. He had seen many lepers, yet He was concerned about each one.

The man probably had not been touched by a non-leper in months or even years. The Law declared that a person became "unclean" by touching a leper. Jesus could have healed the leper without touching him, but He did touch him, instantly healing him.

Ask Yourself . . . *What kinds of people do I tend to avoid? How can I overcome my reluctance to be with them?*

Jesus commanded the former leper to tell no one about the healing, but to report to a priest for verification. Not only would such verification fulfill a requirement of the law, but also it would testify to the religious establishment of Jesus' authority.

The man may have obeyed the priestly verification part of Jesus' orders, but he did not obey the Lord's command to remain silent. He spread the news far and wide. Consequently, Jesus' ministry in the synagogues was hampered by His popularity with miracle seekers. This incident ended His early preaching tour of Galilee.

b Jesus Forgives Sins (2:1-12)

"Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk' "?
—Mark 2:9

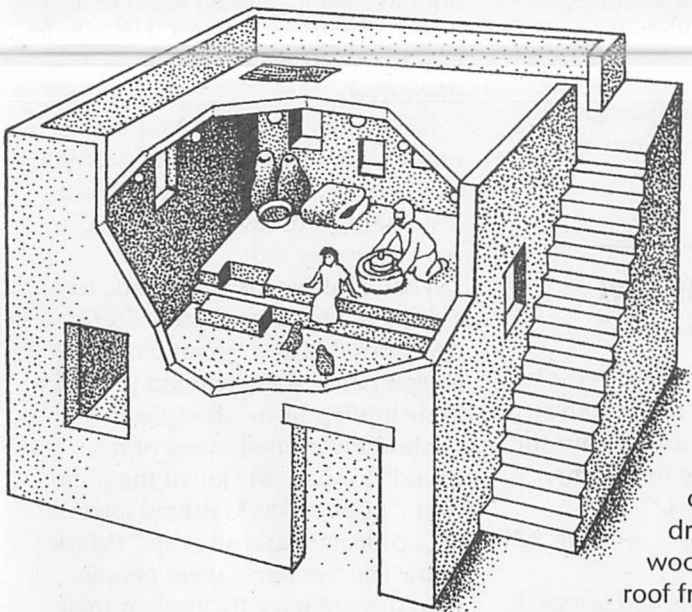
Soon after healing the leper, Jesus returned to Capernaum. The home where He was staying (possibly Peter's) quickly overflowed with people. Jesus took advantage of the occasion to preach the Word.

As Jesus was preaching, four men carried a paralyzed friend to the home using a mat as a stretcher. They hoped Jesus would heal their friend. Not discouraged by the crowd blocking their way, the men

dismantled a part of the roof and lowered their friend into the house.

Jesus was impressed by the faith the four men had shown. And Jesus responded to their faith, but not (at first) as the men expected. Jesus saw that the greatest problem faced by the man on the cot was not physical paralysis but spiritual paralysis. So instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus forgave his sins. Evidently this man had faith, too.

Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness angered the religious leaders. They lacked the courage to confront Jesus openly, but in their hearts they accused Him of blasphemy. They understood that anyone who claims to forgive sins also claims to be divine, and they would not accept the truth that Jesus is God.



Most Jews in Jesus' day lived in simple homes made of stone or brick. Inside were plain furnishings and utensils. Often the family shared the home with their animals. Outside, a narrow stairway led to the roof, which was made of branches and dried clay laid over wooden beams. The roof frequently was used for working or sleeping.

Jesus responded to the teachers' thoughts by asking, "Which is easier: to say to the paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'" (Mark 2:9). Answer: It is easier to say "Your sins are forgiven," since no one can disprove this statement. Forgiveness takes place invisibly. On the other hand, a false claim of miraculous healing can be disproved on the basis of visible evidence.

Miraculous healing and the forgiveness of sins both require divine authority. Jesus healed the paralytic in part to lend credibility to His pronouncement of forgiveness.

This event offers two applications for those who want to serve Christ by serving others. First, sometimes we will have to look beyond people's secondary needs to their primary need. Second, sometimes we must do good even when it opens us up to criticism.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who among my acquaintances has a need I can meet?*

C Jesus Calls Levi (2:13-17)

Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

—Mark 2:17

Until this time Jesus had selected only four disciples. They were not

especially impressive men, yet they were at least respectable in the eyes of religious leaders.

Jesus' next choice was bound to raise questions. As far as we know, Levi (Matthew) was an honest man. But as a tax collector he was a member of a profession notorious for attracting thieves. As long as the taxes came in, government officials didn't ask many questions. So tax collectors often grossly overcharged people, pocketing the extra. It's not surprising that tax collectors were despised.

Matthew was even more unpopular than some other tax collectors because he was Jewish. His cooperation with the Romans made him an outcast among his own people. He was probably not permitted to worship in the synagogue. He would not have been allowed to serve as a judge or witness in court. His whole family would have been viewed as disgraced.

Jesus looked beyond Matthew's reputation, recognizing his potential as a member of the apostolic band. Jesus said, "Follow me" (vs. 14). And Matthew did.

Then Matthew invited Jesus to a dinner at his home. Luke 5:29 describes this as a "great banquet." Probably Matthew wanted to celebrate joining Jesus' disciples.

Matthew invited many of his friends to share the joy of the occasion. "Friends" to Matthew meant "tax collectors and sinners" (Mark 2:15). The "sinners" were people who did not have the time or inclination to follow the traditions of the

Pharisees and religious teachers.

Jesus' presence at the banquet troubled the religious leaders. They asked, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (vs. 16). The Pharisees were implying that Jesus must be of questionable character Himself; otherwise, He would not be seen in such company.

Jesus justified His presence at the banquet with a medical analogy:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (vs. 17). The "doctor" was Jesus; the spiritually "sick" were the "tax collectors and sinners." Jesus was at the banquet because He was needed there.

The spiritually "healthy" in Jesus' analogy were the Pharisees. They were not actually righteous, but they saw themselves that way. Jesus was not ministering to them because they, unlike the "tax collectors and sinners," had not admitted their infection with sin.

Ask Yourself . . . *Am I willing to risk my reputation by associating with outcasts who need Jesus?*

FASTING in the Bible

Old Testament law required only one fast, to be held on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:27-29). However, the Israelites fasted at other times for a variety of reasons, such as to show mourning (I Sam. 31:13), to demonstrate repentance (Neh. 9:1), and to gain God's protection (2 Chron. 20:3).

Jesus fasted at least once (Luke 4:2). He never ordered His followers to fast, but neither (to our knowledge) did He order them not to fast. He predicted that His followers would fast when He was taken from them (Mark 2:20).

d Jesus Is Asked about Fasting (2:18-22)

Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

—Mark 2:18

The coincidence of two religious groups holding fasts at the same time led to a question by some people, probably followers of John the Baptist (Matt. 9:14). "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?" they asked Jesus (Mark 2:18b). To them, the omission cast doubt on Jesus' piety.

Jesus responded by saying His disciples should no more be

expected to fast when He was with them than a man's friends should be expected to fast at his wedding celebration. The Bible records a number of reasons why people fasted, such as to express sorrow or a need for God's help. Jesus' immediate presence with His disciples during His earthly ministry removed these needs for fasting, since He gave them joy and supplied all they needed. Later Jesus would be taken from His disciples by death, however, and then they would fast.

Fasting was part of the larger issue of religious forms. When Jesus came on the scene, He found a Jewish community that was more interested in preserving their religion than in having an obedient relationship with God. Jesus hadn't come to earth to be a part of that kind of religion.

Speaking in parables, Jesus said new cloth cannot safely be attached to old material, since the old cloth will be damaged when the new cloth shrinks. Likewise, new wine would burst old wineskins that had been stretched to the limit by the fermenting of their previous contents. Jesus meant that old religious practices could not be modified to fit His purposes. New life would require new forms.

Not all traditions and rituals are bad. But traditions and rituals must always reflect, and never restrict, our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *Which rituals, traditions, or forms have I found distracting? Which have I found helpful in my walk with Jesus?*



Two Sabbath Conflicts (2:23—3:6)

He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

—Mark 2:27, 28

God designed the Sabbath to give people an opportunity for resting and reflecting on His goodness. But the Jewish teachers, in their attempts to standardize religion, had lost sight of this purpose. Under their interpretations, the Sabbath had become more a burden to the people than a help.

The disciples violated the religious leaders' regulations when they picked some grain to eat. To the legalistic religious leaders, this was reaping—a forbidden activity on the Sabbath.

Jesus defended the actions of His disciples by citing an Old Testament precedent (see I Sam. 21:1-6). During a flight from Saul, David and his men had eaten bread that was forbidden under normal circumstances (Lev. 24:8, 9). Jesus' point was that in the case of His disciples, as in David's case, human well-being came before strict obedience to a regulation. That's why Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

If anyone doubted Jesus' right to make pronouncements about Sabbath observance, He declared that He is "Lord even of the Sabbath" (vs. 28).

Ask Yourself . . . *Are there any human laws that tend to keep me from meeting people's needs?*

Undoubtedly the religious leaders were not pleased with Jesus' comments on the occasion of the first Sabbath conflict. But in the second Sabbath conflict (3:1-6) we see their hatred coming to the surface. It appears first in verse 2, where we are told they were seeking some means of tripping up Jesus.

Jesus was in a synagogue, and one of those present was a man with a shriveled hand—perhaps the result of a birth defect or injury. The religious leaders knew Jesus healed the sick. They hoped the unfortunate man would provide them with a reason for condemning Jesus.

The religious traditions prohibited any healing on the Sabbath, except when there was an immediate threat to life. This was based on the teachers' understanding that healing is work, and all work was prohibited on the Sabbath.

Jesus knew their thoughts, but was determined to heal the man anyway. In the process He challenged the leaders openly. The implication of His question in verse 4 is that to fail to do the good you can do is to do evil. To refuse to save a life when you can save it is to kill.

The religious leaders

The Sabbath

When God had finished Creation, "on the seventh day he rested from all his work" (Gen. 2:2). That rest was the model for the Sabbath.

It is not known when the Hebrews began keeping the Sabbath. From Exodus 16:27, however, we know that they began before God gave the fourth commandment to require Sabbath observance.

In the four or five centuries before Christ, Jewish religious teachers debated at length what actions should and should not be permitted on the Sabbath. They formulated 39 articles prohibiting all kinds of agricultural, industrial, and domestic work.

But the teachers also developed ways of getting around their own rules. For example, they taught that no one should travel more than two thousand cubits (about three thousand feet) on the Sabbath. But if people were to deposit food two thousand cubits from home before the Sabbath, then on the Sabbath they could declare the spot a temporary residence and act as though they had not traveled up to that point.

It's no wonder Christ felt He had to put the Sabbath back into perspective.

remained silent, saying nothing to His question, not wanting to acknowledge that even good could be done on the Sabbath. In their concern for the details of the law they had forgotten mercy. They didn't understand the kind of grace that prompted God to provide a Sabbath in the first place.

Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal the man, but He didn't. He could have healed the man secretly, but He didn't. Instead, He focused everyone's attention on the man by asking him to stand up in front. Then Jesus healed him.

Once this was done, the Pharisees began to plot with the Herodians, who were supporters of Herod Antipas, the Roman-appointed ruler of Galilee. Both the Pharisees and the Herodians were determined that Jesus must die. The only questions were when and how.

Jesus did good on the Sabbath: He healed a man. But the Pharisees and Herodians did evil on the Sabbath: they plotted to kill a man.

3

Jesus Selects and Trains His Disciples

Mark 3:7—4:34

a Jesus Withdraws to the Sea and a Mountain (3:7-19)

He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

—Mark 3:14, 15

Jesus was operating on a divine agenda that had as its goal the Cross. But before He reached that point, He wanted to help people with His words and deeds.

The deeds created a dramatic increase in Jesus' popularity. People came to Him from all over the area. They wouldn't leave Him alone. When He withdrew to the shore of the Sea of Galilee, they followed Him there. The crush was so great that Jesus told the disciples to have a small boat ready so that, if necessary, He could move away from the people.

Jesus constantly had to struggle to conduct His ministry on His own terms. He had to avoid getting entangled with people who

sought Him for His miracles, not for Himself. And He had to silence evil spirits because the time had not yet come for the full glory of His identity to be revealed.

Despite the difficulties, Jesus continued doing what He knew He had to do. His first priority was to equip a group of devoted followers who would represent Him after He returned to the Father.

With that task on His heart, Jesus withdrew to the hills. There He appointed twelve men to serve Him. In parallel passages, Matthew and Luke call them apostles (Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:13-15). The Greek word translated "apostle" is composed of two words, meaning "to send" and "from." The apostles were sent out from Jesus to carry His message.

Jesus set aside the apostles for three important tasks. First, they were to "be with" Jesus, getting to know Him (Mark 3:14). Second, they were to preach the Good News. And third, they were to demonstrate authority over demons.

Jesus had a unique strategy for winning people to Himself. He would not do it by capitalizing on the sensation of His miracles. He would do it by pouring His life into

the lives of a few, who in turn could pour their lives into others. Then as that cycle repeated, the Gospel would reach to the ends of the earth.

This gives us a clue about how we should continue the Lord's work today. Our first priority should be spending time with Jesus. But beyond that we must devote ourselves to others, showing them the love of God.

Ask Yourself . . . *Are there some people into whom I can be pouring my life now to the glory of Christ?*



b Jesus Responds to Hate and Misunderstanding (3:20-35)

He looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." —Mark 3:34, 35

Jesus' popularity was overwhelming. The demands of the multitudes, along with His own zeal for ministry, kept Him from enjoying regular meals and sleep. Hearing reports about this, His family concluded that He was deranged. They came from Nazareth hoping to take Him back home with them and care for Him.

The teachers of the law interpreted Jesus' actions in a different and more sinister way. They didn't pity him for being deranged. They accused Him of being possessed, and not by a common demon but by the "prince of demons" (vs. 22). This was "Beelzebul"—probably meaning Satan himself. As evidence of this charge, the teachers of the law cited Jesus' well-known power over demons.

Jesus responded to the teachers' accusation by offering a rebuttal, making a pronouncement, and issuing a warning.

His rebuttal came in the form of equivalent proverbs. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (vss. 24, 25). In other

words, the accusation of the teachers was absurd. If Satan were using Jesus to cast out demons, he would be weakening his own cause. It would be like a coach removing his own players from a game.

In His pronouncement (vs. 27), Jesus spoke of binding and robbing a strong man. The strong man was Satan, and the one who robbed him was Jesus. Everyone knew Jesus had cast out demons, but they didn't understand what it meant. So Jesus spelled it out. He had overpowered Satan: that's why He could take back the soul of the demon-possessed man. Far from being in league with Satan, Jesus would conquer him on the Cross.

Finally, Jesus warned His accusers that they were in peril because they attributed holy deeds to evil powers (vss. 28, 29). Because of their long exposure to divine truth, the teachers should have known better than to accuse Jesus of cooperating with Satan.

We can learn from this that the human heart never remains the same. Either the heart becomes more tender by receiving the truth, or it becomes increasingly hard by resisting the truth.

The Unforgivable *Sin*

The teachers of the law whom Jesus accused of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit were guilty because they despised the truth. The Holy Spirit showed them truth in nature, and they ignored it. He gave them truth in the law, and they perverted it. He announced truth by the prophets, and they buried it. He proclaimed truth through John the Baptist, and they despised it.

Each of these previous revelations had left room for another—for Jesus. Now that Jesus had come, the Spirit had nothing greater to say. To reject the truth in Jesus was to reject the truth finally, with no hope of a greater revelation to come.

But these men persisted in their rejection by declaring that Jesus was in league with Satan. This was an unforgivable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Why was the blasphemy unforgivable? Certainly not because God was unwilling to forgive it. The blasphemy was unforgivable because the hearts of those who uttered such blasphemy had been willfully hardened by remaining in the darkness of unbelief while being exposed to so much light of truth.

Ask Yourself . . . *Lately, has it seemed that my heart has been growing harder or more tender?*

Earlier, we saw that Jesus' family was concerned about Him. When they arrived at the house where Jesus was teaching, they sent someone in to call Him. Probably they wanted to question Him and convince Him to go home with them.

The crowd transmitted the message to Jesus, but He did not obey the summons (at least not right away). Instead, He took the opportunity to explain about membership in His spiritual family.

When Jesus pointed to His disciples (Matt. 12:49) and declared "Here are my mother and my brothers!" (Mark 3:34), He was not disregarding proper family relationships. He honored His mother and respected His brothers. Yet here He indicated that there is another level of fellowship that is deeper and more lasting than kinship by birth. That is the kinship of faith. Because obedience is evidence of saving faith (see I John 2:3-6), those who obey God are the family of Jesus.

This fact is easily forgotten in a world where Christianity often becomes synonymous with certain forms and institutions. It would be a mistake to assume that we can enjoy fellowship with God simply because we were baptized or because we attend church. Religious practices can play an important part in our walk with God. But in the final analysis those who are members of God's family demonstrate that relationship by doing His will.

Ask Yourself . . . *Is it clear from the way I live that I am related to Jesus?*

C A Parable of the Kingdom (4:1-20)

He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables."

—Mark 4:11

Those who want to do God's will must understand the principles of His kingdom. It was necessary, then, that Jesus speak with the greatest clarity. That is why He made extensive use of parables, such as the one about a farmer sowing seed.

Even those who have never farmed can understand the experience of the man in this story. Not all the seed produces a full harvest. No matter how faithfully the farmer sows, and no matter how good his seed is, the results of the harvest still depend in part on the response of the soil.

Jesus used parables because He wanted to make the truth clear to those who were ready to learn. But He had another reason for using this method of instruction. Verse 11 states the simple facts: His followers were given an understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom, while those who were not following Him were left in the dark. Then verse 12 (quoting Isaiah 6:9, 10) says why this approach was necessary.

At first glance it may appear that

Jesus did not want unbelievers to believe. But that cannot be. Jesus had just told a parable in which seed (the Gospel) is scattered indiscriminately, without regard to the character of the soil (the hearts of people). It is clear that God wants everyone to come to repentance (II Pet. 3:9).

Jesus told the parable of the sower in a company of both believers and unbelievers. His disciples were devoted to Him and anxious to learn about Him. But His enemies hated Him. Parables were a way of revealing information to those whose eyes had been opened by faith, while concealing some of it from those blind to the truth.

Why would Jesus want to conceal truth from those people? Because they didn't believe the truth they had already heard. Only by believing would they qualify to know the meaning of the parables.

Ask Yourself . . . *Is there truth that I have heard but have not believed or obeyed?*

Jesus continued giving His disciples private instruction by interpreting

His story about the sower and the soils.

This actually is four stories in one, with each story presenting the same message in a little different way. The seed is the Word of God. The soils are the people who hear that Word. Each category of hearer is characterized by a response to the Word.

First are those who hear the Word, but never let it into their hearts. So Satan comes and takes it away. The seed does not even begin to take root.

Second are those who are quick to receive the Word. But they are so shallow that the seed is not able to put down roots, and their apparent commitment doesn't last.

At the first pressure they stop even pretending to be disciples.

Third are those who receive the Word, but also allow the love of money and worry about material items free rein in their hearts.

These distractions prevent them from developing spiritually. Then there are



Jesus' Favorite Teaching Technique

A parable is essentially a comparison. It uses a brief story or illustration to help people understand a concept. Parables are effective because they appeal to the entire person, touching the emotions, challenging the mind, and igniting the imagination.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke record 40 parables told by Jesus. Mark contains nine parables.

those who hear the Word, accept it, and obey it, allowing it to produce a rich harvest in their lives. The farmers in Jesus' audience would have known that a thirtyfold harvest was good, a sixty-fold harvest was very good, and a hundredfold harvest was extraordinarily good. God is able to produce extraordinary fruitfulness through those who accept His Word and obey it.

This parable brings a warning to all of us: the bounty of the harvest is related to the receptivity of the soil. We must be careful to respond to God's Word correctly. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (vs. 9).

Ask Yourself . . . *What has happened to the seed that has been scattered in my life?*

d More Parables of the Kingdom (4:21-34)

He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

—Mark 4:34

The parable of the sower and the soils implied that those who hear the Word of God have a responsibility to use it. Those who have received become responsible to give to others. The secret of the Kingdom, which Christ privately made known to His disciples, must be proclaimed openly by all His followers. We should no more conceal the radiance of the Gospel than we should hide the illumination of a lamp (vss. 21-25).

The Gospel becomes richer in those who share it with others. But those who keep it to themselves find less and less fulfillment in their walk with Christ. What they have is "taken from" (vs. 25) them because they did not share it. If you want to enjoy the riches of Christ, you must give those riches generously to others.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what ways am I making the light of Christ visible to others?*

The influence of Jesus' followers upon the world might not always seem impressive. We often feel like the sower in the parable: we scatter a lot of seed, but not much of it falls on good soil. There seems to be little fruit for our labor.

Every Christian has experienced that feeling. So to us Jesus gave the encouraging parable of the seed (vss. 26-29).

The growth of the Kingdom is like that of a seed. After the seed is planted, the farmer might forget it is there. But more happens than is seen, because the seed has life within itself. It will germinate and grow even while the farmer sleeps. Eventually it will produce the plant and fruit for which it was created. This process is as mysterious as it is predictable.

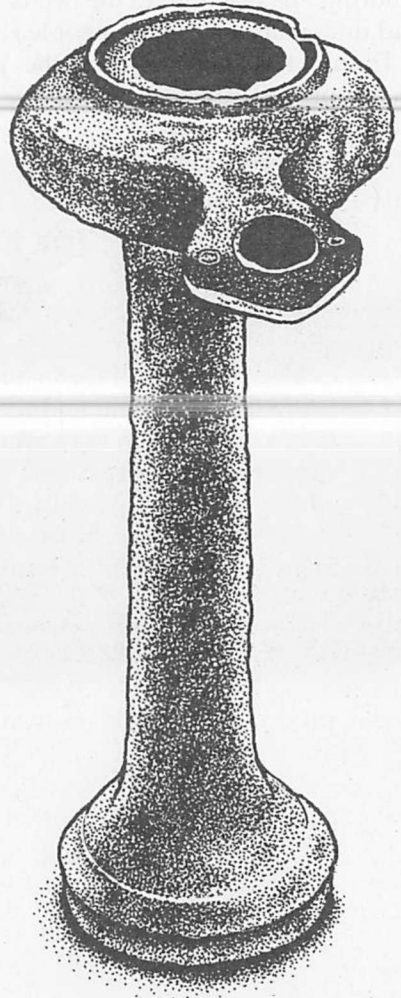
Compared with the countries and corporations of this world, the kingdom of God does not always make an impressive appearance. We may sometimes feel discouraged by how little Christians seem to be accomplishing. But things are not as they appear. The seeds we plant for the Kingdom are growing. In their own time they will produce a full harvest. The Kingdom's growth may be inconspicuous, but it is also inevitable.

The extent of Kingdom growth is illustrated in the parable of the mustard seed (vss. 30-32). The mustard tree to which Jesus referred began as a tiny seed, and had to grow several years before it could bear fruit. But eventually this small seed developed into a plant over twelve feet

tall—large enough for birds to build nests in its branches.

God has given us the privilege of being coworkers with Him. Sometimes we may feel that the work we do for Him is about as formidable as a mustard seed. But we can be encouraged through knowing that

A lamp and stand like those made by first-century Palestinian potters.



God has destined the triumph of His kingdom.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever done a work for God that seemed fruitless? If so, how can I be encouraged by the parable of the mustard seed?*

This section on parables closes with a reminder that Jesus made extensive use of this teaching device (vss. 33, 34). Parables were a way of tailoring His teaching to the needs and understanding of the people.

Though the disciples heard the secrets of the Kingdom, they too were sometimes slow to

understand. For that reason Jesus explained everything to them when they were alone with Him.

We are in much the same position. We learn much and try to understand, but our understanding will never be complete until we come into the presence of Jesus, who makes all things plain.

The Kingdom of GOD

The kingdom of God embraces all who walk in fellowship with God and do His will. It is governed by God's laws, which are summed up in our duty to love God supremely and love others as ourselves. And this Kingdom, which was announced by the prophets and introduced by Jesus, will one day displace all the kingdoms of this world, following the return of Jesus Christ.

4

Jesus Demonstrates His Power

Mark 4:35—5:43

a

Jesus Calms a Storm at Sea (4:35-41)

[The disciples] were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"
—Mark 4:41

Jesus' miracles did more than meet obvious needs. They proved the truth of His teachings and revealed the glory of His identity. Those people who looked beyond the miracles to the person who performed those miracles became convinced that here was a man with divine authority. Here was God's own Son, the Messiah they'd been waiting for!

The passages for this lesson record four miracles, each of which demonstrated Jesus' power. We'll learn how Jesus liberated a man from demons, healed a woman who had long been sick, and raised a girl from the dead. But first we'll learn how He calmed a storm at sea.

It was evening when Jesus gave the order to sail eastward across the Sea of Galilee. Ordinarily this was about a two-hour trip. But on this occasion it must have taken longer.

After a long day of ministry, Jesus was exhausted. No doubt He was grateful for the custom of keeping a cushion in the stern of sailing ships for anyone who did not have to man the sails or nets. He may have curled up to sleep beneath the platform on which fishermen would kneel to work with their nets. This would explain why a change in the weather did not disturb Him.

Sudden and violent storms have always been common on the Sea of Galilee because of its location in a land basin. One such squall developed as the disciples tried to navigate their boat. This must have been an especially severe storm, since it terrified even the experienced fishermen among the disciples. Jesus, however, remained asleep.

After struggling on their own for a while, the disciples woke Jesus and asked, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" (vs. 38). This was more an accusation than a question. The disciples were not challenging Jesus' knowledge or power. They were doubting His compassion.

Ask Yourself . . . *Has a problem in my life ever caused me to doubt God's compassion?*

The Sea of Galilee

The Sea of Galilee is located in what was northern Palestine during the first century. At its farthest distances, the lake is thirteen miles long and seven and a half miles wide. In places it reaches a depth of 160 feet.

The lake's setting is beautiful. Beyond the shoreline of pebbles and shells, wildflowers grow. High green hills ring most of the lake.

The lowness of the lake surface, 685 feet below sea level, contributes to the almost tropical character of the weather. The surrounding land is exceptionally fertile for growing crops. The lake itself abounds with freshwater fish.

The Sea of Galilee was known by at least three other names: the Sea of Kinnereth (Josh. 11:2), the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), and the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1).

Jesus commanded the storm to cease. Then He turned His attention to a more serious problem: the disciples' weak faith. Their fear was unreasonable, and He used a couple of questions to try to help them realize that. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" He asked them (vs. 40).

The disciples ignored these questions. They could not see their own fault in the matter because they were too stunned by what Jesus had done to the weather. He who had healed the sick and cast out demons

was also able to rule the elements.

No longer were the disciples afraid of the storm. Now they were afraid of Jesus. He was more than they had reckoned Him to be. In wonder they asked themselves, "Who is this?" (vs. 41).

Their first question was a question of doubt: "Don't you care?" Their second question was one of amazement: "Who is this?" This was the kind of question Jesus wanted them to ask, because it meant they were open to learning more about Him.

When our circumstances lead us to doubt God's com-

passion, it is plain we are facing more than a "storm" on the outside. We are dealing with a tempest in our hearts. It is a struggle between faith and fear.

Yet hard times are necessary because faith grows little when "smooth sailing" describes our lives. We begin to understand the grace and power of God better as we fight fear with faith.

Ask Yourself . . . *How might my present experiences lead to the growth of my faith?*



This slope near the present-day town of Khersa may be the one down which two thousand pigs stampeded to their deaths. A couple of miles away are cavern tombs that appear to have been used as dwellings in ancient times.

b Jesus Casts Out Demons (5:1-20)

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." —Mark 5:9

Jesus had already demonstrated His power over one demon at a time. But after reaching the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, He encountered a man possessed by many demons. We don't know exactly how many, but the word by which the demons called themselves (vs. 9) gives us a hint. A legion, the principal unit of the Roman army, consisted of about six thousand

soldiers. However, the word *legion* had come to be associated with a great multitude of unspecified numbers.

With so many demons inhabiting him, it's no wonder the man was in terrible distress. His actions were mournful and self-destructive.

The demon-possessed man inspired fear in all who came near him. People had tried to restrain him, but to no avail. Under the influence of the evil spirits, the man possessed almost superhuman strength.

The demon-possessed man hardly seemed a candidate for conversion. Yet while Jesus was still a long way off, the man ran to meet Him; then knelt before Him. The demons identified the Lord precisely—"Jesus,

Son of the Most High God" (vs. 7)—when they begged Jesus for mercy.

In His turn, Jesus demanded the name of the demons, and then sent them into a herd of pigs. To Jews, swine were ritually unclean animals. But the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee was populated mostly by Gentiles, who would keep pigs.

There is much about this story we don't understand fully. We don't understand why the Gerasene was possessed by demons. We don't understand why so many demons took up residence in him. We don't understand why the demons wanted to enter the pigs, or why Jesus let them. However, the understandable parts of this incident are more important than the obscure parts, and we should keep our focus on the understandable parts.

Of first importance is Jesus' authority over the demons. The evil spirits recognized Him instantly and knew they were at His mercy. We have seen how Jesus demonstrated His power over sickness and nature. Now He showed Himself superior to all spirits, even evil spirits gathered in great numbers.

The Gerasene demoniac, after being freed by Christ, was found sitting peacefully, properly clothed, and in his right mind.

One would expect the people of that region to have honored Jesus because of the changes in the former demoniac. Instead, they responded with fear. Curiosity drew them to the scene, but once they realized all that had happened, they became frightened and asked Jesus

to leave. They saw in Him a power more staggering than the power in demons, yet they didn't understand that Jesus' power is the power of goodness and not of evil.

Ask Yourself . . . *Lately, have I responded with gratitude for the good things God has done in my life?*

Compared with the response of the others, the response of the former demoniac was admirable. He pleaded to stay with Christ as His disciple. Instead, Christ sent him home to tell his family the story.

The grateful man did more. He spread the news of Jesus abroad in his homeland. This was the Decapolis (literally, "Ten Cities"), a region containing ten independent cities that followed the Greek way of life.

C Jesus Heals a Bleeding Woman (5:21-34)

He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

—Mark 5:34

The problem of the demoniac was rare. Few if any of us have encountered such a situation. Our greatest problems are common ones such as sickness and death.

Jesus faced those two problems after He returned to the western

shore of the Sea of Galilee. The first, death, is described in verses 21-24 and verses 35-43. The other, sickness, is covered in verses 25-34.

The anxious father of a twelve-year-old girl introduced the problem of death. This was Jairus, a man of influence among the Jews in his area. He was a ruler of a local synagogue, perhaps the one in Capernaum. Each synagogue had one or more rulers, who looked after the building and supervised worship.

Jairus knew his daughter's condition was grave and that if things took their normal course, she might die. So he came to Jesus and pleaded for help.

R

for Bleeding Cases

Below are some of the remedies that doctors may have prescribed for the bleeding woman:

- carrying the ashes of an ostrich egg in different cloths, depending on the season;
- eating Persian onions boiled in wine;
- carrying a barleycorn that had been found in the dung of a white female donkey.
- swallowing a mixture of gum, alum, and crocuses.

These remedies are contained in the Talmud, a Jewish commentary on the law.

Jesus listened to the man's request and started walking with him. That may not have been an easy task, because He was surrounded by people who wanted to see Him and talk to Him. Nevertheless, Jesus moved gradually in the direction of the man's home.

This was when He encountered the problem of illness (vss. 25-34). He met a woman who had suffered for twelve years from a bleeding ailment, the precise diagnosis of which is now impossible to determine.

Her condition must have been a heavy burden on her in several respects. Obviously, she suffered physical discomfort. But on top of that, she must have felt a sense of rejection, since by law her sickness excluded her from religious ceremonies and social events. Added to these problems, most likely, was the financial drain of medical bills.

The woman must have heard of Jesus' miracles. In desperation, she sought Him out. But she did so secretly, perhaps fearing that her condition would bring shame upon herself or upon Jesus. If she was aware that Jesus was going on a lifesaving mission to the home of an important synagogue official, this might have added to her reluctance.

But she approached Jesus anyway. She came up from behind Him and touched the edge of His cloak, thinking no one would notice. But someone did.

Ask Yourself . . . *What need of mine should I take to Jesus today?*

Jesus knew immediately that someone had touched Him. He asked who, although He already knew the answer to that question.

Jesus' Concern for WOMEN

In first-century Judea, women were held in low esteem. Many men would not speak to a woman on the street, especially if her character was questionable. Men would actually thank God that they had not been born female.

In contrast, Jesus talked openly with women (John 4:7-26). He ministered to their needs and involved them in the work He was doing (Luke 7:11-15; 8:1-3; 10:38-42).

He wanted the woman to admit to Him what she had done.

The question of who had touched Jesus seemed ridiculous to the disciples, since they were all being

pressed on every side by people. But Jesus knew that the woman's touch was unique because it expressed both great need and great faith.

The woman could see that there was no way out short of a confession. So she came forward, fell at Jesus' feet, and told the whole story.

Far from delivering the rebuke she anticipated, Jesus put her fears to rest by addressing her as "daughter." Then He praised her faith and urged her to go in peace, enjoying her newfound wholeness.

Not all who were close to Christ that day enjoyed the benefits of His ministry. Similarly, many today have great opportunities for access to Jesus. They can read the Scriptures, listen to Christian teachers, and pray at their leisure. But because they see neither their own need nor Jesus' power, they remain indifferent.

Ask Yourself . . . *In whom can I try to arouse an interest in Jesus?*

d Jesus Restores Life to a Young Girl (5:35-43)

He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").
—Mark 5:41b

Jesus was concluding His conversation with the woman He had healed when some men came to

Terms for GIRLS

Jews had specific terms to describe girls, depending on the girls' ages. Until the age of 11 years and one day, a girl was called "a child." From 11 years and one day to 12 years and one day, she was "under age." From 12 years and one day to 12 and a half years, she was "a young daughter." (Jairus's daughter fell into this category.) From 12 and a half years upward, a girl was considered an adult.

These distinctions were important in determining when a girl was of marriageable age.

say that Jairus's daughter had died. They could see no reason to trouble Jesus further. They had hoped for help from Jesus if He had arrived while the girl was still alive, but now that she was dead, the case appeared hopeless.

Jesus was not discouraged by the report. He reassured Jairus, and then continued toward the home with Peter, James, and John. These three seem to have been an inner circle within the band of disciples. Jesus chose them to witness the miracle He was about to perform.

When they arrived at the home, mourners were providing a great deal of noise and ritual signs of grief. They may have been chanting and clapping, or pulling their hair, tearing their clothes, and beating their chests.

These were hired mourners. We know their grief was not real by

their response to Jesus' announcement that the girl was asleep. They laughed. Jesus did not deny that the girl was dead, but only wanted them to understand that her condition was not final. The mourners thought they knew better.

Jesus, after sending the mourners out, took the girl's hand and told her to get up. The phrase "*Talitha kum!*" (vs. 41) is Aramaic, rather than Greek like most of the rest of the Gospel. By Jesus' day Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the common language of the people in Palestine. Its appearance here in the Gospel may be due to Peter's being especially stirred by this command, which Peter later transmitted to Mark.

In a different way, the dead girl also was stirred. Suddenly no longer dead, she obeyed the command to stand up. The hopeless case was not hopeless after all.

Ask Yourself . . . *What advice could I give people who think they are in a hopeless situation?*

Earlier in the Gospel of Mark, we learned how Jesus revealed His nature through His teachings on such subjects as the Sabbath and the kingdom of God. More recently we learned about His compassion and power displayed through His mighty deeds, such as calming a

storm and casting out demons. Here is One who not only taught with authority; He acted with authority. He could raise a dead girl.

Knowing this about Him, it would be natural to assume that those who knew Him best—those who lived in His hometown—would have been the first to believe in Him. But that remains to be seen.

5

Jesus Prepares His Followers to Lead

Mark 6

a Jesus Is Rejected at Home (6:1-6a)

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." —Mark 6:4

The disciples had learned much from Jesus' teachings and miracles. But still they needed to understand much more. A great deal of their

leading His followers through the events and opportunities that confronted them.

One such lesson from life came when Jesus was rejected in His hometown. This was Nazareth, a small town located in the hills of south-central Galilee looking out over the Plain of Esdraelon.

Since Jesus had gained acceptance in other places, the disciples must have expected Him to be welcomed in Nazareth, too. But while the townspeople were amazed by Jesus'

teachings and by reports of His miracles, their amazement led to unbelief, not to belief.

The Nazarenes had long been familiar with Jesus and His family. They knew His mother and His many half brothers and half sisters. (Joseph probably had died by this time.) Furthermore, the Nazarenes recalled how Jesus had worked among them as any common man. Some

of them may still have been using wooden items He had made or repaired. Consequently, the people rejected Him on grounds



Modern Nazareth

training could come only through their own observations and experiences. Mark shows us how Jesus made a classroom of daily life by

of familiarity. They thought they knew Him too well as a man to accept Him as the divine Messiah.

When the Nazarenes took offense at Jesus, He replied with His own version of a common proverb from that period: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." (vs. 4). We have a similar proverb: Familiarity breeds contempt.

Ask Yourself . . . *As I have gotten to know Jesus better, have I begun to have less or more respect for Him?*

Although Jesus marveled at the unbelief He met in Nazareth, He did not interpret His rejection there as failure on His part. He knew He had been faithful. But the Nazarenes were faithless.

Because of His reception, Jesus performed few miracles in Nazareth. This was not because He lacked power. He chose not to do many miracles because of the people's faithlessness. As long as the people were unwilling to believe, Jesus knew no teaching or miracle would persuade them to follow Him. And if He had done more miracles in a climate of unbelief, the people's guilt would have become all the worse. Thus the Nazarenes missed out on the benefits of Jesus' power because of their unbelief. The same is true for all who refuse to believe.

The unpleasant episode in Nazareth had one benefit: it taught the disciples to expect opposition. Shortly afterward, when the disciples set out on missions for Christ, it must have comforted them to know that

a negative response to the Gospel message is not necessarily due to a flaw in the messenger. Even the greatest Messenger was not received by all. He was rejected by those who knew Him best.

We, too, can take comfort from this episode. While we should be grieved over unbelief wherever we find it, we do not have to punish ourselves over that unbelief. If we have faithfully presented the Gospel, then the failure is not our own.

Ask Yourself . . . *When have I presented the truth, only to have others reject it? How did I feel?*



Jesus Sends Out the Disciples (6:6b-13)

Calling the Twelve to him, [Jesus] began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. —Mark 6:7

For months the disciples had watched Jesus minister, and now they would try ministry on their own. Jesus sent them to the Jews (Matt. 10:5, 6), telling them to preach repentance and perform miracles.

Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in six pairs. One reason for this provision may have been the law that a minimum of two witnesses was needed to establish truth (Deut. 19:15). Ministering as partners also provided companionship and support.

Jesus' specific instructions to the disciples regarding what to take and how to act may seem strange to us. But there were good reasons for each instruction.

The disciples were to carry only minimum supplies because God would provide for their needs. For example, an extra tunic (used when sleeping outdoors) would not be needed because God was going to provide a warm place for them to sleep every night. Furthermore, the short time spent in equipping for these mission trips underscored their urgency.

Jesus told the disciples to remain in the first house that offered them hospitality. It would insult their hosts if they were to move on to more comfortable lodgings later. Besides, they were to be mainly concerned about their ministry, not their own comfort.

In that day, pious Jews reenacting Palestine would cleanse their feet and clothes so as not to pollute the Holy Land with the dust of Gentile lands. Jesus instructed His disciples to use this symbolism against a town that would not receive them. This would warn the town that it was no better than a heathen town in God's eyes.

Some people have said that the disciples' mission trips provide the model for Christians who are trying to obey the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). But that is probably a mistake. Jesus sent His disci-

ples on limited, temporary missions. They traveled for a few days among the towns of Galilee to introduce the Jewish people to Christ. In contrast, the Great Commission applies to all peoples and is relevant until Christ returns.

Like the disciples, we all are called to minister while depending on God. And the world urgently needs our ministry too. But if God is sending us to a foreign field, we should consider the need for money



Oil had many uses in the ancient world. Sometimes it served as medicine. For example, the good Samaritan in Jesus' story poured oil on another man's wounds to aid in healing them.

Oil also had a religious use. It represented the Holy Spirit. When a king or other person was anointed with oil, this symbolized an anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Did Jesus' disciples anoint the sick with oil for medicinal or religious purposes? Probably for religious purposes. It was a way of saying, "Not we but God will heal you."

and provisions. Often well-prepared ministers have the most powerful long-term impact.

Ask Yourself . . . *What specific task has God called and equipped me to do? What steps can I take today to accomplish that task?*



John Is Executed (6:14-29)

At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

—Mark 6:25

The disciples' deeds caused such a stir that news about them and about Jesus reached Galilee's ruler, Herod Antipas. When Herod Antipas heard the details of Jesus' ministry, he became concerned. The public held a variety of views regarding Jesus, but Herod was convinced that this miracle worker was none other than John the Baptist returned from the dead.

The story of John's arrest and execution is told in Mark 6:17-29. Against his better judgment Herod Antipas had John executed, much as Pontius Pilate later would have Jesus executed.

While a guest of his half brother in Rome, Herod Antipas had become infatuated with his half brother's wife, Herodias. The two had eloped, even though both were married and

they were doubly related. Herodias was Herod's niece as well as his sister-in-law. It is no wonder that John the Baptist condemned such a marriage.

Herod did not intend to execute John the Baptist. John troubled him, but fascinated him too. Herod merely had John put in jail. According to the historian Josephus, John was imprisoned in the Machaerus fortress east of the Dead Sea.

Herod's was a history of foolish commitments: a commitment to the wrong woman in marriage, a commitment to arrest John the Baptist, a commitment to give Salome whatever she asked. Herod's foolishness led him into his wife's trap. This success took no great skill on her part. All she had to do was play his promise against his pride. Going back on his promise to Salome would have embarrassed him before his guests.

Suddenly, the drunken king was sober. He saw how his foolish commitments joined in forcing him to commit a terrible crime. What tragic deeds have been done to protect human pride!

Even though his wicked character was well known, Herod was held in esteem by the people because of his position. But he became to the disciples (and to us) an example of what a leader should not be.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who looks to me for leadership? Am I leading them in the right direction?*

Herod the Great

King of Judea, Galilee, Iturea, and Traconitis, 37-4 B.C.

FIVE OF HIS TEN WIVES

Doris

Mariamne
of
Hasmonean

Mariamne
of
Boethusian

Malthace
of
Samaria

Cleopatra
of
Jerusalem

Antipater
(murdered by his
father in 4 B.C.)

Aristobulus
(murdered by his
father in 7 B.C.)

Alexander
(murdered by his
father in 7 B.C.)

Herod Philip
(died A.D. 34;
first husband of
Herodias)

Herod Antipas
Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea,
4 B.C.-A.D. 39
(second husband of Herodias)

Herod Philip
Tetrarch of Iturea and
Traconitis, 4 B.C.-A.D. 34
(married Salome)

Archelaus
Ethnarch of Judea, Idumea,
and Samaria,
4 B.C.-A.D. 6)

Herod
King of Chalcis
(died A.D. 48)

Herod
Agrippa I
King of Judea
(A.D. 37-44)

Herodias

Herod
Agrippa II
King of Chalcis
(died A.D. 100)

Bernice

Drusilla

Salome

THE HERODIANS

"King" Herod

Herod Antipas was not a king. He was another kind of official called a tetrarch. Mark may have called him "king" (6:14) out of irony or because it was a local custom. Herod desperately wanted to be called king; in fact, his demand to be called king caused the Roman emperor to dismiss him from office in A.D. 39.

On top of being ambitious for power and prestige, Herod was unscrupulous. His administration was characterized by deceit and crime. Jesus called him a "fox" (Luke 13:32).

d Jesus Feeds More Than 5000 (6:30-44)

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. . . . They all ate and were satisfied.
—Mark 6:41, 42

The Twelve had just returned from their evangelistic missions. Not surprisingly, they were excited and exhausted. From ministering on His own, Jesus was probably tired too. So Jesus suggested that they all go away for a time of rest and prayer in a “quiet place” (vs. 31). Jesus is sympathetic toward the needs of His servants.

But as they tried to escape, the crowds raced ahead of them to their place of retreat. By the time Jesus and the disciples arrived, the masses were already there. It was no longer a quiet place.

This situation, which might have annoyed us, produced compassion in Jesus. He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd: they needed His leadership. He put off meeting His own need for rest so that He could minister to the people’s need for teaching.

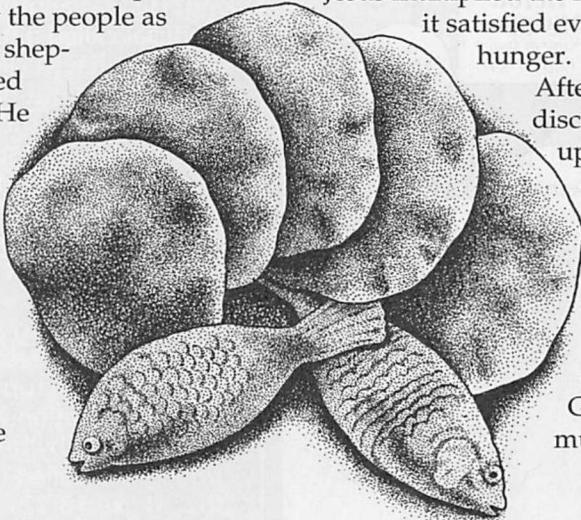
The disciples also were concerned about the

people. They wanted Jesus to dismiss the people to get some food on their own. If the disciples’ plan had been carried out, it would have placed a burden on the nearby villages, since the largest of them housed only two or three thousand people. The crowd around Jesus included about five thousand men, in addition to women and children. But this solution was the only one the disciples could offer.

In reply, Jesus commanded the disciples to feed the people. This stunned them. They didn’t have enough food for themselves, let alone for a crowd numbering in the thousands. The disciples estimated it would cost 200 denarii—at least eight months’ wages for a typical working man—to buy food for such a crowd. They didn’t have that much money. They could come up with a boy’s lunch (John 6:8, 9), but what good was that?

Jesus took the lunch of fish and bread. Then He directed the crowd to sit in an orderly fashion. Lastly, Jesus multiplied the food so that it satisfied everyone’s hunger.

Afterward, the disciples picked up the left-over bread, in keeping with the Jewish belief that bread is a gift from God and must not be



left lying around. Jews in those days usually wore a small wicker basket for carrying or gathering small items. The disciples filled their baskets with fish and bread, no doubt excited by what God had done.

The feeding of the multitude was clearly a miracle from the hand of Christ. Yet He did not perform it in isolation. He let the Twelve have a part in working the miracle such as setting out the food for the people. And even before He began the miracle, He challenged them to come up with their own plan for feeding the crowd. In this way, the deed became a cooperative effort from beginning to end.

Imagine the disciples' thrill in cooperating with Christ in feeding the multitude. That thrill, that sense of involvement, was necessary to their training. Jesus had not called them to stand aside and watch Him work. Neither was He sending them to work without His help. The disciples were partners with Christ.

And so are we. That assurance has comforted and compelled believers since the first century. We understand with Paul that we are "God's co-workers" (II Cor. 6:1).

Christ has chosen to bring the Gospel to the world by human hands.

Ask Yourself . . . *Lately, have I been working with God or against Him?*

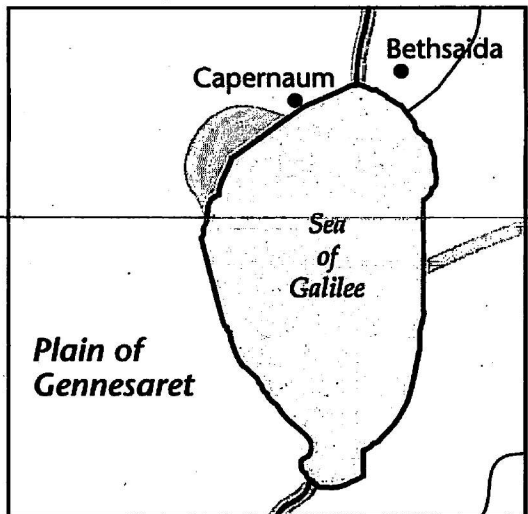


Jesus Walks on the Lake (6:45-56)

He spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

—Mark 6:50

Mark said that Jesus and the disciples left the site of the miracle suddenly, but he did not say why. According to John, however, the crowd had been so impressed by the multiplication of the fish and bread that they wanted to make Jesus king (John 6:14, 15). But Jesus knew His



purpose for coming to earth was not to become an earthly king.

Jesus had traveled to the area to pray. After dismissing the disciples and the crowd, Jesus finally found a place to meet that need. Alone high in the hills with night coming on,

Jesus must have spent a refreshing time with His Father.

Meanwhile, the disciples were out on the lake making little progress against a head wind. The site of the feeding miracle seems to have been relatively near Bethsaida. Therefore, since the disciples were "in the middle of the lake" (vs. 47), they must have been blown well off their course.

They were still on the lake during the fourth watch, which occurred between three and six in the morning. Their need for rest certainly was not being met.

Jesus saw their trouble and came near them, walking with no difficulty on the water as though it were dry land. When His form appeared mysteriously out of the darkness like a ghost, the disciples' minds must have turned to the old Jewish superstition that a spirit seen at night brings disaster. They were terrified. It seems that whenever Jesus was absent, they fell into distress through lack of faith.

This flaw, lack of faith, showed up again in their amazement that the wind had died down as Jesus entered the boat. Should they have expected less from One who had already calmed a storm on that lake? But even if they had forgotten that event, how could they have

forgotten the recent multiplication of bread and fish?

The miracle of the feeding of the multitude was in part performed to reveal a spiritual truth to the disciples. But they had missed the point. They did not understand that the miracle was a revelation of the One who had performed it. The miracle showed Jesus' divine authority.

Often we are like the disciples in this respect. We know what has happened in our lives, but we fail to see how the hand of God has been at work in it all. Consequently, every new crisis fills us with fear and every new work of grace takes us by surprise.

Ask Yourself . . . *What has hindered my appreciation of God's work in my life?*

This section ends as Jesus continued His ministries in Galilee (vss. 53-56). He and the disciples crossed the lake westward to "Gennesaret," meaning either the plain by that name or a city on the plain. This was a fertile and heavily populated area.

Many people of the area gathered their sick loved ones in the public areas where Jesus passed. The sick were healed by touching even the fringes and tassels Jesus wore (compare vs. 56; Num. 15:37-39).



Jesus Ministers among Jews and Gentiles

Mark 7

a Jesus Is Asked about Tradition (7:1-8)

The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" —Mark 7:5

The people clamored after Jesus. But the religious leaders remained hostile toward Him. The same words and works of Jesus that attracted the crowd's interest ignited the leaders' anger. When some Pharisees and teachers of the law gathered around Jesus, it wasn't to learn but to criticize.

They soon found something in His disciples' behavior that seemed to give them cause for criticism. Jesus' disciples were eating without first washing their hands

ceremonially, and Jesus was doing nothing to stop them. Based on their religious tradition, Pharisees taught that before eating bread a handful of water should be poured over each hand while the hand was in a cupped position with the fingers slightly spread. (In verses 3 and 4, Mark gave his Gentile readers a

Pharisees and Teachers of the Law

The Pharisees were members of a Jewish sect that had risen to prominence during the two centuries before Jesus' birth. Their goal was to increase the righteousness of society.

Pharisees insisted on strict obedience to the law of Moses. However, they considered the traditions of religious experts—the "elders" mentioned in Mark 7:5—to be equal in authority with the law.

Some Pharisees were trained in the law and had official status as teachers of the law, or scribes. These teachers were authorities on Old Testament law. They believed they had received the spirit of Moses and claimed to know divine will in legal matters.

Theoretically, Pharisees and teachers of the law believed in righteousness and love. In reality, all too often they practiced legalism and hypocrisy.

short course on Jewish ceremonial washing.)

Presumably, the disciples had not ignored the need for personal cleanliness. And certainly they had done nothing to violate God's law. They had only violated a human addition to God's law. Yet this made their actions sinful in the eyes of the religious leaders.

The Pharisees considered their traditions to have the same authority as God's law. They taught "as doctrines the commandments of men" (vs. 7, NASB). They insisted on obedience to these rules even when that would involve a violation of God's law. As a consequence, Jesus applied some harsh words from Isaiah's prophecy to the religious leaders (Isa. 29:13).

We shouldn't comfort ourselves with the thought that the error committed by the religious teachers ended with the New Testament era. Many professed Christians today go to great lengths in enforcing rules that have no basis in Scripture. The temptation to displace God's Word with our own interpretations of it is always strong.

Ask Yourself . . . *Are there any man-made religious traditions that I am sometimes tempted to treat as divine?*

The Teachers' TRADITION

During their captivity in Babylon, the Jews underwent a rebirth of interest in the law. At that time an unwritten but highly developed body of teachings and commentary about the law began to grow up among religious teachers, who were called rabbis.

The original intention was good. The teachers wanted to prevent violations of the law. They tried to do this by setting up regulations for all of life, like a hedge around the law.

These regulations grew generation by generation until they were gathered in a written collection, called the Mishnah, two centuries after Jesus' death. Even during Jesus' life the tradition had become overvalued, obscuring the law it was meant to safeguard.

b

Corban: A Harmful Tradition (7:9-13)

“You say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”

—Mark 7:11-13

Jesus reserved His most cutting language for those who substituted their own teaching for God’s. We can sense His anger when we read in verse 9 His comment to the teachers of the law: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”

As an illustration of this practice, Jesus cited the Corban vow being used frequently at that time. This vow had no basis in the Hebrew Scriptures; it had merely become traditional. When people declared their money *Corban* (literally, an “offering”), they claimed it was dedicated to God. They were, however, not required to use the money for religious purposes. They could do with it anything they wanted. Thus the vow often was nothing more than a hypocritical means to legitimize selfishness.

The religious leaders defended the Corban vow. As Jesus pointed out, by doing so they showed their disregard

for the fifth commandment and for other Old Testament laws requiring children to honor their parents (Exod. 20:12; 21:17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 5:16).

Ask Yourself . . . *As I look back on my behavior toward my parents, can I say that it usually showed a proper amount of respect for them?*

The teachers of the law would not even permit people to go back on the Corban vow when the people changed their mind about withholding money from their parents. Misapplying Numbers 30:2, the teachers taught that *every* vow, including the unrighteous Corban vow, remains binding.

The Corban vow showed how the teachers nullified the Word of God. They used additions to Scripture and false interpretations of Scripture to contradict the true meaning of Scripture.

Although the Corban vow is no longer in use, we can learn a lesson from it. We must bring all the teachings of our churches and all our own ideas under the scrutiny of the Word of God. Some of our notions might seem as harmless as the use of the Corban vow once appeared to be. Some might even seem beneficial. But when we allow them to displace the plain sense of Scripture, they are deadly.

We are not guardians of human traditions. We are ministers of the living Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever used an excuse to duck one of the Ten Commandments?*

CLEANNES and Uncleanness

In the Bible, "cleanness" and "uncleanness" rarely have to do with hygiene. Instead, they are religious concepts. The Old Testament defines which animals are unclean and describes how people and objects can become unclean. The Old Testament also tells ways of purifying unclean people and objects.

But beyond the scriptural guidelines, the teachers of the law developed complicated rules about uncleanness. For instance, after a pottery seller temporarily left his wares unattended in the marketplace, he would have to treat the pots as unclean. Since one of them might have been touched by an unclean person in his absence, he would have to wash the outsides of all his pots.

Jesus declared that the teachers of the law had lost sight of the purpose for the clean/unclean distinction. That distinction had been meant to point to the need for inner cleanness, for moral purity.



Jesus Redefines 'Uncleanness' (7:14-23)

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them."

—Mark 7:14, 15

Jesus was deeply concerned about the influence of the religious leaders over the people. After rebuking those leaders for their abuses of the law, Jesus called the crowds to

Himself and told them the truth about cleanness and uncleanness. Purity, He said, is a matter of the heart.

His lesson was simple and reasonable. The most basic understanding of the human body makes it clear that food cannot make us spiritually unclean. We are not corrupted by what is outside us, but by what is within. It is our heart, not our diet, that may pollute us spiritually. Jews considered the heart to be the center of human personality—that part of us where we decide how we are going to act.

Note: Many translations of the Bible leave out verse 16. That is because this

verse does not appear in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark. It appears to have been added by a copyist later.

Jesus' words must have sounded revolutionary to His audience. He was declaring all foods clean. The people had grown up under the Pharisees' rules about ritual washings and forbidden foods. They had seen the law through the eyes of their teachers, never in its own light.

For us, this teaching of Jesus is easy to accept in theory but difficult to put into practice. We have a

desire for the visible and the measurable, even in matters of spirituality. We want to know where we stand, and sometimes we are concerned about where others stand. That is why nearly every Christian group uses certain standards of behavior to test a person's devotion to God. But if we allow our standards to take us beyond the commands of Scripture, then we have committed the error of the Pharisees. We have made spirituality external.

When the emphasis is kept external, evil can grow within. Jesus pointed out some kinds of corruption that can grow in the fertile soil of an impure heart: greed, deceit, envy, and so forth (Mark 7:21, 22). Notice that Jesus' list contains both evil acts and evil attitudes. Notice also that none of the items on the list has gone out of style.

Ask Yourself . . . *Do my words and deeds indicate that a process of cleansing is going on within me?*



Jesus Honors a Gentile's Faith (7:24-30)

"First let the children eat all they want," he told her, **"for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."**

"Lord," she replied, **"even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."**

—Mark 7:27, 28

Jesus clarified the concepts of spiritual cleanness and uncleanness because He cared about people and about their relationship with God. And He continued to show concern for people in His encounter with a woman whose daughter was possessed by a demon.

Jesus wished to spend time teaching the Twelve. So He left Galilee and traveled thirty or forty miles northwestward to the area of Tyre, where He found a place to stay. This was supposed to be a retreat, but it didn't turn out that way. Jesus' reputation had preceded Him, and even here people came to hear His teachings and benefit from His miracles.

The woman whose daughter was demon possessed must have seen something in Jesus to make her believe He would help her. That faith was strengthened by compassion for her child. Because of her faith in Jesus she did what the residents of Jesus' hometown would not do: she presented her plea to Jesus for His help.

Syrian Phoenicia

Syrian Phoenicia was the name given to the southern portion of Syria during Jesus' lifetime. (This area now is part of Lebanon.) Mark may have used the term "Syrian Phoenicia" (7:26) to distinguish the area from Libyan Phoenicia in North Africa.

The people of Syrian Phoenicia worshiped many gods invented in early years when the area was Canaanite. Matthew called the woman who spoke with Jesus "a Canaanite woman" (Matt. 15:22).

In Jesus' day, Syrian Phoenicia followed the Greek way of life. That is why Mark referred to the woman as "a Greek" (Mark 7:26). She was Gentile.

to another Gospel, on this occasion Jesus declared, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). This was not because Jews were the only ones to be saved, but because they were to become the first agents through whom He would extend His Gospel throughout the world. On this level of meaning, the "children" are Jews, the "dogs" are Gentiles, and the "bread" is the Gospel.

But it is hardly likely that the woman understood this meaning of Jesus' words. More likely she understood them on a practical level. The woman had interrupted Jesus' retreat with His disciples. For Jesus to help her then would have

Surely Jesus meant all along to help the woman, but before doing so He decided to test her faith. He pretended to reject her plea by saying, "First let the children eat all they want, . . . for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs" (vs. 27).

Jesus' statement describes a common domestic situation in which a family is eating dinner while small household dogs are begging for food. Jesus said the order in which the appetites should be satisfied is children first, dogs second.

This statement has a double meaning. On one level it refers to the focus of Jesus' mission. According

required Him to take His time and energy away from the disciples and give them to the woman. On this level of meaning, the "children" are the disciples, the "dogs" represent the woman, and the "bread" is Jesus' ministry.

The woman was not put off by Jesus' reply to her request. She extended Jesus' analogy for her own purposes. The meal did not have to be interrupted and the children's bread be given to the dogs; all the dogs needed were a few crumbs dropped during the meal. In other words, she was saying that Jesus could quickly and easily fulfill her

request, and then get back to teaching His disciples.

The woman's answer pleased Jesus. He may even have laughed at the way she turned His statement to her own benefit. Then He rescued her daughter from the evil spirit.

Like the woman from Syrian Phoenicia, we should demonstrate boldness in seeking God's help. Often we are too easily discouraged from our spiritual pursuits. We need the humility to know we deserve nothing, but the determination to draw upon the riches of God's grace.

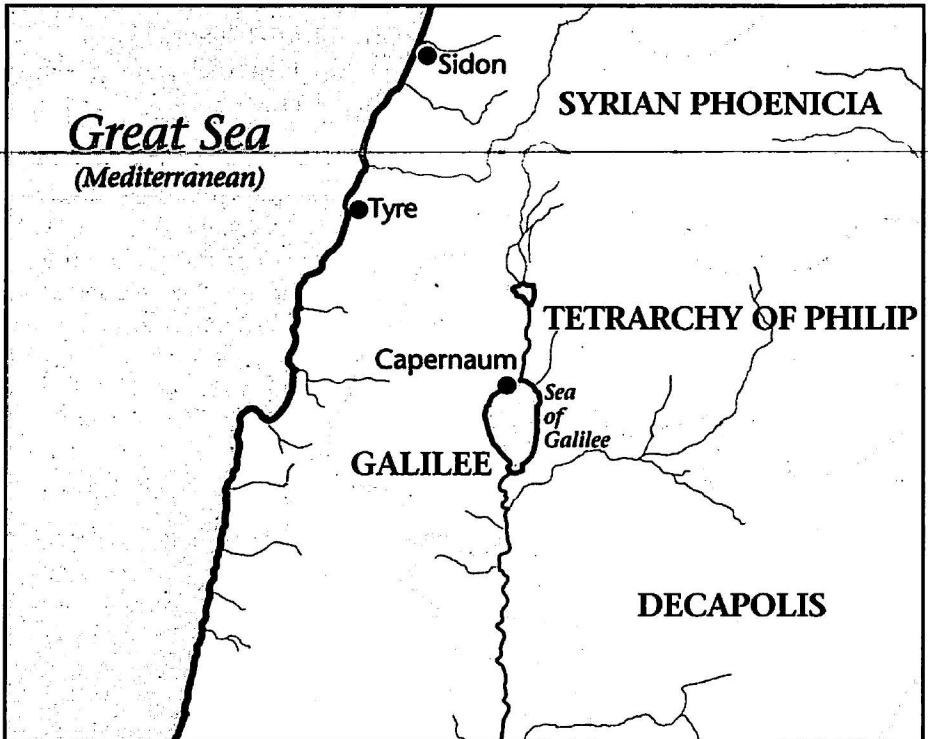
Ask Yourself . . . *Am I ever timid in asking for God's help? If so, why?*



Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute (7:31-37)

People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."
—Mark 7:37

The final incident of this lesson serves somewhat as a conclusion to what came before. Jesus had fed a multitude, confronted religious leaders, and performed various healings. Now these events were crowned by the confession of the



people that "He has done everything well" (vs. 37b).

Jesus left the region of Tyre and traveled first northward to Sidon, then southeastward through the territory of Herod Philip to the Decapolis. In doing so He skirted Galilee, traveling on the eastern side of the lake.

We don't know for certain why Jesus was avoiding Galilee at this time, but here are three possible reasons for it: First, Herod Antipas, who had killed John the Baptist, was now threatening Jesus' life (Luke 13:31). Second, the Pharisees had strengthened their opposition to Jesus, and He could be freer from their influence outside Galilee. Third, He still wanted to avoid crowds so that He could have time to teach the Twelve.

When Jesus arrived in the Decapolis, some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and nearly incapable of speaking. In asking Jesus to place His hand on the man, the man's companions may have hoped for a healing, or they may have expected only a blessing.

We do not know whether the deaf-mute was a Gentile or a Jew. Both kinds of people lived in the Decapolis, but Gentiles were more numerous there. As with the story of the woman from Syrian Phoenicia, Mark may have recorded this story to show God's grace for Gentiles.

Jesus decided to heal the man. He touched him and used His own saliva in the healing. In those days saliva was widely believed to have healing properties. So in using saliva Jesus was communicating at the man's level of understanding.

Then Jesus prayed and sighed. The man's condition distressed Him.

Finally, Jesus commanded, "*Ephphatha!*" (which means "Be opened!"); Mark 7:34). Mark preserved Jesus' command in the language He actually used: Aramaic.

At this point, Jesus didn't want to encourage a large healing ministry. He wanted primarily to preach and teach. Healing could have occupied so much of His time that He would not have been able to minister to the people's spiritual needs. This may explain why He took the man aside and why He charged observers not to tell about the healing.

But Jesus' command did no good. The people spread the news that here was One who could open the ears of the deaf and loosen the tongue of the mute. It seems Jesus amazed them, but inspired little obedience.

This healing act shows us that Jesus cares deeply about our problems and is willing to get intimately involved in our lives as He helps us.

Ask Yourself . . . *What personal needs should I bring to Jesus?*

7

Jesus Helps People Understand Him

Mark 8:1—9:8

a **Jesus Feeds More Than Four Thousand (8:1-10)**

Another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat."
—Mark 8:1, 2

Two chapters ago we read that Jesus performed a miracle so that more than five thousand people could eat. Now we read about a second miraculous feeding of a crowd gathered to hear Him.

The second miracle seems to provide a Gentile counterpart to the first miracle. Both miracles probably took place east of the Sea of Galilee, where the population was mostly Gentile. But the first miracle was performed for Jewish Galileans who had run to the area, while the second miracle was performed for local Gentiles.

Apparently it didn't occur to the disciples that Jesus might repeat the miracle. They should have sug-

gested the possibility themselves. Jesus even tried to move their minds in that direction by pointing out that He was concerned about the people's need for food. But the disciples didn't catch on.

Jesus gave them another chance to exercise their faith when He asked how many loaves of bread they had. He had asked that question before the previous miracle (6:38), but they missed the connection. They reported the facts and left it at that.

Seeing that the disciples would not suggest a miracle, Jesus took matters into His own hands. He gave thanks to God and then fed the four thousand men, along with the women and children.

The bounty of this miracle was greater than it had been the previous time. After dinner the disciples filled seven large rope baskets with leftovers. On the other occasion the leftovers had filled twelve small baskets (vs. 43).

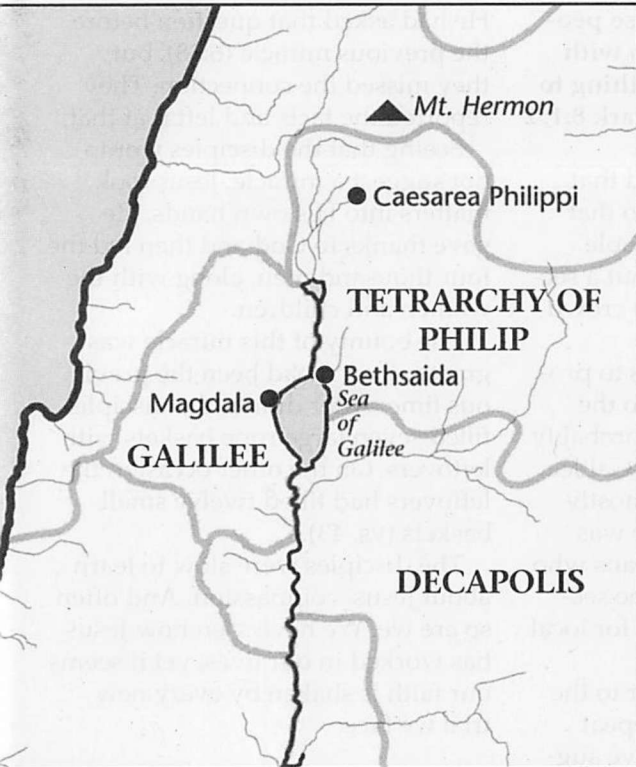
The disciples were slow to learn about Jesus' compassion. And often so are we. We have seen how Jesus has worked in our lives, yet it seems our faith is shaken by every new trial we face.

We should learn from our experiences. If God has brought difficult circumstances into our lives, He has done so to stretch our faith.

Our resources are seldom adequate for the need before us. But Christ's always are.

Ask Yourself . . . *When have I been more conscious of my problems than of God's power?*

Mark 8:10 says that after the miracle Jesus sailed to the region of Dalmanutha. The precise location of this region is no longer known. Matthew referred to it as "the vicinity of Magadan" (Matt. 15:39), which perhaps means Magdala in Galilee.



b The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (8:11-21)

"Be careful," Jesus warned [the disciples]. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." —Mark 8:15

The second miraculous feeding provided evidence that Jesus' claims were true. Yet the miracle did not inspire faith in everyone. That's because faith cannot be compelled by evidence, no matter how powerfully the evidence is presented. Some stubbornly continue to reject the truth that is shown them.

This was the case with the Pharisees. They did not want to believe. And they demonstrated their unbelief by requesting a sign that would back up Jesus' claims. By a "sign" they meant some definite, public proof that Jesus' authority came from God. Evidently they still thought He was doing miracles through demonic, rather than divine, power.

Jesus' first response to their test was a sigh. Recently, He had sighed in sympathy for

a sufferer (7:34). But this time He sighed in disappointment at unbelievers. Those who have worked hard to teach people who are determined not to learn can understand that sigh. It came from the depths of His heart.

These Pharisees were not rejecting Jesus because they were ignorant sinners who didn't know any better. They were leaders of Israel, some of the most knowledgeable people of their day. They should have been teaching others, but they refused to learn themselves.

In a parallel text, Matthew 16:1-4, we learn that Jesus offered them only the sign of Jonah, which referred to His resurrection. But this was not the immediate proof the Pharisees sought. Of course, a sign wouldn't have convinced them anyway. They were not even persuaded by Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Ask Yourself . . . *In moments of doubt, what prevents me from simply trusting in God?*

Seeing that nothing good would come from further conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus abruptly left in a boat with His disciples.

Three situations came together, giving Jesus the opportunity to teach the disciples an important lesson during the trip. The first situation was the recent feeding of the multitude. The second was His discussion with the Pharisees. And the third was the lack of bread in the boat. The ingredient common to all three was yeast.

YEAST

In Jesus' day bread was usually made by adding a piece of dough containing yeast (leaven) to a new loaf. The yeast spread through the loaf of bread, multiplying and releasing carbon dioxide gas, which caused the bread to rise.

Yeast is used often in Scripture as a symbol, usually of evil. It represents something that has the power to permeate and influence something else.

The "yeast" (negative influence) of the Pharisees and of Herod was their refusal to believe in Jesus unless they saw miraculous evidence (Mark 8:11; Luke 23:8). Such skepticism revealed an unwillingness to believe in Jesus because of who He is. Jesus told His disciples to beware of this evil.

Ask Yourself . . . *When have I seen the evil of skepticism spread from one person to another?*

The disciples misunderstood Jesus' warning. From His mention of yeast they thought He was talking about their failure to bring more than one loaf on board the boat (Mark 8:16). Even when Jesus tried

to explain His meaning by talking about physical bread, they still misunderstood (vss. 17-21).

The disciples had watched Jesus feed thousands of people with a few loaves. And on those occasions there had been not only enough bread but more than enough. Yet the disciples were worried because they had only one loaf. They suffered from a lack of faith in Jesus, as did the Pharisees and Herod.

The disciples did not understand Jesus. But, as we will see, Jesus did not give up on them. He is a patient teacher with those who want to learn from Him.



A Blind Man and Peter See (8:22-30)

[Jesus asked,] “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” —Mark 8:29

Arriving at Bethsaida on the northeast shore of the lake, Jesus met some people who evidently knew His reputation as a healer. They brought with them a man—probably a neighbor, friend, or relative—who had lost his sight. (We know the man had once been able to see because he knew what trees look like.)

Jesus led the blind man outside Bethsaida, presumably so He could perform the healing with fewer spectators. At this time, Jesus did not want to arouse any more popu-

lar curiosity, because that could have hindered His central mission. He cared deeply about the sick, but His first priority was to heal the sickness of sin.

The restoration of sight to the blind man is the only healing in the Gospel that took place in two stages. Various suggestions have been offered to explain this, but no one knows for sure why the miracle happened this way. In any case, it is important for us to know that the healing happened even if we can't be sure why it happened as it did.

Jesus told the newly sighted man not to return to Bethsaida. Perhaps this was because He didn't want the man telling about Him. Unlike others to whom Jesus gave such commands, this man apparently did as he was told.

Ask Yourself . . . *When God does good for me, do I respond with obedience?*

After a story about physical sight (8:22-26) comes one about spiritual insight (vss. 27-30).

On the way northward to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had a talk with His disciples. He had demonstrated His divine nature through His teachings and miracles. Now He came directly to the question of identity. “Who do people say I am?” He asked (vs. 27).

The opinions then were much as they are today among unbelievers. People viewed Jesus as a great reformer (John the Baptist), a great miracle worker (Elijah), or a great teacher (a prophet). Those who have such views of Jesus today usually

imagine they are holding Him in high esteem, when in reality they have misunderstood Him altogether.

In short, Jesus did not receive a pleasing report. But Jesus expected better from the Twelve, so He put the question directly to them: "Who do you say I am?" (vs. 29). Peter answered rightly, "You are the Messiah."

We might wonder how Peter could make such a brilliant confession when, shortly before, he

and the other disciples had been unable to understand Jesus' lesson about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. Jesus' response to Peter solves this mystery. He said, "This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). It took a divine revelation for Peter to make the confession.

Jesus warned the Twelve not to tell anyone about His identity as the Messiah. The time was not yet right for all people to know about it.

Ask Yourself . . . *If someone asked me to describe Jesus, how would I answer?*

MESSIAH

The title *Messiah* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one." It is equivalent to *Christ*, a word derived from Greek.

Jews believed that a man would appear as God's anointed prophet, priest, and king to bring salvation to God's people. The Jews, however, had defined salvation mostly in political terms. Perhaps that's why most of them failed to recognize Jesus, who fulfilled the most comprehensive definition of the Messiah.

d Jesus Teaches about Bearing Crosses (8:31—9:1)

He called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." —Mark 8:34b

It is no coincidence that after the height of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah came the depth of Jesus' prediction regarding His own death. Once Jesus' identity was clear in the minds of His disciples, He moved swiftly to tell them why He had come to this world. Jesus came to die.

This was Jesus' first specific teaching about His death. It was not a brief speech. It gave specific facts

SON OF MAN

Jesus' most common self-description was "Son of Man." He called Himself the Son of Man immediately after Peter identified Him as the Messiah. He wanted to teach that, as the Messiah, He combined two Old Testament roles: Son of Man (Dan. 7:13, 14) and Servant of the Lord (Isa. 52:13—53:12).

Daniel described a Son of Man to whom God gives an everlasting kingdom. Isaiah described a Servant of the Lord who suffers on behalf of others. Jesus knew that He must perform the role of the suffering Servant. But He also knew that eventually He would receive glory as the Son of Man.

surrounding His crucifixion. Jesus made four points about His future: (1) He would suffer, (2) He would be rejected, (3) He would be killed, and (4) He would rise from the dead.

Peter was so shocked by the first three points that the fourth meant

nothing to him. Jesus had violated all he understood about the mission of the Messiah. Along with the majority of Jews, Peter evidently was looking for a Messiah who would defeat Rome and establish Israel as the dominant world power.

In consequence, Peter took upon himself the role of counselor. He rebuked the One he had just called Messiah, voicing his disbelief and dissatisfaction: "Never, Lord! . . . This shall never happen to you!" (Matt. 16:22).

But as Peter was in the midst of his rebuke, Jesus did an amazing thing. He turned and declared that Peter's words were satanic. Satan was using Peter to tempt Jesus to abandon the Father's will. Peter's ideas about the career of the Messiah were worldly, not godly.

Peter had modeled the wrong reaction to Jesus' messiahship. It was left to Jesus to explain the proper response. And this is something everyone should know. So Jesus addressed the crowd as well as the Twelve.

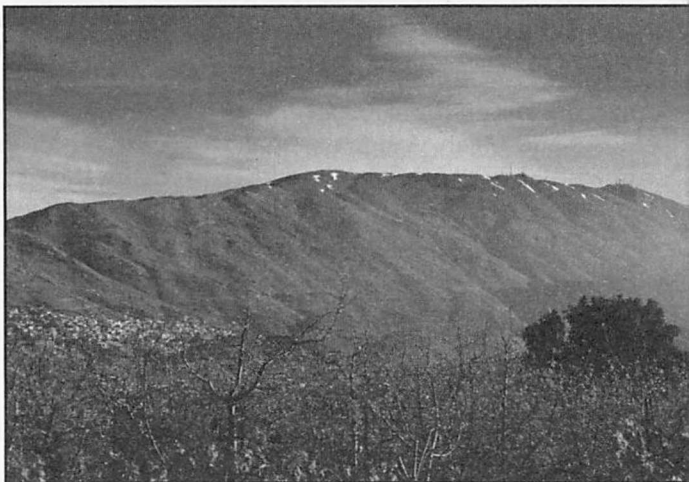
Jesus unequivocally explained that being His disciple would not be easy. Indeed, anyone who would follow Him must likewise follow Him in taking up the cross. In some cases this has meant literally dying for Christ's sake and in all cases it means dying to selfishness.

As missionary Jim Elliot wrote before he was martyred, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." The life saved is not one's physical existence. The word "life" in Mark 8:35

refers to the soul—that aspect that reasons, feels, and wills. So the saving of the soul for eternity is infinitely more important than lengthening our life in this world.

Ask Yourself . . .

Am I ever ashamed of being associated with Jesus?



Mt. Hermon

Jesus' statement that some of His hearers would not "taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" (9:1) is interpreted in several ways. Some think the coming of the Kingdom "with power" refers to Christ's resurrection. Others say it refers to the birth of the Christian church at Pentecost. Still others believe it refers to the Transfiguration, which occurred a few days after Jesus made the prediction.



A Revelation of Jesus' Glory (9:2-8)

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. —Mark 9:2

Six days after Peter's confession

and Jesus' prediction, Jesus took the inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—up a high mountain, probably Mount Hermon. "There he was transfigured before them" (vs. 2b). This means He exhibited His heavenly splendor, which appeared as a radiance.

As if this transformation were not enough, two great figures from Hebrew history suddenly appeared. Moses and Elijah were there for a reason, although the three disciples didn't understand it at the time.

Moses was the Old Testament lawgiver. Elijah was a representative of the prophets. For centuries Old Testament law and prophecy had been the two highest forms of revelation. However, they had given way to God's full revelation in Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). This is what the appearance of Moses and Elijah represented.

Apparently desiring to prolong the experience, Peter offered to build three shelters. But that would have placed Jesus on the same level with Moses and Elijah. A sign of equality with Moses and Elijah would have been flattering for an ordinary person, but Jesus is infinitely greater than those two men.

After Peter's inappropriate remark, the Father testified to Jesus' divine identity, much like He had done at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:11). And because Jesus is the Son of God, the disciples were to obey Him.

It is important that we go beyond the disciples in understanding this incident. The Transfiguration was

related to Jesus' approaching death. Mark tells us that Elijah and Moses talked with Jesus, but doesn't give the topic of conversation. Luke tells us that they talked about Jesus' death (Luke 9:31)—the very subject Jesus had begun discussing with His disciples six days earlier.

Death, especially death by crucifixion, was so closely associated with shame that the Transfiguration was needed to show that Jesus' death would be one of glory. He who is not only superior to Moses and Elijah but also equal with the Father displayed His glory on the Cross.

Ask Yourself . . . *What evidences of God's glory can I praise Him for today?*

8

Jesus Further Trains the Twelve

Mark 9:9—10:52

a Jesus Comes Down from the Mountain (9:9-29)

[Jesus said,] "Everything is possible for one who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" —Mark 9:23b, 24

As we learned in the previous lesson, Jesus considered it important for Peter, James, and John to see Him in His glory. However, it was still necessary for Jesus to keep the lid on His divine identity in public. The need for secrecy about that would continue until after Jesus' resurrection.

The phrasing of Jesus' command for silence raised questions in the minds of the disciples. From reading the prophecy of Daniel, the disciples knew about the Son of Man. But they did not understand what death and resurrection could have to do with that glorious figure.

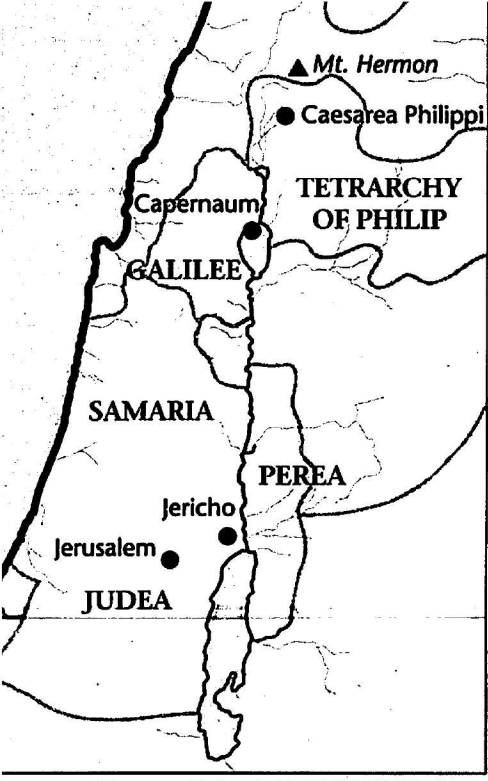
Their question about Elijah may have been meant to challenge Jesus' declaration that He must die. They probably had in mind the popular

teaching that Elijah would return to earth and would anoint the Messiah for immediate leadership. Since Elijah had already appeared (9:1), the sufferings Jesus had described before the Transfiguration would seem to them to be unnecessary. However, the popular view went beyond Scripture, which only says that Elijah would prepare for the Messiah by readying hearts for salvation (Mal. 3:1; 4:5, 6).

Actually, those prophecies referred not to the real Elijah, who had appeared with Jesus on the mountain, but to one who was like Elijah, that is, John the Baptist. And now like John the Baptist, Jesus had to suffer and die. The suffering of both was portrayed in Scripture (I Kings 19:1, 2; Isa. 52:13—53:12).

When Jesus, Peter, James, and John rejoined the other nine disciples, they were met with a problem. The nine had tried to deliver a boy from a demon, but had failed.

This episode had led to an argument with the teachers of the law. Of course, the disciples were defensive because of their inability to work the miracle. Like many today, they used arguments to cover up their inadequacy.



Jesus Teaches about Greatness (9:30-50)

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

—Mark 9:35b

Jesus' focus was more and more on His own approaching death and resurrection. He knew the disciples needed more preparation before that time came, so He spoke in plain and simple terms. But they did not understand.

Jesus' words about His death form a striking contrast with the disciples' argument about greatness. He was facing crucifixion; they were cultivating their ambitions. We well might wonder how they could be so self-centered in the presence of One who is self-sacrificing.

When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, it wasn't because He didn't know. He wanted them to say it out loud in His presence. Many things we would say to ourselves or to our close friends we would not want to repeat in the Master's presence.

Jesus saw this as an opportunity to address the issue of greatness. And He did so by defining and illustrating greatness through a single action. He stood a small child in their midst. A great person is one who serves seemingly insignificant people such as children.

Another dimension of the issue of greatness comes up in verse 38.

It appears from Mark 9:17 that the man whose son was possessed had intended for Jesus to perform the miracle. But in Jesus' absence he had presented his appeal to the disciples. Then the disciples' weak faith had negatively affected the man's faith.

After Jesus cast out the demon, the disciples were anxious to discover the reason for their failure. His reminder about prayer probably means they had assumed that the power to heal was in themselves, not in God.

Our biggest failures are failures of faith. And our lack of faith often becomes noticeable in our lack of prayer.

Ask Yourself . . . *What does my prayer life say about my faith in Christ?*

Speaking for the Twelve, John complained that a man not of their group was casting out demons. John was not suggesting that the man was not a follower of Christ; he probably was. Instead, John objected because the man was not of their group. Jesus had given the Twelve authority to cast out demons in His name, and here was an outsider doing the same! Of course, it didn't help that the stranger was succeeding where the disciples had failed (vs. 18).

The kind of greatness the disciples defended was rooted

in pride. But according to Jesus' definition, greatness overflows with humility. The disciples associated greatness with the sense of power that comes from doing mighty deeds. But Jesus reminded them that greatness is nothing of the kind. Genuine greatness will show itself most often in simple deeds of kindness, such as offering a cup of water.

Ask Yourself . . . *How often do I do deeds of love when I am not noticed?*

Rather than concern themselves with their own greatness, the disciples should have been thinking about how they were influencing others and what was influencing them. That's the subject of Mark 9:42-50.

A person's character will be evident in the way that person treats those who are of little consequence in the eyes of the world. When Jesus mentioned "these little ones" (vs. 42), He was probably referring, specifically, to children. But the point applies to all who are powerless.

God is the champion of those who cannot help themselves. Those who abuse helpless people will have to deal with God. And they would be better off swimming with a millstone around their neck. Unless they repent, judgment is inevitable.

Another kind of influ-

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN

In first century Palestinian culture, older people were revered. Although the Jews did, of course, love their children, often they considered children to be of lesser value than adults.

Some might even consider daughters a disadvantage. In contrast, Jesus welcomed boys and girls. He healed and blessed them, and cited their trustfulness as an example for adults.

ence concerned Jesus as well: the influence of the flesh on our spiritual welfare. Jesus said that if one part of our body would make us fall into sin, we should eliminate that part. Some have taken these words literally and have mutilated themselves. But that was not Jesus' intent. Cutting off one hand won't keep you from sinning with the other. And what one eye can see, the other can see as well.

At issue here is not body parts, but the rationalization that a person can't say no to temptation. Jesus taught that we must say no. Temptation has less to do with external attractions than with our inner drives. We should be willing to deprive ourselves of any physical pleasure that would draw us away from God's will. It is not easy, but it is far better, to suffer with unfulfilled desires now than to fulfill them improperly and wind up in hell.

Jesus' words in verse 49 about being salted with fire presumably are a prediction that those who follow Him will live with suffering and persecution. But since salt is a symbol of purification, this indicates that our trials and sacrifices will have a cleansing effect on us.

Verse 50 indicates that those who remain true to Christ will have a salting, or saving, effect upon those around them.

Ask Yourself . . . *Who are the people under my influence? How am I influencing them?*



Jesus Teaches about Marriage and Children (10:1-16)

[He said to them,] "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

—Mark 10:15

Mark concluded his account of Jesus' Galilean ministry with chapter 9. Then he skipped over a period of about five months and focused on Jesus' final ministries (see p. 111). From this point on, events moved quickly and inevitably toward Jerusalem and the Cross.

Mark 10 covers Jesus' Perea ministry. Perea was a region lying east of the Jordan River. The events recorded in this chapter immediately preceded the last week of Christ's earthly life.

As Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem, five different groups or individuals came to Him with requests: (1) Pharisees, (2) parents with their children, (3) a rich man, (4) James and John, and (5) a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Of these five groups or individuals, only two asked their requests of Jesus properly, and so only those two received what they wanted.

The first of these five groups or individuals was the Pharisees. They questioned Jesus with the intent of testing Him. Jesus, however, refused to fall into their trap. Instead, He disarmed them with two texts they

did not generally associate with divorce. He pointed out from Genesis 1:27 that God made them “male and female,” and then from Genesis 2:24 that in marriage the two “become one flesh” (Mark 10:6-8).

From these two texts He drew the conclusion that divorce is always a violation of God’s ideal for marriage. That ideal is one man and one woman staying together for a lifetime.

In private with His disciples, Jesus carried the matter further, citing two cases of adultery. Jesus may have had Herod Antipas and Herodias in mind when He said this, for they fit the two cases perfectly. The main principle is that anyone who remarries after divorcing, “except for sexual immorality” (Matt. 19:9), is guilty of adultery.

Appropriately, after Jesus’ discussion on marriage (Mark 10:1-12) we have the incident of His welcoming little children (vss. 13-16). Jesus was held in such high regard that parents brought their children to Him for a blessing. Since Jesus took them into His arms, these must have been small children.

In rebuking the parents of the children, the disciples probably were trying to protect Jesus from interruption and fatigue. Also, the disciples may have been thinking the children were too

unimportant for Jesus’ attention.

In contrast, Jesus held up the attitude of a child as the model for those who want to enter His kingdom. Just as a child is dependent on its parents, so a Christian is dependent on God.

DIVORCE IN JESUS’ DAY

When some Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce, they were trying to draw Him into a theological debate raging within Judaism. There were two schools of thought on divorce at that time. Two famous Jewish teachers, Shammai and Hillel, each headed one of the schools of thought.

The debate focused on the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1. What did Moses mean when he said that a man can divorce his wife if he finds “something indecent about her”? The school of Shammai said that the only indecency Moses meant was adultery. Consequently, this group allowed divorce only in cases when the wife had been sexually unfaithful. Hillel, on the other hand, insisted that an indecency was whatever irritated the husband. Therefore, his school taught that a husband could divorce his wife for any reason at all.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I trust God more completely?*



Jesus Warns about Wealth (10:17-31)

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

—Mark 10:23

Having said all He intended to say, Jesus started to leave. But He was interrupted by a wealthy young man who was troubled by life's ultimate question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (vs. 17). Evidently the young man expected to be given a task he could accomplish to win favor with God. But Jesus always taught that eternal life is a gift.

Before dealing with the young man's question directly, Jesus called attention to his unthinking use of the word "good." Probably Jesus meant that the young man should seriously consider the implications of calling Jesus good before using that term.

Next, Jesus paraphrased those of the Ten Commandments that concern our relationships with other people (Exod. 20:12-17; Deut. 5:16-21). The young man felt confident in that area. He claimed to have obeyed those commandments since he was a boy—probably meaning since his bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen.

The editorial remark in Mark 10:21 shows how Jesus' love for all people was individualized in this situation. Out of love, Jesus told the

young man something he didn't want to hear. Jesus told the man to sell all and follow Him.

Jesus had touched the man's heart, and the man was devastated. His face fell, he became gloomy, and he went away grieved. Jesus never specifically stated the one thing the man lacked. But as soon as He instructed him to sell all, the one shortcoming took control of his heart and dictated his response. He chose his possessions over eternal life.

Jesus' command to sell everything pointed to the commandments Jesus didn't mention: those requiring that God be first. The man was an idolater. Wealth was his god.

Ask Yourself . . . *What one thing would be most difficult for me to give up for Jesus' sake?*

The disciples' shocked response shows that they had accepted the common thinking of that day, namely, that wealth is a sure indication of God's favor. Jesus rejected that attitude.

While our sinfulness makes it impossible for any of us to achieve salvation on our own, the wealthy have special temptations to sin. Yet God can achieve the impossible: He can change any human heart.

In light of the difficulties facing the wealthy, Peter wanted reassurance that he and the other disciples, who had made themselves poor for Christ's sake, would receive God's blessing. Jesus gave him that assurance. Although Christians suffer hardship, our rewards are great.



Jesus Teaches and Models Servanthood (10:32-52)

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

—Mark 10:45

Jesus and His disciples were on their last journey to Jerusalem. Something in the Master's appearance or manner astonished the disciples. Everyone had a sense of impending disaster.

This third prediction of Jesus' death seems to have been fuller and more specific than those that came before. The end was at hand. He had said most of this before, but now it had a deepened intensity.

While Jesus was preoccupied with His death, the disciples were ambitious for success. James and John made a special appeal for position and power in Christ's kingdom. Their motive for asking was the same as the other disciples' motive for objecting to their asking. All wanted to be first. All wanted to be served.

Jesus capitalized on the occasion by reaffirming His teachings on servanthood. The citizens of His kingdom will not try to rule others. Rather, they will look for ways to serve.

Verse 45 could be called the key verse of the Gospel. Jesus had already said He would die. Here He said why He would die. He would

give His life as a ransom for many, to pay for the sins of all who repent. Jesus was the ultimate servant.

Jesus turned greatness on its head, reversing the relationship between serving and being served. He said the truly important are those who make little of themselves and help others. By Jesus' definition, the lower you stoop to serve others, the higher you climb on the ladder of greatness.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I better serve others?*

Right Hand, Left Hand

At Jewish banquets the seating arrangement reflected the guests' degrees of distinction. Those whom the host wanted to honor were seated nearest him. The most privileged position was to the host's immediate right. The second most privileged position was to the host's immediate left.

This practice determined the way James and John asked Jesus for privileged positions.



In Jericho, Jesus modeled servanthood in the way He treated a blind man. The blind man refused to be silenced by the crowd, but kept calling for Jesus' attention. Then once Jesus asked to see him, Bartimaeus discarded his cloak and came immediately.

It might seem peculiar that Jesus would ask a blind man what he wanted. What could be more obvious than that a blind man would want sight? But Jesus asked the question for a good reason. Bartimaeus, a beggar, could have asked for money, thinking that sight was too much to ask for. How he answered was a reflection of his faith. When he asked for sight,

it was clear that he believed Jesus could give him what he requested.

Many people spend too much time in prayer seeking things that make little difference. They need a faith like Bartimaeus's—one that is bold and specific.

Ask Yourself . . . *How is faith evident in the way I pray?*

In chapter 10 we found several requests. But only the parents with children and blind Bartimaeus received their requests. The parents wanted Jesus' touch for their children; Bartimaeus wanted to see. Those were worthy requests. Our worthy requests can be ours, too, if we ask them in faith.

2

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

Mark 11:1—12:12

a Jesus Enters Jerusalem to Hosannas (11:1-11)

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" —Mark 11:9

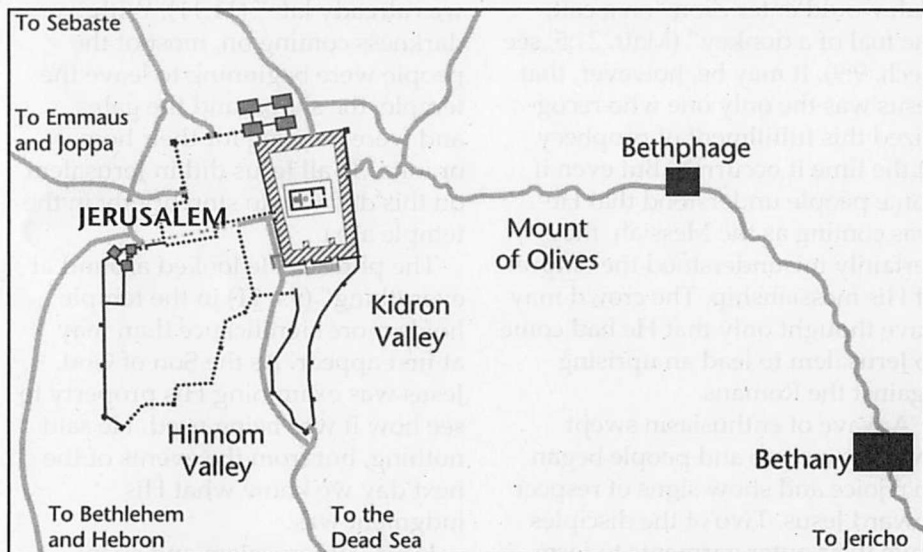
Passover was only a few days away. Jerusalem was already filling up with pilgrims from all over.

Jesus, too, was expected to be there.

On every hand there were high expectations and high tensions. Jesus' followers were hoping He would use the great national celebration to claim His place as King of the Jews. The Jewish leaders were hoping to find an opportunity to capture and kill Him.

Knowing the danger, Jesus could have stayed away. Yet He chose not to stay away. He decided to enter Jerusalem—but on His own terms.

Jesus had been making the trip to



Jerusalem on foot. But on the road approaching Bethphage (BETH-fuh-jee) and Bethany, villages near Jerusalem, He instructed two of His disciples to go into Bethphage and borrow a specified colt of a donkey. It is not known whether Jesus had arranged with someone to provide the colt or whether He knew about the colt supernaturally. At any rate, the animal was an appropriate one. It had never been ridden before, which according to Jewish belief made it especially suitable for religious purposes.

When the crowd accompanying Jesus saw that He was going to ride a colt, they knew He meant to enter the city triumphantly. Pilgrims to Jerusalem usually finished the last stage of their journey on foot. Kings and other leaders, such as victorious generals, rode into the city on colts.

Jesus' ride on a colt fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah would enter Zion "on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Matt. 21:5; see Zech. 9:9). It may be, however, that Jesus was the only one who recognized this fulfillment of prophecy at the time it occurred. But even if some people understood that He was coming as the Messiah, they certainly misunderstood the nature of His messiahship. The crowd may have thought only that He had come to Jerusalem to lead an uprising against the Romans.

A wave of enthusiasm swept over the crowd, and people began to rejoice and show signs of respect toward Jesus. Two of the disciples gave their outer garments to form

a makeshift saddle for Him. Many other people used their outer garments as well as leafy branches to soften His path. Quoting Psalm 118:25, 26, they shouted, "Hosanna!" (literally, "Save now, we pray") and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!" While the people had an inaccurate view of Jesus' messiahship, they at least recognized Him as a potential deliverer.

The irony in this passage is that within a week nearly all support for Jesus melted away. It is even likely that some of the people shouting "Hosanna!" were part of a later crowd shouting "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13).

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever said religious words insincerely, just to go along with a crowd? In the future how can I resist the temptation to do so?*

By the time Jesus crossed from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, "it was already late" (11:11). With darkness coming on, most of the people were beginning to leave the temple, the shops, and the gates, and were heading for their homes or inns. So all Jesus did in Jerusalem on this day was to stop briefly in the temple area.

The phrase "He looked around at everything" (vs. 11) in the temple holds more significance than may at first appear. As the Son of God, Jesus was examining His property to see how it was being used. He said nothing, but from the events of the next day we know what His judgment was.

Jesus left Jerusalem and spent

the night in Bethany, perhaps at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. This withdrawal from the city may have been for safety's sake, since He knew it was not yet time for Him to fall into His opponents' hands. It may also have been to dramatize His unwillingness to be a part of what was going on in the temple.

b Jesus Clears the Temple (11:12-19)

As he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.' " —Mark 11:17

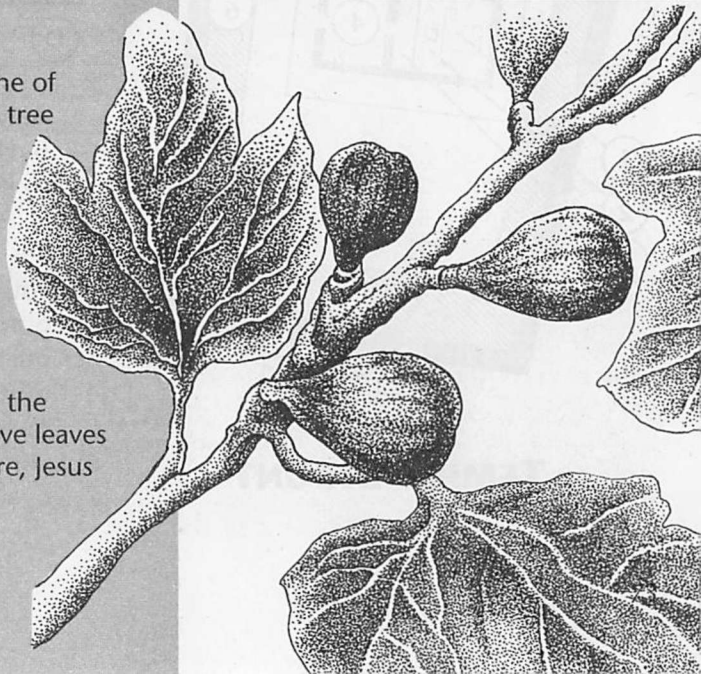
Leaving Bethany on Monday, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. Along the way He did a curious thing: He

cursed a fruitless fig tree. He did not say why He did this, but the meaning of the curse became plain through what He did next. He emptied the temple of people who were behaving irreverently.

From His observations the previous day, Jesus knew that the temple was being misused. People walking between the city and the Mount of Olives were carrying goods through the temple courts as a convenient shortcut. Money changers had set up tables where they exchanged Palestinian half-shekels (required for paying the temple tax) for Greek and Roman coins. Merchants were selling sacrificial animals and items used in worship rituals. Both the money changers and the merchants were taking advantage of pilgrims by charging excessive rates. The temple had become a "den of robbers" (11:17; see Jer. 7:11).

Jesus was grieved that people

In early spring (the time of Passover), a Judean fig tree would produce unripe figs, even though most of its leaves had not yet appeared. The leaves usually were not full nor the fruit ripe before June. A fig tree that Jesus inspected had none of the early figs. But it did have leaves (Mark 11:13). Therefore, Jesus made it a symbol of hypocrisy.

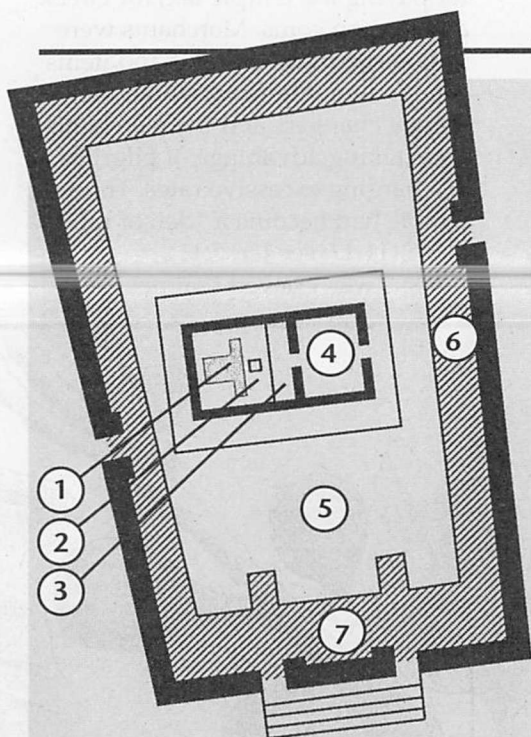


were using religion to exploit others. But perhaps His greatest grief was that Gentiles were being prevented from worshiping in the temple. The temple was supposed to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17; see Isa. 56:7), but traffic and business occupied the Court of Gentiles—the only part of the temple that Gentiles could enter. This situation was especially grievous with Passover coming on. So Jesus chased the merchants out of the Court of Gentiles, and then kept everyone else out who did not have a legiti-

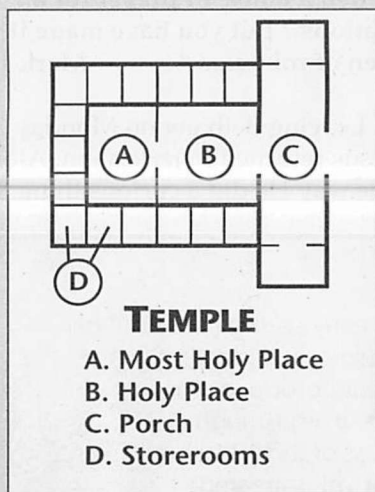
mate reason for being there.

When earlier in the day Jesus had cursed the fig tree, it wasn't the fruitlessness of the tree that annoyed Him. He was grieved over the religious system that He had observed the previous day. It had gone corrupt.

Jesus found a fitting symbol for that fruitless system in the fruitless tree. In the tree, the leaves masked the fact that it bore no fruit. In the religious system, the outward busyness of the temple obscured the fact that the people were not bearing the



TEMPLE MOUNT



TEMPLE

- A. Most Holy Place
- B. Holy Place
- C. Porch
- D. Storerooms

- 1. Temple
- 2. Court of Priests
- 3. Court of Israel
- 4. Court of Women
- 5. Court of Gentiles
- 6. Solomon's Portico
- 7. Royal Portico

fruit of faith. Both were hypocritical.

If we are not vigilant, a similar hypocrisy can grow up in our churches. We must be careful to have more concern for people and their fellowship with God than we do for the buildings, programs, and forms of religion.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I help my church focus on what's most important?*

Jesus' display of holy wrath in the temple earned the approval of many people. But it angered the religious leaders, who probably benefited financially from the trade. They especially feared that Jesus' popularity endangered their own standing in the people's eyes. Therefore, the chief priests and teachers of the law combined forces in seeking Jesus' death.

After cleansing the temple, Jesus apparently spent the rest of the daylight hours teaching publicly in Jerusalem.



Prayer with Faith (11:20-25)

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

—Mark 11:24

The next morning Jesus and His disciples passed by the fig tree they had seen the day before. Miraculously, the fig tree had withered.

Mark's comment that it was dead "from the roots" (vs. 20) may reveal another part of its symbolism. The religious leaders, who should have been the source of nourishment (the "roots") for the people, were spiritually dead. Thus the nation had withered spiritually.

Peter pointed out the way Jesus' curse had affected the fig tree. Apparently this surprised Peter. By this time he should have known better. Peter had seen Jesus do more spectacular miracles than this one.

Jesus replied by telling the disciples that if they had faith in God, even greater miracles than the withering of a tree could be accomplished through them.

The extreme example He used to illustrate this statement drew on their circumstances at the moment. They were on or near the summit of the Mount of Olives. In the distance to the east lay the Dead Sea. Jesus said a person of faith could order the mountain to throw itself into the sea. The key is faith.

For the person who submits to God's sovereign will, nothing will ever be impossible. Such faith is a confidence in the goodness and power of God, who does all things well.

Not only faith, but also our treatment of others can affect our relationship with God. If we have not forgiven others, we will not be forgiven by God (Mark 11:25).

Ask Yourself . . . *Is there anyone whom I need to forgive for a wrong against me?*

Jesus' LAST WEEK

SUNDAY

Jesus:

- enters Jerusalem triumphantly
- surveys the temple

Mark 11:1-11

MONDAY

Jesus:

- curses a fig tree
- clears the temple

Mark 11:12-19

TUESDAY

Jesus:

- teaches about faith
- replies to His opponents in the temple
- teaches His disciples on the Mount of Olives

Mark 11:20—13:37

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

Jesus:

- celebrates Passover with His disciples
- goes to Gethsemane, where He is arrested

Mark 14:12-20

FRIDAY

Jesus:

- is condemned by the Sanhedrin
- is denied by Peter
- is handed over for crucifixion by Pilate
- dies and is buried

Mark 14:53—15:47

Note: Mark 11:26 does not appear in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of Mark. New Testament scholars believe it was inserted at some point from Matthew 6:15.

d Jesus' Enemies Question His Authority (11:27-33)

"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"
—Mark 11:28

Jesus returned to Jerusalem a third day, Tuesday. He came this time to instruct the people.

While He was walking in the temple courts, He was confronted by delegations from three groups of leaders: the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. The chief priests probably included the ruling high priest, Caiaphas; a former high priest, Annas; and possibly members of their families. The teachers of the law were men who studied and taught religious law. The elders were influential laymen. All three groups included members of the national ruling council, the Sanhedrin.

After Jesus cleared the temple, a confrontation with the religious leaders was inevitable. They felt it was their business to know why Jesus thought He had authority to

drive out those who were engaging in customary temple activities. They didn't focus their complaint on Jesus' deeds, but rather on His authority.

When Jesus answered their question with a question, He was using a common debating technique of the rabbis. His question also put the religious leaders on the defensive. Their attitude toward John the Baptist had revealed that these men would not recognize anyone's authority unless it served their own purposes. So Jesus forced them into an impossible position by asking them about the authority behind John's baptism.

The religious leaders could not answer His question without either alienating the crowd or supporting Jesus' position. In spite of their contempt for the common people, the religious leaders feared them. The multitudes had held John in high esteem during his lifetime, and still did. So the leaders were afraid to say anything against John. But if they acknowledged that John's authority came from heaven, then they would also have to acknowledge Jesus' authority. That's because John had told the nation to accept Jesus.

Inevitably, the religious leaders claimed ignorance. Jesus won the argument about the source of His authority before it really started.

We should never read of the hostile leaders without being concerned about making the same mistake they did. When God's will does not match up with our ideas or wishes, we should not question His right to do as He pleases. We should look

for the fault in ourselves rather than question His sovereignty. We must trust God because He is God.

Ask Yourself . . . *In what areas of my life do I need to acknowledge God's authority?*



Jesus Describes the Religious Leaders (12:1-12)

Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the corner-stone"?

—Mark 12:10

We have seen how the religious leaders felt toward Jesus. Now Jesus used a parable to reveal His attitude toward them.

Jesus' parable about the tenants of a vineyard accurately reflects land practices in His day. Large tracts of agricultural land were owned by wealthy people who lived elsewhere. The land was worked by tenant farmers, who often coveted the land for themselves. Sometimes the farmers conspired to take over ownership of the land.

But despite its realism, Jesus' parable is not about land ownership disputes. It is about the men to whom He had just been speaking, namely, the religious leaders.

Study the elements involved in the parable: The vineyard owner is God. The vineyard is God's kingdom. The

tenants are the spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation. The servants are God's prophets. And the son is Jesus.

Most irritating of all to the leaders was Jesus' quotation from Psalm 118. Perhaps by choosing to quote from this psalm, He was meaning to reinforce the hosannas of the crowd during His triumphal entry. The crowd had used the same psalm.

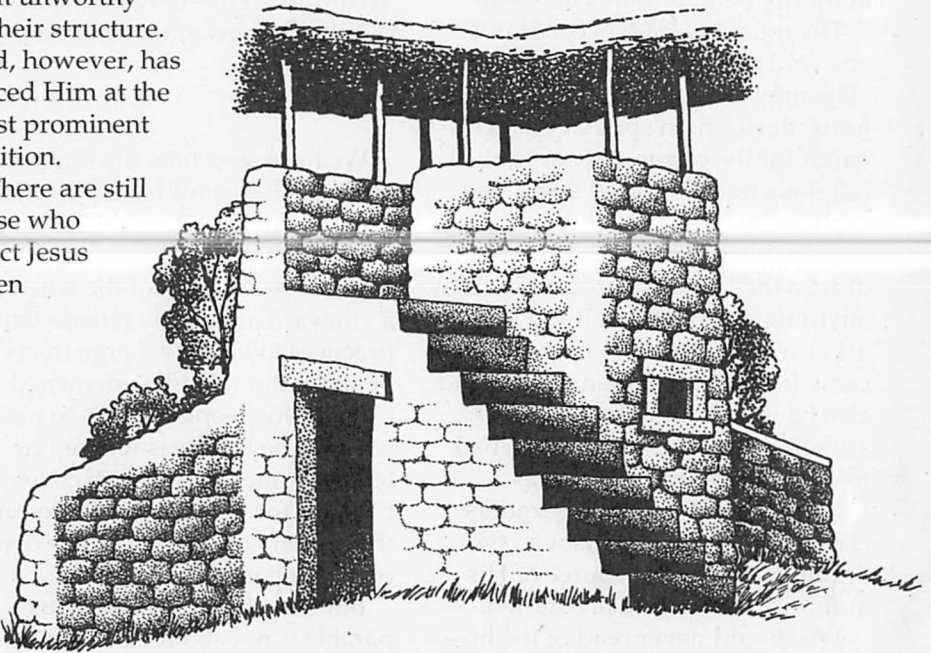
On this occasion Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22 and 23, identifying Himself as the cornerstone of true religion. The leaders, who considered themselves spiritual builders, had examined Jesus and judged Him unworthy of their structure. God, however, has placed Him at the most prominent position.

There are still those who reject Jesus when

He does not advance their cherished private ambitions. Such rejection is as dangerous now as it was then. What matters most is not that we achieve our own goals in life. What matters most is that we acknowledge the centrality of Jesus Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *Do I have any goals that I cannot fulfill while at the same time lifting up Jesus Christ? If so, how should I change those goals?*

Vineyards in Jesus' day often had watchtowers like this one.



10

Jesus Answers Questions

Mark 12:13-44

a Is It Right to Pay Taxes? (12:13-17)

Then Jesus said to [the Pharisees and Herodians], "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him. —Mark 12:17

Jesus taught many of His lessons in circumstances we would consider less than perfect. He seldom enjoyed an environment like a classroom where students were waiting to learn. Instead, sometimes He gave instruction in the midst of meeting people's needs. At other times, He taught the principles of His kingdom while traveling. Yet in each situation He showed Himself the Master Teacher, capable of using every issue to communicate truth.

Passages covered in this lesson show Jesus teaching others through His responses to their questions. The first question came from some Pharisees and Herodians sent by an unidentified "they" (vs. 13). "They" probably were members of the Sanhedrin, the national ruling council of the Jews. These men had made it

their business to destroy Christ, so they sent their handpicked representatives in hopes of catching Him with clever words. Their plan was entrapment; their method, flattery.

The Sanhedrin chose their delegation carefully. Pharisees disliked the payment of taxes to Rome, though they did not outright oppose it as did a militant group called the Zealots. The Zealots saw the payment of taxes as a concession to worship of the Roman emperor. Herodians, on the other hand, taught that it was proper to respect political leaders who might in return favor the Jews. The Herodians supported Roman rule, including Roman taxation.

By sending Pharisees and Herodians to ask Jesus about paying taxes, the Sanhedrin intended to create an artificial conflict between duty to God and duty to government. They assumed they had set the perfect trap for the Galilean carpenter. Jesus, they thought, must risk being accused of either supporting emperor worship or advocating a tax revolt. Thus they thought He would have no choice but to alienate one part of the population or another—those who agreed with the Zealots or those who agreed with

the Herodians.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees and Herodians did not really respect Him, and He knew why they asked Him about taxation. So He did not directly answer their question. Instead, He asked them whose picture was on a Roman denarius.

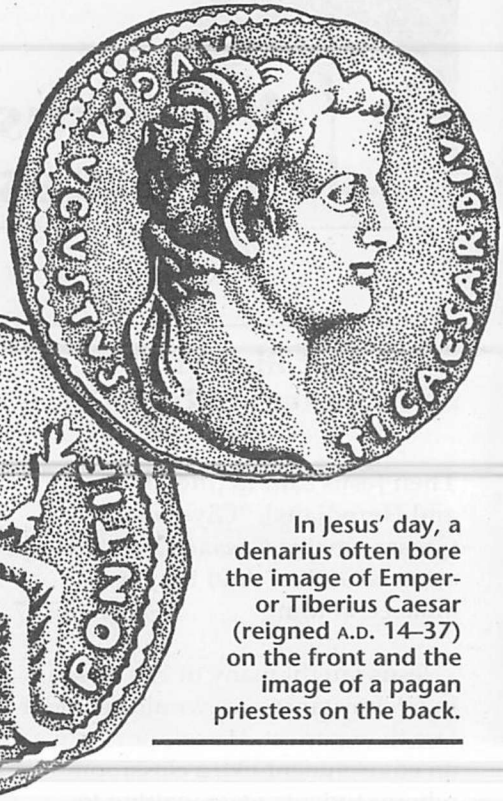
They answered Him with a name the Pharisees didn't even like to pronounce:

Caesar. Based on this, Jesus taught that Jews should give to Caesar the taxes that belonged to him.

More importantly, Jesus taught that every person should give to God what belongs to Him. Just as the denarius bore Caesar's image, we bear God's image. Government will have to be content with our money. God demands our hearts.

This is a lesson on priorities. The Pharisees and Herodians had not put God first. People who neglect life's highest priority tend to confuse their other priorities. Then they use that confusion to justify their lack of commitment to God.

For example, the workaholic has no time for worship because he "must provide for his family." The



In Jesus' day, a denarius often bore the image of Emperor Tiberius Caesar (reigned A.D. 14-37) on the front and the image of a pagan priestess on the back.

leisure enthusiast has no time for Kingdom service because he "needs his relaxation." While both work and leisure are essential to a healthy life, neither can be done properly until one's first priority is obeying God.

The principle applies to everything from taxes to television. Put Jesus first, and then you can fulfill your other responsibilities in their proper order.

Ask Yourself . . . Judging from the way I spend my time and money, what could people conclude is my highest priority?

b

Will the Dead Live Again? (12:18-27)

"Have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

—Mark 12:26b, 27a

Since the Pharisees and Herodians failed to trap Jesus, the Sadducees tried their hand. They thought they had a foundation for their argument in Deuteronomy 25:5, which was designed to keep a family's inheritance from being divided. But there was not a shred of sincerity in their motive for raising the question about marriage in heaven. It was merely an attempt to force Jesus into saying something for which they could condemn Him.

Jesus responded by announcing that their question was irrelevant because there is no marriage in heaven. There we will be like the angels—not in every respect, but in our not being married. (Incidentally, by so saying, Jesus refuted the Sadducees' belief that there are no angels.) If the Sadducees

knew the power of God, they would realize that He can provide a new existence for believers that is radically different from this one.

Jesus' revelation about our heavenly state may be seen as either good news or bad news, depending on one's experience with marriage. Those who are disturbed at the prospect of no marriage in heaven

The Sadducees

The Sadducees made up a small Jewish sect whose interests were partly religious, but mostly political. Their membership came mainly from the upper class.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the Sadducees, both priests and laymen, was their conservatism. Politically, they opposed any movement (such as Christianity) that threatened to disturb the status quo and their own privileged positions. Religiously, they opposed new doctrines.

The beliefs of the Sadducees placed them at odds with the Pharisees. They considered the first five books of the Old Testament to be more important than the others. They denied that the oral tradition of the teachers of the law was binding. They believed thoroughly in human free will. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They did not believe in angels or demons. And they did not expect a Messiah.

need to understand that heaven is not a place of diminished pleasures. Heaven will enhance our intimacy and multiply our joys. Once there, we will no more look back with longing at what we have left behind than an adult, while enjoying a hearty meal, wishes to return to eating strained vegetables.

Next, Jesus addressed the real question behind the question of the Sadducees. They actually wanted to know whether Jesus agreed with them that there is no resurrection. Or did He agree with the Pharisees, who believed in life after death? Is there a resurrection of the dead?

Jesus responded by turning to the Sadducees' favorite authority: Moses. From a passage on the burning bush (Exod. 3:6), Jesus demonstrated that resurrection is a reality. In speaking to Moses, God had indicated that He is currently related to people who had long been dead. That meant they had not ceased to exist. If the Sadducees knew the Scriptures, they would see that this is true.

Some Christians today need a revival of belief in life after death. Their shortcoming is like that of the Sadducees. As they consider death, they "do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Mark 12:24). They live every day with the sting of death in their hearts and the victory of the grave hanging over them.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can thoughts of resurrection improve my enjoyment of daily life?*



Which Commandment Is Most Important? (12:28-34)

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself."

—Mark 12:30, 31

Many people listened to Jesus' debate with the Sadducees. One of them, a teacher of the law, was impressed by what Jesus said. A third question came from him: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (vs. 28).

The teacher of the law was not asking Jesus to select the one commandment that people could least afford to disobey. Rather he was asking if there is a class of laws, or even one specific law, that represents the entire body of law.

One striking difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day was the difference between their tendency to make many laws out of a few and His gift for making few laws out of many. They had identified a law for every Hebrew letter (613 of them) in the Ten Commandments. Generally, they emphasized laws about external behavior, such as maintaining cleanness and keeping the Sabbath.

Jesus, by contrast, summarized the entire law very briefly: Love God! Jesus knew that the Father did

not give the law to burden people with endless rules, but so that they would love Him. Obedience should be an outgrowth of love for God.

Jesus' first quotation was from Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. Together, the words "heart," "soul," "mind," and "strength" are a way of saying "entire being." Every part of us should be involved in our devotion to God.

But that command does not stand alone. We need to work out our love for God in daily life. A supreme love for God will always find expression

in unselfish love for others. That is why, for the second greatest commandment, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18.

We must always use the two principles of a supreme love for God and an unselfish love for others to test the priorities by which we order our daily lives. If we fail these tests, then our life, and even our religion, will bring little fulfillment.

Ask Yourself . . . *In the coming week how can I show my love for God by the way I love others?*

When Jesus quoted the two most important commandments, something in the teacher of the law responded to His words. The teacher repeated Jesus' words and added that love was superior to the sacrificial system. This was an improvement over the common teaching of the time that love and sacrifices were equal. The teacher was not yet a believer in Jesus, but he did have some understanding of the nature of the Kingdom.

The Shema

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Mark 12:29; see Deut. 6:4). This was the basic creed of the Jewish people. It was called the Shema [sheh-MAH], after its first word in Hebrew.

Many Jews recited the Shema twice a day—first thing in the morning and last thing in the evening, as Deuteronomy 6:7 required. It was the first sentence taught baby boys. Often it was the last words on the lips of a dying Jew. Thus every day and every life was symbolically enclosed within this declaration of the oneness and uniqueness of God:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

d How Is the Messiah David's Son? (12:35-40)

As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law."

—Mark 12:38a

Because of Jesus' masterful answers, the people were afraid to

Devouring Widows Houses

Teachers of the law could not charge for their services. Instead, they depended on the generosity of the people to support them.

During certain periods, teachers of the law were beggars. But by Jesus' day it had become a mark of piety to support a teacher of the law. Wealthy people would donate money. In turn, teachers would say lengthy prayers on their behalf.

This dependence on others for money caused some abuses by teachers of the law. Some sponged off those who did not have enough money to spare. This is what Jesus meant when He spoke of teachers "devouring" widows' houses (see Mark 12:40).

competence to put the teachers of the law in their place.

But Jesus didn't stop there. Besides confronting their inadequate teaching, He also attacked the teachers of the law for their pride and hypocrisy.

The teachers of the law loved recognition. They wore long, white linen robes with fringes. These garments set them off from the common people. When the teachers

ask Him any more questions. He, however, had a question for them. He wasn't content with amazing the crowds (12:17) and silencing His enemies (vs. 34). He hadn't come to earth to make good impressions or to coexist peacefully with wickedness. He had come to confront evil with good. Thus He deliberately exposed the religious leaders' inadequate teachings about the Messiah.

On this matter, the leaders' teaching was correct as far as it went. They were just not teaching enough. They taught that the Messiah would be the "son," or descendant, of King David. But they placed all their emphasis on the Messiah's Davidic sonship, and none on His divine lordship.

As Jesus pointed out, the word "Lord" is used in Psalm 110:1 in the sense of one who has authority over another. It even implies deity. That verse, composed by David, refers to the Messiah. So Jesus in essence asked, "How can David's descendant be his superior, even his Lord?" In other words, "How can the Messiah be 'Lord' and human at the same time?"

The question pointed to Jesus' own nature. He is human as well as God. Jesus was often called "Son of David" (for example, see Mark 10:47), but few recognized Him as the Son of God. So in one stroke, Jesus corrected the teachers of the law and clarified His identity as the human-divine Messiah.

The crowd loved this, whether or not they fully understood it. Finally someone had the courage and the

passed in public, the people would rise respectfully. The teachers occupied the most important seats in the synagogues, which were on the bench before the "ark" containing the scrolls of Scripture. Sitting there, the teachers could be seen by all the other worshipers. The places of honor at a banquet were at the head of the table, especially next to the host. When teachers of the law occupied those places, all the other guests could witness their favor with the host.

But the teachers' evil went beyond loving public recognition. They went further by mistreating others and conducting their religious duties for selfish reasons. The teachers' thirst for power had undermined their morals until they viewed themselves as above the laws they imposed on others.

Jesus exposed the hypocritical motives behind their behavior. They had made religion a vehicle for self-advancement. They were ambitious men who abused their office.

We need to beware of hypocrites today. They still use religion for personal profit.

Even more importantly, we need to beware of hypocrisy in ourselves. It's easy to depend more on impressions than on genuine goodness; it's easy to use people for our own advancement.

Ask Yourself . . . Which is a stronger temptation for me: to use others to flatter my pride, or to pretend I'm "spiritual" when I'm not?

e A Widow Gives All She Has (12:41-44)

A poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

—Mark 12:42

After condemning the teachers of the law for false piety, Jesus drew His disciples' attention to an example of true piety.

Jesus watched people give their offerings to the temple treasury in the Court of Women. (Both men and women used this court, but women could not use the courts closer to the temple.) The Court of Women housed thirteen trumpet-shaped containers for the offerings that all Jews were expected to give.

While Jesus watched, wealthy people gave large sums of money. But a poor widow gave two small coins, called *lepta*, which were all the



The lepton was the smallest and least valuable coin in Palestine during Jesus' time.

money she had to live on. She could have saved one of the coins for herself, but she gave both.

The rich may have been the teachers of the law who had made their money by stealing from widows. Perhaps the widow was one of those whose houses had been "devoured" by the teachers of the law.

Jesus pointed to this poor widow as an example of a generous and obedient person. She was all that the teachers of the law pretended to be but were not. She had fulfilled the greatest commandment. By her actions, it was clear that she loved God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength.

If we wish to give God the devotion He desires, we should take the

widow for our model. We should seek her spirit of dependence on God. And then as we live for the Lord, we can be sure He notices our smallest act of love.

Ask Yourself . . . *What does it mean for me to give God everything I have?*

To our knowledge, this was Jesus' last appearance in the temple and the end of His public teaching. As He looked ahead to the Cross, it must have been discouraging to consider the hostility of the religious leaders, the corruption of the temple system, the insincerity of the masses, and the instability of the Twelve. Yet in the midst of all this, He found joy in watching one true worshiper.

11

Jesus Predicts Near and Distant Events

Mark 13

a The Disciples Ask Jesus Questions (13:1-8)

"Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

—Mark 13:4

Jesus commented on a widow's generosity (as we studied in Lesson 10) while in an outer court of the temple. As Jesus and His disciples were leaving the temple area, Jesus made the prediction recorded in Mark 13:2. Then the group crossed the Kidron Valley and climbed the

nearby Mount of Olives.

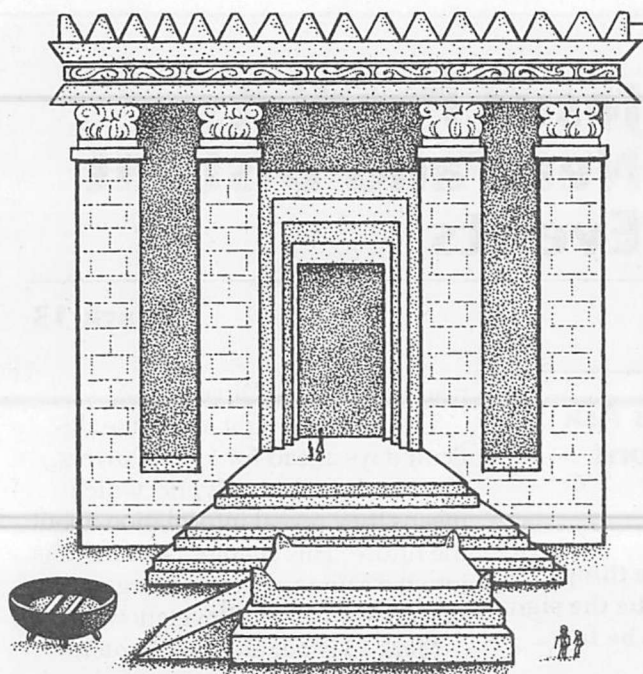
There Jesus taught about the difficult days ahead for His followers. His words are apocalyptic, which means they reveal information about the future. This chapter of Mark falls into the same category as large portions of Daniel and Revelation.

Mark 13 is not an easy chapter, and we cannot hope to comprehend all that is in it. By its nature, prophecy becomes completely clear only at the time of its fulfillment. Some details will remain obscure even after we have made our best efforts to comprehend them. So we should not become distracted by speculations about the obscure parts. Rather, we must learn from and act upon that which is clear.

Without intending to, one of the disciples supplied an opening for Jesus to introduce the subjects that were on His heart. The disciple merely drew Jesus' attention to the appearance of the temple. It was an impressive

The Mount of Olives, as seen from the old city of Jerusalem





Herod's Temple

In Jesus' day the temple, which had been rebuilt about 515 B.C., was undergoing such extensive remodeling that it amounted to a reconstruction. Though begun by Herod the Great shortly before Jesus' birth, the remodeling project was not completed until A.D. 64.

Nevertheless, in Jesus' lifetime it already was an awe-inspiring structure. Some of the stones were more than 38 feet long, 12 feet high, and 18 feet deep. The stones were white and decorated with gold and carvings.

cluster of buildings and courtyards. Yet Jesus said all of it would be destroyed.

As the disciples crossed to the Mount of Olives, they had time to reflect on Jesus' shocking prediction. To them, as to all Jews, the temple was the place God's presence dwelt among them. Any suggestion that it would be destroyed was highly disturbing.

The disciples reacted to Jesus' prediction by asking Him to explain what He had meant by it. They asked two questions: "When will these things happen?" and "What will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (vs. 4).

Everything that follows in the chapter was Jesus' response to those two questions. His answer to the second question is in verses 5-27. His answer to the first question is in verses 28-32.

Jesus' response to the disciples revealed additional information, not only about the destruction of the temple, but also about His own future return to earth in glory. Evidently in Jesus' mind those two events were closely connected. That is probably because the destruction of the temple was, and the Second Coming will be, a time of God's judgment on humanity. However, as we well know, the destruction of the

Jerusalem temple and Jesus' second coming are separated by a long period of time.

More than trying to give the disciples information, Jesus was attempting to build their confidence. He wanted them to remain faithful in the face of peril. There would be much to fear: deceivers, wars, natural disasters.

Mark's first readers would already have seen examples of such disturbances. A famine struck Judea in A.D. 44. An earthquake rocked Crete around A.D. 46. Rebels threatened the peace of the Roman Empire.

People of every age need to learn that only those who are faithful to Jesus can enjoy security in the midst of a crumbling world. No time or place is free from upheavals. For that reason we must rest our confidence on those things that cannot change. When we see institutions, nations, and even religious organizations in which we have placed our trust begin to fall apart, we can reflect on the changelessness of God. Our first duty is to know Him and obey Him.

Then we need to understand that the future holds no surprises for Jesus. He knows what is ahead and is preparing His people to deal with the disturbing events they will encounter. Those events only come with His permission. And along with the trials He gives grace to deal with them.

Ask Yourself . . . *Do pressures tend to weaken my faith or build it up?*

b Jesus Warns of Dangers Ahead (13:9-13)

"Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

—Mark 13:13

Besides natural and national disturbances, Jesus predicted personal assaults against the faithful. More than just Jerusalem and the temple were at risk. There was even physical danger to the disciples. They might lose their lives.

The threats to the faithful would come from religious ("synagogues"), political ("kings"), and family ("brother") fronts. Those who follow Jesus Christ would become the focus of hostility from unbelievers of every stripe. The persecutions Jesus predicted in verse 9 began early in church history (see Acts 4). But the persecution of believers will reach its high point in a period of great tribulation that still lies in the future.

Christians too often expect to find lasting peace within this world. That's not to suggest that we should say or do anything deliberately to provoke disfavor from others. It only means that while we hope and work for the best, we need to be prepared for the worst. We cannot let opposition discourage or destroy us.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever been persecuted for my faith in Jesus? If so, what did I learn from the experience?*

Jesus promised the disciples that when persecution came, they would not need to be concerned about what to say to their accusers. The Holy Spirit would supply them with words for their defense. We can see from the Book of Acts that this prediction too began to be fulfilled in the early church. The promise of the Holy Spirit's prompting must have been a comfort for shy Christians who were arrested and brought before leaders.

Note, however, that this promise is for those under persecution and not for those who just don't like to study. There's no basis here for preachers or teachers to assume that the Spirit will make up for their lack of preparation.

fulfillment of the prophecy occurred in 167 B.C. At that time a Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, profaned the temple by erecting in it an altar to the pagan god Zeus. But Jesus' warning related to the second fulfillment of the prophecy, which occurred at the time of the siege and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman general (later emperor) Titus in A.D. 70. During that invasion, Jewish Zealots profaned the temple through a number of acts, including murder. (Jesus' prophecy may also refer to actions of the future Antichrist.)

When the first-century Christians saw the abomination in the temple, they were to "flee to the mountains" (Mark 13:14). The nearest mountains, other than the ones that Jerusalem itself was in, were many miles away, across the Jordan River. Nevertheless, the Christians were to drop everything and take flight.

Jesus warned that such a flight would be difficult for pregnant women as well as for families with small children. And if it should happen in winter, the rainy season, then crossing the swollen Jordan River would be dangerous. But in any case, all must run for refuge in the mountains.

The believers were not to allow themselves to be delayed from taking their flight by anyone claiming that the Messiah had appeared. The situation would be bad, but it would not be the time for Christ to come back. Anyone at that time who claimed to be the Messiah, regardless of how impressive his proofs might seem, would be a liar. The



The Fall of Jerusalem (13:14-23)

"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong . . . then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." —Mark 13:14

If the disciples were to survive the threatening crisis, they would need a plan of action. That's what Jesus gave them. He said they were to be on the lookout for the "abomination that causes desolation" (vs. 14). When they saw it, they were to flee.

The phrase "abomination that causes desolation" came from Daniel (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). The first

They Did Flee

The fourth-century church historian Eusebius wrote: "Before the war [that destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70], the people of the church of Jerusalem were bidden in an oracle given by revelation to men worthy of it to depart from the city and to dwell in a city of Perea called Pella. To it those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem." Eusebius may have meant that Christians applied Jesus' words in Mark 13:14 to their situation and fled to distant Pella in some foothills of the mountains across the Jordan.

Christians could avoid this deception if they kept up their guard.

False messiahs will appear in every generation to lead people away from obedience to Jesus. Their works will be outstanding and even seem miraculous. But we must not be impressed with their claims or their deeds. More important than any miraculous sign is that the character of the messenger be in conformity with Christ.

Ask Yourself . . . *What should I do if I meet a "false messiah" tomorrow?*

d Jesus Gives Reason for Hope (13:24-31)

"He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." —Mark 13:27

Now Jesus seems to have turned from the fall of Jerusalem to His own return to earth. To clarify the sequence of events, Jesus described signs that will appear before His second coming ("in those days") but after the fall of Jerusalem ("following that distress," vs. 24).

"The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (vss. 24, 25). This imagery from the Old Testament (particularly Isa. 13:10; 34:4) pictures the intervention of God in history.

At that time, the Lord's return will be at hand. These verses, along with the remainder of this chapter, focus on Christ's glorious return in power.

Jesus spoke these words to inspire His followers to hope. Everything about us that we are used to and rely on may seem to collapse. But one day all Christians everywhere will be gathered into the presence of God. What a marvelous day of reunion that will be!

Unfortunately, many sermons on the Second Coming frighten the faithful. That's a shame. Jesus certainly did not intend to frighten His people. In fact, quite the opposite.

Although frightening events will come to pass before Jesus returns, He wanted us to know that the very disasters that destroy the peace of unbelievers can give Christians reason to hope. When distress is upon the world, we can look for Christ's return.

On that day, when Jesus comes in power and glory, God will vindicate those who have placed their trust in His Son as their only hope for salvation. We will see—indeed all will see—that faith is stronger than doubt, good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate.

Ask Yourself . . . *If Jesus came back today, would there be anything of this world I wouldn't want to leave behind?*

To encourage His disciples to look for signs that His return is near, Jesus told a parable about a fig tree. Of the few trees in Palestine that lose their leaves each winter, the fig tree is the last to sprout new leaves in the spring. So if you didn't know by any other means that summer is near, you could know it by looking at the fig tree. In the same way, an

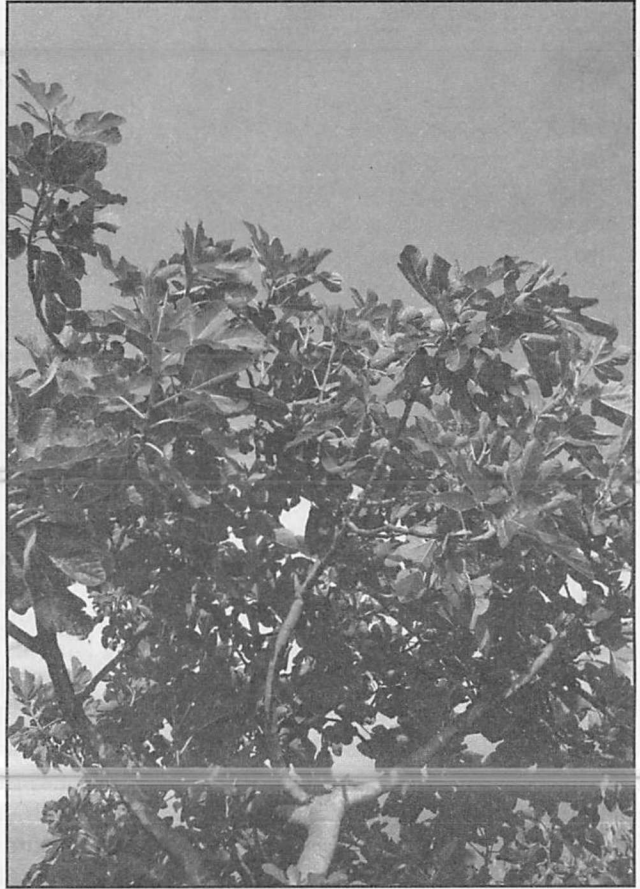


Fig tree

observant person will be a student of the times and of Scripture.

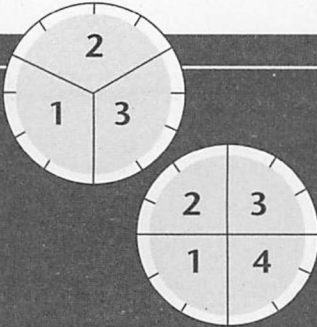
Verse 30 has confused many. On the surface it may seem as though Jesus predicted His return within a single lifetime. However, that obviously cannot be the case, since He has not yet returned. There must, then, be another meaning.

Several ideas have been suggested to explain this. Perhaps the best explanation is that Jesus meant His generation would not pass away

before they saw the beginning of the signs that point to His return. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was one of those signs. Most of Jesus' early disciples lived long enough to witness that event.

While verse 30 may be confusing to some Christians, verse 31 should be comforting to all Christians. Jesus will come again. We have His word on it.

Ask Yourself . . . *What change do I most look forward to experiencing when Jesus returns?*



WATCHES

In ancient times the night was divided into watches. During each of the watches a guard would patrol, looking for robbers or enemies.

Jews divided the night into three watches: sunset–10:00 P.M., 10:00 P.M.–2:00 A.M., 2:00 A.M.– sunrise. Romans had four watches: 6:00–9:00 P.M., 9:00 P.M.–midnight, midnight–3:00 A.M., and 3:00–6:00 A.M. Mark 13:35 reflects the Roman practice.

e Jesus Exhorts His Disciples (13:32-37)

“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”

—Mark 13:33

Jesus concluded His prophetic teaching with an exhortation. It can be summed up in one word: watch!

Yet while there are some signs of the Second Coming that can be seen and heeded, there are other facts

that cannot be known with certainty. Specifically, we cannot know precisely when Jesus will return. That is the reason why we all must be watchful.

Jesus gave some information to His followers so that we will not lose hope. He withheld other information so that we will not become careless. The servant who knows it will be months before his master returns may ignore his duties until just before the appointed time. But the servant who doesn't know exactly when His master will come back is more likely to be vigilant at all times.

No one can interpret the signs of the times perfectly. Some people think they can, but they always fall into error,

often taking others with them. All must stay alert.

The closing command to “watch” was appropriate for the disciples as they approached the fall of Jerusalem. And it is appropriate for us today. These are uncertain times. We need to watch.

The primary purpose of Mark 13 is not to disclose secrets of the end times. Jesus’ intent was to encourage faithfulness and obedience during times of great distress. These words had a profound relevance for the early Christians as they faced the instability of those times along with persecution for their faith. These words also have great relevance for those of us who live in these

last times, so that we will watch for Jesus’ return.

To believers of all times, these words serve, not as a springboard for fanciful speculation, but as a serious call to obedience and evangelism. So watch!

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I be more watchful for Jesus’ return?*

12

Jesus Lets Himself Be Taken

Mark 14

a Mary Anoints Jesus for Burial (14:1-11)

"She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." —Mark 14:8



It's appropriate that the setting of Mark 14 is the Jewish Passover. At the original Passover, lambs were slain as substitutes for firstborn chil-

dren. Now Jesus would die as the fulfillment of that symbol. He was our Passover Lamb, dying in our place.

The story of a woman anointing Jesus (vss. 3-9) is positioned in Mark's Gospel in such a way that one might assume the anointing occurred during the Passover. However, John 12 reveals that this anointing actually took place on the previous Friday. Mark included the story here, not to confuse the order of events, but because its meaning

Two Feasts

Passover was the yearly festival of national redemption. The Passover lamb was killed in the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan (a month corresponding to March/April). The Passover meal was eaten after sunset (the start of a new day, the fifteenth) but before midnight. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the fifteenth and continued through the twenty-first day of the same month. By Jesus' time the two feasts were treated as one, so that essentially Passover was a week-long festival.

Sundown	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	Passover  Feast of Unleavened Bread 
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	

was closely related to Christ's death. Jesus Himself identified this anointing as a burial rite.

The Gospel of John also reveals that the woman who anointed Jesus was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary wanted to show her love and respect for Jesus, so she brought to Him one of her most valuable possessions. This was an alabaster jar containing a rose-colored ointment made from the roots and stems of the Indian nard plant. Mary broke the neck of the jar, which contained only one application. Then she poured the ointment on Jesus' head and feet.

Judas (John 12:4) and others objected to this apparent waste. But Jesus defended Mary. She had performed a loving service that was especially appropriate in light of His approaching death.

Mary's unselfish act shines all the brighter because of its contrast with the behavior of others at that time. It contrasted with the way the disciples were competing for power (Mark 10:37, 41). Even more strikingly, Mary's generous act contrasted with the way Judas traded Jesus to the chief priests for money.

Ask Yourself . . . *Should I give an extravagant gift to Jesus just to express my love and gratitude?*

Jesus' remark that there will always be poor people (Mark 14:7) should not be taken as an indication that He lacked concern for the poor. In fact, He was always the champion of the oppressed and the afflicted. By making that remark, Jesus meant

that His followers would have many opportunities to help the needy. But only a short time remained for His disciples to show Him their love before He died.

Greed seems to have played a part in Judas's betrayal of the Lord. But the total motivation for his betrayal may always remain a mystery. How could someone observe Jesus' love and goodness for years, then turn around and give Him up to killers? We don't know how, but it happened.

b

Jesus Offers His Body and Blood (14:12-26)

"Truly I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

—Mark 14:25

To maintain his appearance of faithfulness, Judas remained with the apostles. This meant, of course, that he was with them for their observance of Passover, a national religious festival celebrating the Hebrews' escape from Egypt in the time of Moses. Jesus' Passover meal with His disciples took place, by prior arrangement, in the second-story room of a house in Jerusalem.

During the Passover meal, Jesus let Judas know that He was aware of Judas's agreement with the reli-

gious leaders. That must have been an anxious moment for Judas, waiting to hear whether Jesus would identify him as a traitor. Yet Judas coolly joined with the others in asking, "Surely you don't mean me?" (vs. 19).

Judas need not have feared being exposed. Jesus would not betray His betrayer. He knew that Judas's treachery was part of the Father's will for His death. Evidently, the other disciples did not suspect Judas's guilt even when he left the supper early (John 13:28-30).

Jesus applied some of the elements of the ritual meal to Himself. And He used them to establish a new practice, which we call the Lord's Supper.

According to tradition, one of the items on the menu of the Passover meal was unleavened bread. This bread without yeast reminded the Jews that their ancestors had not taken time to let their bread rise before leaving Egypt. Jesus broke some of this flat, hard bread and compared it to His body.

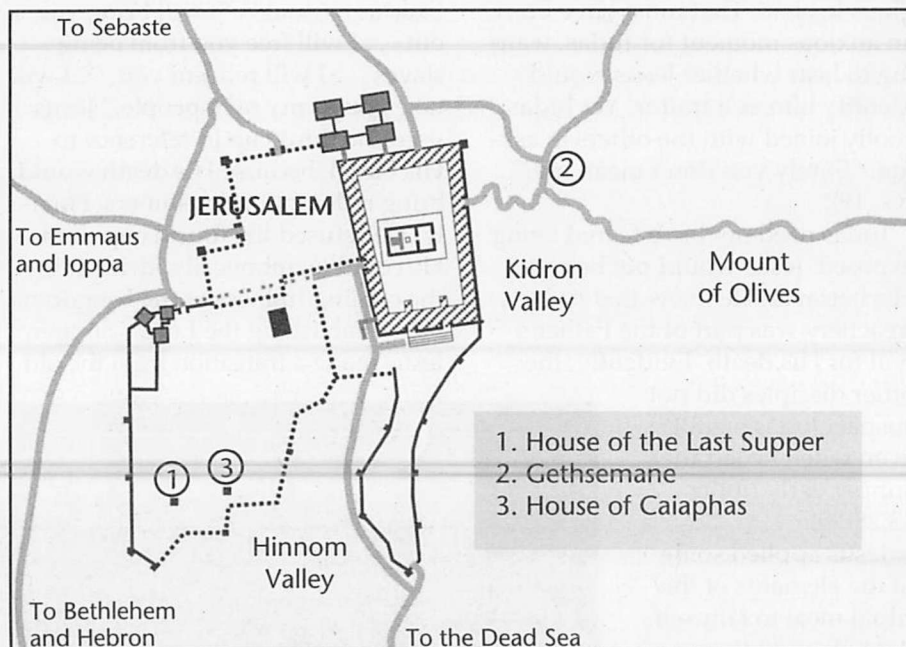
Participants in the Passover celebration drank four cups of wine. Each cup represented a promise in

Exodus 6:6 and 7: "I will bring you out . . . I will free you from being slaves . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you as my own people." Jesus used the third cup in reference to His blood, because His death would bring redemption for sinners. Finally, He refused the fourth cup until He could (symbolically) drink it in the coming fullness of the Kingdom.

In establishing the Lord's Supper, Jesus made a transition from the old

THE PASSOVER MEAL

The Passover meal followed a traditional pattern. A family or group of friends would meet for the meal after sundown. First, the head of the group would say a prayer over a cup of wine. Then they would all eat bitter herbs to remind themselves of the bitter times their ancestors had endured in Egypt. Next, they would pour a second cup of wine without drinking it. They would also serve the meal, the main dish of which was a specially prepared roast lamb. But they would not eat the meal until they had recited the Passover liturgy, had sung Psalm 113, and had prayed over the unleavened bread. A prayer over a third cup ended the feast. Finally, they would sing Psalms 114—118 and drink another cup of wine.



covenant to the new. The old covenant was based on the system of sacrifices and ceremonies that reminded people of their need for salvation. The new covenant is based on the sacrifice of Christ. In His death, He fulfilled all that was symbolized in the old covenant and provided a complete means of forgiveness.

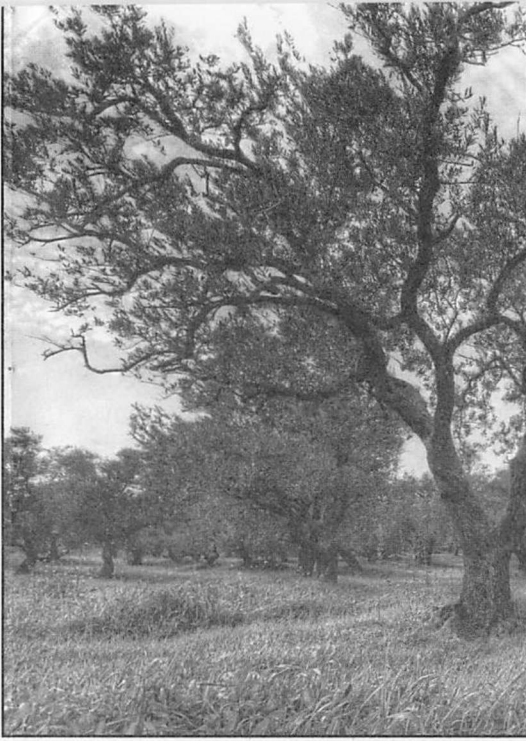
The Lord's Supper can have great benefits for us if we understand that it is an occasion for remembering. It is designed to trigger feelings of humility and gratitude for what Christ has done in our behalf. It reaffirms our faith in Him.

Ask Yourself . . . *The next time I partake of the Lord's Supper, what should I be thinking about?*

C Jesus Prophecies and Prays (14:27-42)

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners." —Mark 14:41

Peter had been uneasy over Jesus' prediction that one of the Twelve would betray Him. But when Jesus suggested that all twelve would prove to be cowards, Peter had enough. Perhaps it was Jesus' choice of an illustration from Zechariah



Olive trees

13:7 that set Peter off. It seemed insulting to be compared with scattering sheep.

As once before (Mark 8:32), the disciple presumed to teach the Master. But in doing so, Peter let himself in for a great deal of pain later on. He swore his loyalty and refused to believe Jesus' prediction of his unfaithfulness.

Many today repeat Peter's mistake. They speak boldly about their commitment to Jesus. However, their confidence rests upon their devotion to Christ rather than upon Christ Himself.

Peter should have responded to Jesus' words by asking for the strength and resolve he needed to face the coming crisis. Nevertheless, the Master Teacher saw to it

that Peter would learn his lesson in the only way he could. Clay can be molded gently; granite requires blows. Peter needed a shock to restore his dependence on Jesus.

Ask Yourself . . . *What dangers might I let myself in for if I overestimate my spiritual strength?*

Finally, the group arrived at Gethsemane. The name Gethsemane is Hebrew and means "oil press." It was probably an olive orchard or garden on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, opposite Jerusalem.

Jesus was aware of the test awaiting Him. He also knew He could not draw strength for that hour from His followers. So He returned to a familiar place where He could pray to the heavenly Father.

In the garden, Jesus felt anguish. This reaction was not caused by a fear of death. Many have confronted their final hour without the agony of soul Jesus felt in Gethsemane. Instead, Jesus' grief arose from His knowledge that He would bear the guilt of all people and that temporarily He would be cut off from the Father.

When Jesus prayed that the hour might pass and the cup might be taken from Him, He was not faltering in His mission. He would do the Father's will. But as much as He wanted to do the Father's will, He recoiled from the suffering it involved. His prayer was a last-minute plea for an easier way of accomplishing human redemption.

All Christians should be encour-

aged by this account of Jesus' struggle. It shows us that we don't have to face suffering stoically, pretending that it doesn't matter. It also shows us that God gives grace to help us endure suffering as we remain true to Him.

The disciples did not share Jesus' agony. They slept. Peter, who had claimed to be ready to die for Jesus, could not even stay awake for Him.

We shouldn't be harder on the disciples than Jesus was. Even in His agony, He understood the disciples' all-too-human struggle. They had willing spirits: they wanted to do what was right. But their bodies were weak. So they slept.

Besides, this was no time to deal with small problems. The enemy was at hand. The destiny for which Christ had come to this world was about to be fulfilled.

Ask Yourself . . . When has my spirit been willing but my body been weak?

d Jesus Is Arrested, Tried, Disowned (14:43-72)

"You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.
—Mark 14:64

As Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, Judas and his companions were setting their plot into motion. The religious leaders probably could

have found a way to arrest Jesus without Judas's help, but his cooperation made their job easier. Judas could guide an armed crowd to Him at a time when He could be arrested without many of His supporters on hand to observe.

When the arresting party arrived, the disciples were still groggy from sleep. Yet Peter managed to take a swing with his sword at a nearby man named Malchus, a servant of the high priest (John 18:10). But Malchus ducked, and Peter only sliced off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to stand in the way of His destiny. Then Jesus healed the man's ear (Luke 22:51).

Seeing that Jesus was determined not to resist arrest, the disciples began to think of their own safety. As Jesus had predicted, the sheep scattered. However, at least two disciples, Peter and John, ran only a short distance, and then followed the crowd back to Jerusalem.

An unidentified young man also followed the crowd (Mark 14:51). This was probably Mark himself. The fact that he was wearing only his outer garment suggests that he had dressed hastily to follow Jesus to Gethsemane.

Sooner or later every one of us will be in a situation when we will have to decide either to risk danger by identifying ourselves with Jesus or to protect ourselves by abandoning Him.

Ask Yourself . . . How will I make that decision?

It was to the religious leaders'

advantage that Jesus be arrested, tried, and convicted before the city awakened. So that night the Sanhedrin met in an upstairs room of the high priest Caiaphas's house to hear accusations against Jesus. They were already convinced He should be destroyed. All they needed were witnesses to confirm their opinion of His guilt.

Sometimes called "the council," the Sanhedrin was the supreme Jewish authority in Palestine during Jesus' lifetime. It had power from the Romans to make political and judicial decisions in a wide range of areas.

The high priest was the group's president. The seventy other members were elders, teachers of the law, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

According to Jewish law, at least two witnesses were required to secure a conviction. But the testimony of witnesses in Jesus' case did not agree. The witnesses lied to please the Sanhedrin, but they couldn't manage to

coordinate their lies. The trial was a farce.

Some witnesses misquoted Jesus. He had said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again" (John 2:19). They quoted Him as saying, "I will destroy this temple made with human hands" (Mark 14:58). But

even in this matter the witnesses contradicted one another.

Jesus remained silent before His accusers. He needed no defense, and this was not an occasion for teaching. Sometimes there is more power in silence than in shouts. Jesus did not even let the high priest goad Him into responding.

Yet when He was asked, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" (vs. 61), He could not remain silent without denying His nature. So He affirmed His deity, and thereby gave the council the evidence they felt was necessary to convict Him. They took this as a blasphemous statement

The Trials of Jesus

Jesus had two trials—one Jewish and one Roman. Each of these trials had three parts.

The Jewish trial began with a preliminary hearing before Annas, a former high priest (John 18:12-14, 19-23). Next, the Sanhedrin tried Jesus in the quarters of the current high priest, Caiaphas (Mark 14:53-65). This trial ended with an official condemnation of Jesus at daybreak (15:1).

The Jews took Jesus to the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, who questioned Him (15:2-5). Then Pilate sent Jesus to be examined by Herod, the ruler of Jesus' home territory (Luke 23:6-12). Finally, Pilate gave a judgment against Jesus (Mark 15:6-15).

and appealed to Leviticus 24:16, which required the death penalty for blasphemy. And it would have been blasphemy had it not been true.

To express his horror at hearing blasphemy, the high priest tore his clothes. That was a common way of showing grief or strong emotion in ancient cultures.

Once the high priest had declared Jesus' words blasphemy, all felt free to vent their anger on Jesus. They condemned and tortured God's Son.

Ask Yourself . . . *How can I respond to mockery and false accusations in a Christlike manner?*

Abuse by His enemies must not have been as painful emotionally to Jesus as His treatment by Peter. This disciple wanted to stay close enough to Jesus to know what was going on, but not close enough to be identified with Him.

Peter probably looked upon his actions as innocent self-preservation. After all, what was the sense of being arrested? That would do nothing to help Jesus.

When people recognized Peter and noticed his Galilean accent, he made a solemn oath before God that

he was not a follower of Jesus. But when a rooster crowed a second time, the realization of how he had fulfilled Jesus' prophecy rushed in upon Peter. He was crushed. His devotion to Jesus had been exposed as shallow.

Some people today are like Peter. They are loyal to Jesus most of the time. But when it matters most, they skillfully avoid identification with Jesus. However, if they respond to exposure as Peter did, then they are on the path to wholeness. There is often more good in tears than in laughter.

Restoration began in the heart of Peter when he was crushed by his own denial. Finally, he saw himself as he really was, not as he thought he was. As we will see in the final lesson, Jesus knew of Peter's feelings and intended to reaffirm his faith.

Ask Yourself . . . *Have I ever tried to appear as though I am not associated with Jesus? How did that make me feel?*

13

Jesus Lays Down His Life—and Takes It Up Again

Mark 15—16

a **Jesus Appears before Pilate** **(15:1-15)**

“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

“Crucify him!” they shouted.
—Mark 15:12, 13

As we learned in the preceding lesson, the Sanhedrin had determined that Jesus should die. However, their night trial of Jesus was unofficial, if not illegal. So the council met again at daybreak to ratify their decision.

Now they had one more hurdle to cross before they could complete their evil plan. They had to convince Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, that Jesus should be put to death. According to the law of the Roman Empire, only a Roman ruler could approve a death sentence.

Pilate normally lived at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. His presence in Jerusalem at this time was probably due to the Passover holiday.

The Sanhedrin could take Jesus

to Pilate “very early in the morning” (vs. 1) because Roman officials began their working day at first light. This timing also suited the Sanhedrin’s plans to have Jesus killed as soon as possible.

The place where the Jewish leaders found Pilate was called the “Praetorium” (vs. 16), but that was merely the name given to wherever the governor conducted business. In this case, it probably was either the Antonia Fortress, the Palace of Herod, or the Hasmonean Palace.

The Jewish leaders had convicted Jesus because He claimed to be divine. In the eyes of the Jews that was blasphemy. But blasphemy was a religious crime, not a civil offense. While a Roman official might question the sanity of a person who claimed to be God, he would not likely put a person to death for such a cause.

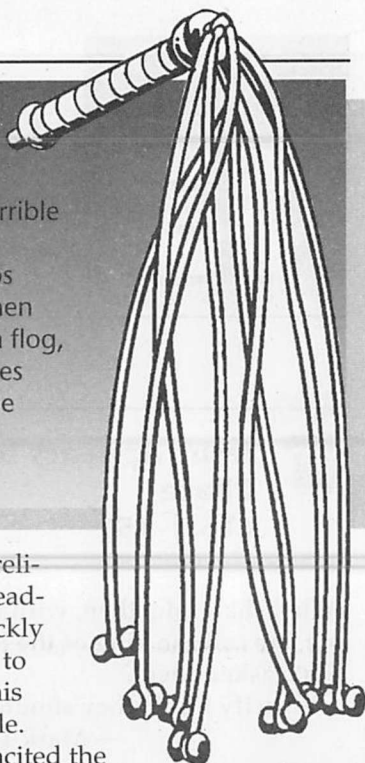
Therefore, the Jewish leaders told Pilate the accusation that would matter most to him: that Jesus had claimed to be the King of the Jews. They made it sound as though Jesus had set Himself up in opposition to Caesar. That would be treason.

But Pilate was no fool. He saw through the leaders’ pretense of

Roman Flogging

The Roman practice of flogging was a horrible punishment. Many died in the process.

The flog was a whip made of leather strips embedded with chips of bone or metal. When captives were beaten across the back with a flog, their flesh would be left in shreds. Sometimes even their bones or internal organs would lie exposed.



loyalty to the emperor. He knew they were jealous of Jesus because He was a threat to their power. Yet he had to look into the case.

This prisoner troubled Pilate. The governor was accustomed to defendants shouting their innocence. But Jesus kept quiet. It was as though He intended to die and would do nothing to interfere with His destiny.

Jesus would acknowledge only that He was King of the Jews. Jesus meant that He was a king in a spiritual sense. Pilate might have been expected to interpret Jesus' words to mean He admitted the charge of treason. Nevertheless, Pilate seems not to have considered Jesus a danger to the empire.

Pilate was caught between a rock and a hard place. He knew he should release Jesus, yet if he did so he would offend Jesus' accusers. Then Pilate thought he saw a way out of this dilemma. The crowd asked him to keep the practice of releasing a prisoner at Passover; he could set Jesus free.

The religious leaders quickly moved to close this loophole. They incited the people to call for the release of the criminal Barabbas, and to demand the death of Jesus. Barabbas seems to have taken part in an attempt to overthrow Roman tyranny.

Finally, Pilate gave in to the pressure. He wanted the approval of the crowd more than he wanted justice. He handed over Jesus for flogging and execution.

Pilate had his crowd, and we have ours. We must take care to uphold the truth, because we are headed for trouble whenever pleasing people becomes more important to us than doing right.

Ask Yourself . . . *Is there some way in which I currently need to say no to my "crowd" in order to remain faithful to Jesus?*

b **Jesus Is Crucified (15:16-32)**

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of the skull) . . . And they crucified him. —Mark 15:22,24a

After Jesus' flogging, the soldiers who were responsible for His execution took charge of Him. These men were non-Jewish residents of Palestine. To them, this crucifixion was all in a day's work. They were "just doing their job."

But it was a job they had come to enjoy. They behaved as men who had grown hardened through con-

tact with criminals. They had no interest in helping Jesus. But neither did they have any personal reason to dislike Him. He was just a helpless man upon whom they could inflict their cruelty.

Evidently the soldiers were aware of the charge against Jesus. They draped over Him a purple cloak and placed on His head a crown of thorns, thus creating for Him mock royal clothing. Then they hailed Him as they might hail Caesar. Their spitting may have been meant as a parody on the custom of kissing royalty. All this behavior is part of the irony of the situation, because Jesus really is a King.

Having had their fun, the soldiers led Jesus away to the place of

crucifixion. It was customary for the condemned man to carry the horizontal beam of his own cross. Jesus, however, was weak because of flogging and the strain He had been under during the preceding days. He only managed to carry His beam a short distance. Then the soldiers forced a bystander, a man named Simon, to carry it the rest of the way.

This Simon was a native of Cyrene, a major city in northern Africa. He may have been a Jew who had come to Jerusalem for

Roman CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion was the form of execution adopted by the Romans for rebels and lesser criminals. First, the executioners used iron nails to pin the convict's wrists to the horizontal beam of the cross. Then they lifted this beam and attached it to another beam placed upright in the ground. Next, they nailed the convict's feet or ankles together to the vertical beam, with his knees bent to one side. Above his head they erected a sign stating the crime for which he was being executed. Crucifixion was one of the most cruel and degrading methods of punishment ever contrived. Many victims of crucifixion lingered for two or three days before dying of exhaustion, exposure, and their wounds.

the Passover. Mark's mention of Simon's sons suggests that they were well-known Christians at the time Mark wrote. Possibly Simon himself became a believer after meeting Jesus in this extraordinary way.

Once the group had reached the execution place just outside the city walls, the soldiers crucified Jesus.

On the cross, Jesus was naked or at most wore a loincloth. The soldiers gambled to see which of them would keep Jesus' clothes.

Mark records three negative reactions at Jesus' crucifixion. The first came from passersby. They mocked Him with His own prophecy of resurrection. The second negative reaction came from the religious leaders. They said nothing to Jesus, but among themselves exchanged smug assurances that they had gotten the best of Him. The third instance of ridicule came from those who were crucified with Him. These men at first insulted Jesus, although later one of them had a change of heart and asked to be in Jesus' kingdom (Luke 23:40-43).

Each time we read these verses about the suffering of our Lord, we should remember two things. First, He endured all of it out of love for us. So this account should fill our hearts with gratitude. But second, we should remember that the servant is not above his Master. If we want to follow Jesus, then we must obey the Father's will regardless of the cost or the consequences.

Ask Yourself . . . *If tomorrow I had to choose between losing my life and denying my Lord, which would I choose—really?*



Jesus Completes His Mission (15:33-41)

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

—Mark 15:37, 38

Three hours later, when the sun was at its highest, a mysterious darkness fell over the area. Much like the plague of darkness that came before the first Passover (Exod. 10:21-23), this darkness symbolized God's curse. It lasted until three o'clock that afternoon.

Near the end of the period of darkness, Jesus cried out. He was experiencing the agony of separation from the Father. This was the torment He had anticipated in Gethsemane.

His cry (recorded in its original Aramaic) quoted the first line of Psalm 22, a prophetic psalm fulfilled in many ways during that day. Some of His hearers seemed to think that He was calling upon Elijah to save Him. "Eloi" sounded like "Elijah." Their motive for offering Him a drink may have been to extend His

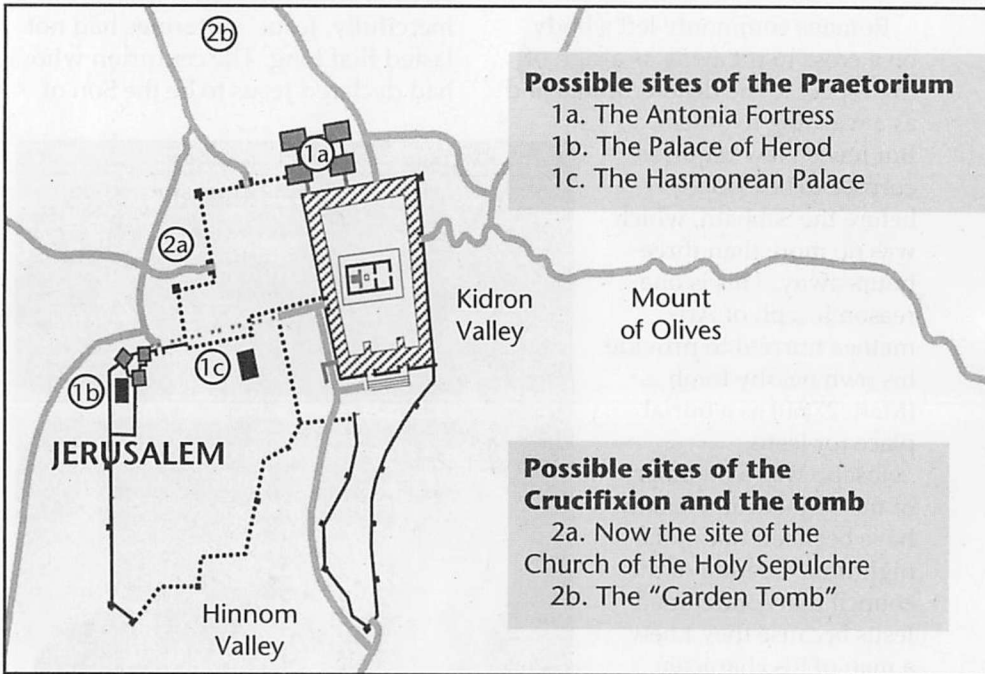
life in case Elijah would come.

Having maintained consciousness until the end, Jesus breathed His last. Thus in simple terms, and without sensationalism, Mark reported the death of the Author of Life.

The splitting of the temple curtain, which occurred at the moment of Jesus' death, had an important symbolic meaning. This veil stood between the Holy Place and the

centurion, a Roman officer who had been assigned guard duty at the cross. He must have been used to violence and suffering. But something about Jesus' death moved him. This Gentile soldier concluded that Jesus was the Son of God.

Another devout response to Jesus' death came from a small group of women who watched at a distance. They had given assistance to Jesus



Holy of Holies to guard the entrance to the presence of God. By splitting this veil, God showed that the way to His presence had been opened through Christ (Heb. 10:19-22).

While most observers of the crucifixion ridiculed Jesus, others responded differently. One was a

during His ministry, and now they kept a loving vigil as He completed His mission of redemption for sinners.

Ask Yourself . . . *What word would best describe my reaction to Jesus' death?*

d Jesus' Body Is Laid in a Tomb (15:42-47)

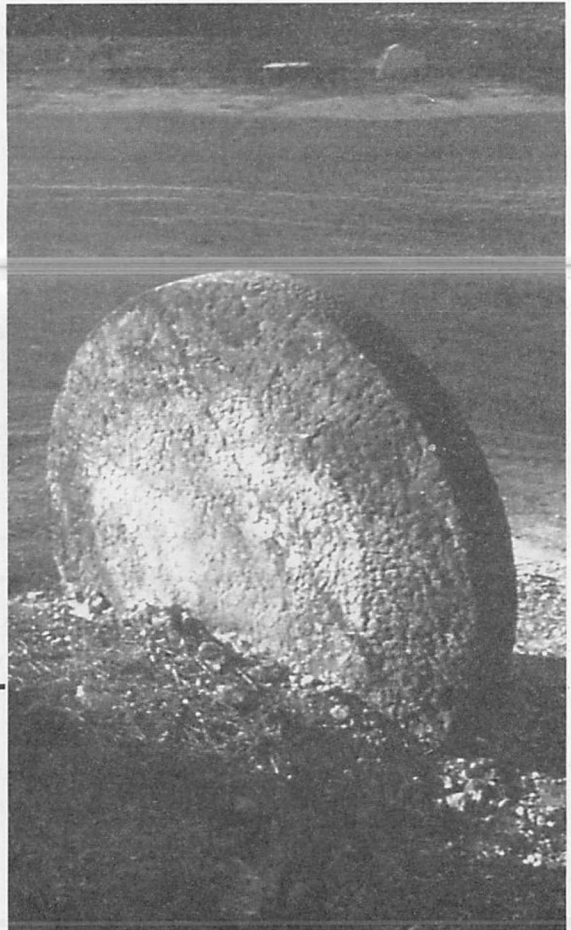
Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. —Mark 15:46

Romans commonly left a body on a cross to rot away as a sign of disrespect to the dead criminal and as a warning to others. But Jewish law required corpses to be buried before the Sabbath, which was no more than three hours away. This is one reason Joseph of Arimathea hurried to provide his own nearby tomb (Matt. 27:60) as a burial place for Jesus.

Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin. He may have been left out of the nighttime meeting of the council that condemned Jesus because they knew a man of his character would not support their wicked intentions (Luke 23:50, 51). He was not only a man of influence

and wealth, but also a man of courage. He risked the wrath of his fellow council members by asking Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus. This act amounted to a public confession of faith in Jesus. Joseph's love for Jesus was another reason he buried Him.

Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had died within six hours of being hung on the cross. Crucifixion victims often lingered for days, but mercifully, Jesus' sufferings had not lasted that long. The centurion who had declared Jesus to be the Son of



A stone blocking the entrance to a tomb similar to the one Jesus' body occupied for parts of three days.

God confirmed Joseph's report that Jesus was dead.

Along with fellow Sanhedrin member Nicodemus (John 19:38-40), Joseph removed the body from the Cross. At the tomb the two men hastily prepared the body for burial. Probably they washed the body and wrapped it in linen, spreading out spices between the folds of the cloth. When they had left, soldiers sealed the tomb with a large circular stone.

Some women observed where Joseph and Nicodemus laid Jesus because they intended to complete the anointing of His body later.

These were sad and difficult hours for Jesus' followers. Nevertheless, they were necessary. Had Jesus not died, there would be no provision for our redemption. And His burial, witnessed by several people, was necessary proof of His death and resurrection.

Ask Yourself . . . *When was the last time I thanked Jesus for dying for me?*



The Tomb Is Empty (16:1-8)

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." —Mark 16:6

While chapter 15 records Christ's sacrifice, chapter 16 shows God's acceptance of that sacrifice. The

grand confirming act of the life and death of Jesus Christ is His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus was buried late on Friday afternoon. After sunset on Saturday, when the Sabbath was over, some women purchased aromatic oils for anointing Jesus' body. But by then it was too late for them to do the anointing. So early the next morning they headed for the tomb. Their chief concern on this trip was who they could find to roll away the massive stone blocking the tomb's entrance.

But the women worried in vain because the stone had already been rolled aside by an angel (Matt. 28:2). The tomb stood open. The risen Lord could have left the tomb without an opening, but the witnesses needed to get in to see that He was gone.

The young man mentioned in Mark 16:5 was an angel (Matt. 28:5). This heavenly visitor had four facts he wanted the women to know. First, both he and the women were referring to the same man: "Jesus the Nazarene" (Mark 16:6). Second, Jesus "was crucified," and so really had been dead. Third, "He has risen!" and therefore is no longer dead. Fourth, "He is not here" because He had broken the grip of the grave.

The angel specifically wanted Peter to know of Christ's resurrection and that Jesus would be meeting him in Galilee (compare 14:28; 16:7). This was a gesture of reassurance and forgiveness extended toward the man who had denied

knowing his Lord. Peter probably felt as though he no longer could have a place among the other apostles. From this message he would understand that he was forgiven and accepted again.

Ask Yourself . . . *How has the Lord reassured me of my forgiveness?*

By comparing early manuscripts, most New Testament scholars have concluded that verse 8 is the last verse of the Gospel of Mark that has survived. Perhaps the Gospel originally had another ending that has

been lost. Or perhaps Mark intended for his Gospel to end abruptly on the note of surprise and amazement that greeted the fact of Jesus' resurrection. After all, the Resurrection not only ends one story but also begins another. The history of the Church, which includes us, proceeds directly from the victory over death won by Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Ask Yourself . . . *How should I live my life differently now that I have studied Mark's record of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?*

Two Additional ENDINGS

Many early copies of the Gospel of Mark contain one or two additional endings. These endings differ from the rest of the Gospel in style, in vocabulary, and (some say) in theology. Most likely they were added by early Christians who regretted the abruptness of Mark's ending.

One added ending is brief. Here it is in the translation of the New American Standard Bible: "And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation."

The other ending, which is longer, has been designated verses 9-20 of Mark 16. This passage represents ancient Christian teaching, but probably should not be considered equal in authority with the rest of the Gospel.

CHRIST'S EARTHLY MINISTRY

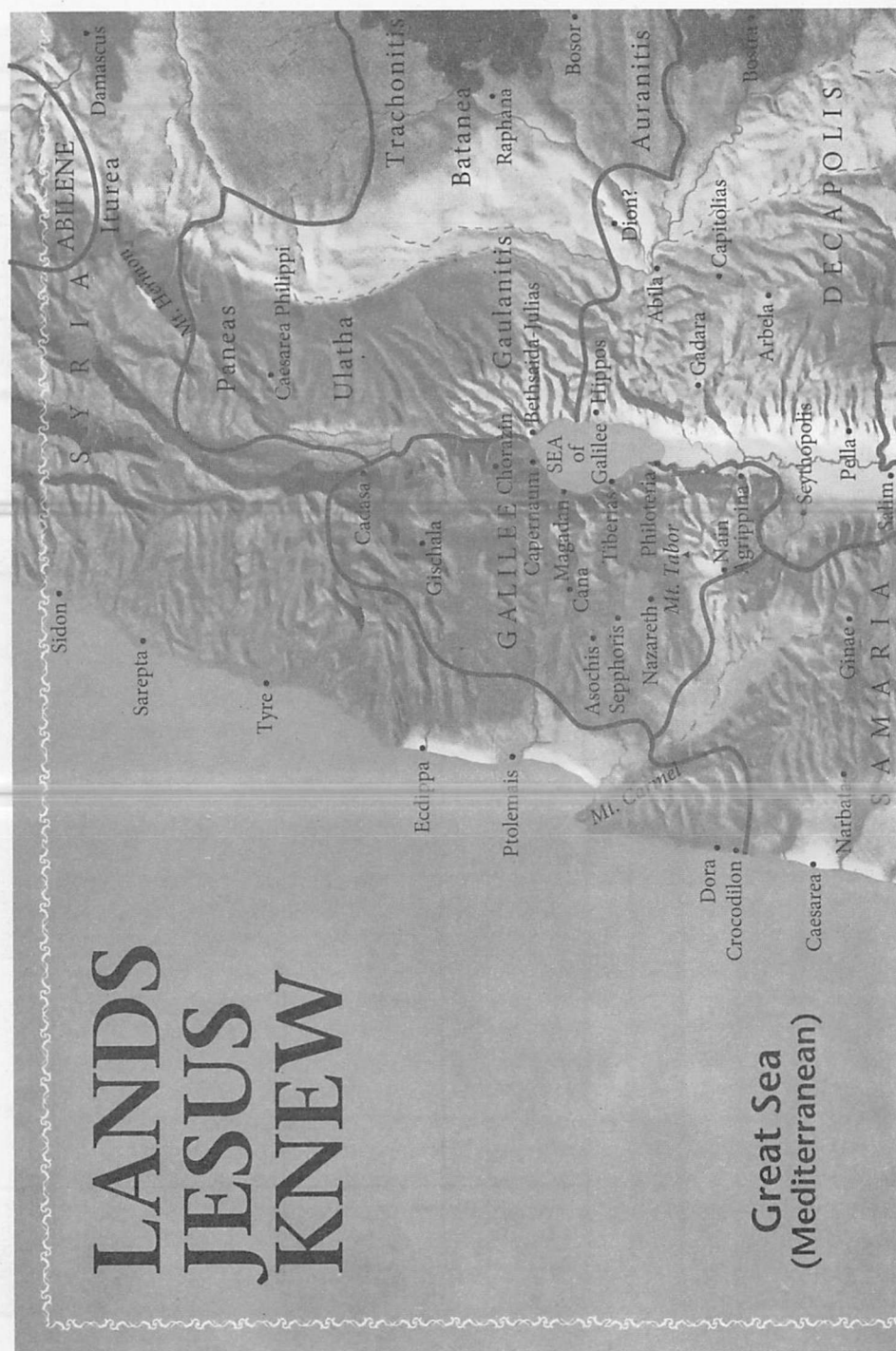
Shading shows time periods covered in Mark.

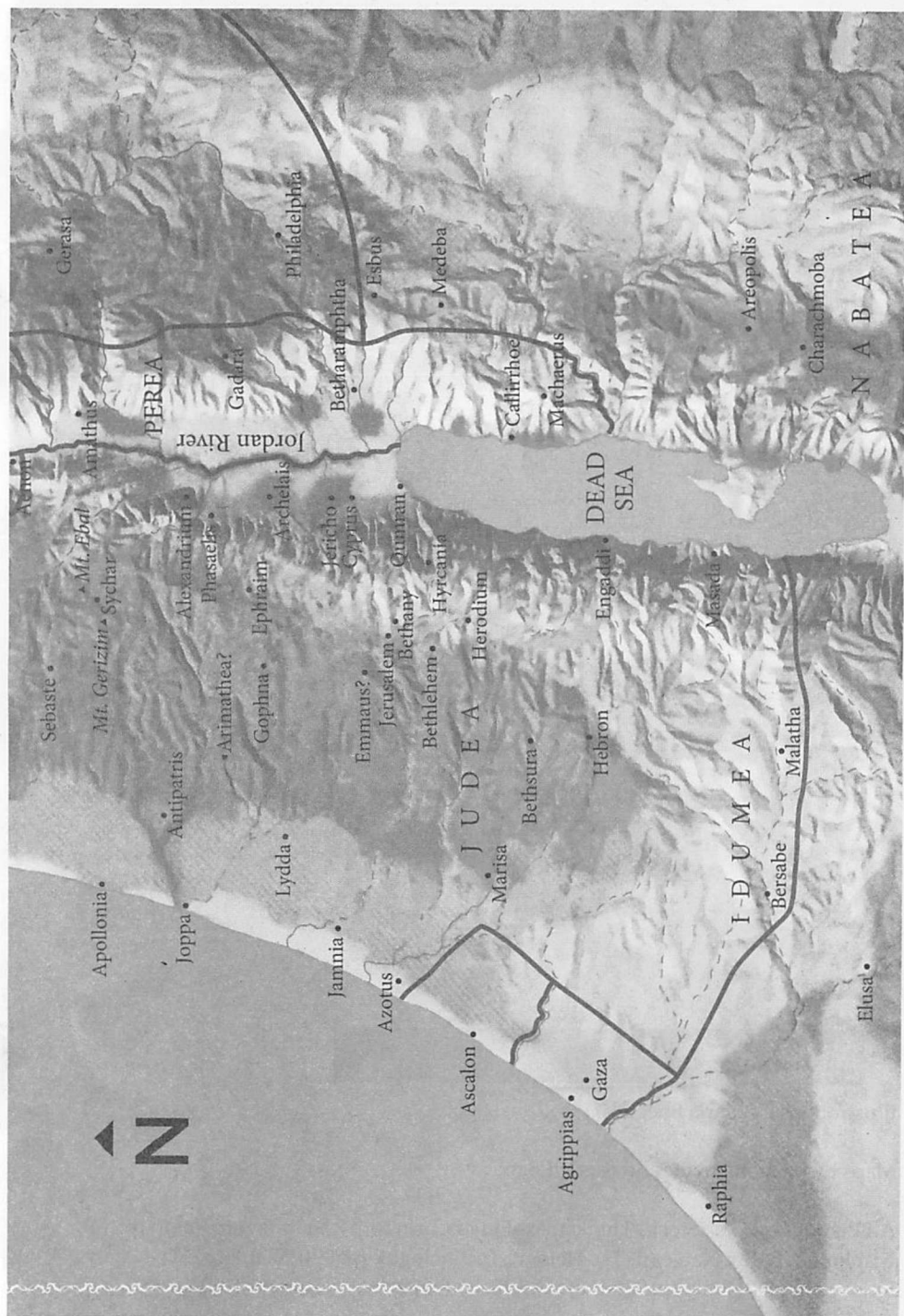
This reconstruction is an estimation.

A.D. 27				A.D. 28				A.D. 29				A.D. 30						
WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	SUMMER	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	SUMMER	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	SUMMER	WINTER	SPRING	WINTER	SPRING			
OPENING EVENTS	EARLY JUDEAN MINISTRY			EARLY GALILEAN MINISTRY			MIDDLE GALILEAN MINISTRY			LATER GALILEAN MINISTRY			LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY					
4 MONTHS	8 MONTHS			6 MONTHS			10 MONTHS			6 MONTHS			3 MONTHS					
John baptizes Jesus (Mark 1:9)				Jesus returns to Galilee (Mark 1:14)			Jesus appoints the Twelve (Mark 3:13, 14)			Jesus goes to Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24)			Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph (Mark 11:1-11)					
	Jesus clears the temple (John 2:13-16)						Jesus goes to the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:10)			Jesus goes beyond the Jordan (John 10:40)								
										Jesus ascends to heaven (Acts 1:9)								
Passover (John 2:13)				Passover (John 5:1)			Passover (John 6:4)						Passover (John 11:55)					

LANDS JESUS KNEW

Great Sea
(Mediterranean)





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