

the gospel of
MARK

40 DAY DEVOTIONAL



Thank you for picking up this devotional booklet through the gospel of Mark. Our prayer is that over the next 40 days, you will be able to see clearly who Jesus is and how His resurrection changes everything. We pray that your faith will be strengthened and you will be better prepared to share the good news of Jesus with everyone you meet.

In the Bible, 40 is attached to spiritual testing and journeys. It is on purpose that this devotional is 40 days. We know committing to something for 40 days is difficult, but we know your faith will be better because of it. As a Christian, everything hinges on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The more we understand Jesus' identity and purpose, the more we understand our identity and purpose in the world.

As you journey with Jesus for the next 40 days, pray that your heart will be open for where He leads. Pray that you will live in faith and the victory of our risen Lord. May you be forever changed by the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,

Christ's Church

MARK'S PURPOSE IN WRITING THIS GOSPEL

John Mark grew up in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' ministry. Christian believers, including Peter, met in his house for some of the earliest Christian gatherings (Acts 12:12). While it is not certain, it would seem likely that Mark was an eyewitness to Jesus' death and resurrection (Mark 14:51-52). Mark knew what it meant to Jesus and how difficult true faith was. Mark is known for starting on Barnabas and Paul's first missionary journey but then abandoning them along the way (Acts 13:13). However, Mark's discipleship journey wasn't over because he continued to follow Jesus and worked alongside Barnabas (Acts 15:38), Paul (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11), and Peter (1 Peter 5:13).

Throughout his gospel, Mark gives us a unique perspective on following Jesus. He shows us the disciples' emotions, especially the fear and confusion they experienced following Jesus. It is reassuring because the original 12 disciples did not have it all figured out. They struggled to understand Jesus' identity and purpose. They struggled to have the proper faith required to follow Jesus. However, Mark also shows us how Jesus willingly spent time teaching and training the disciples. Jesus never gave up on the twelve and even trusted them to continue His ministry after His ascension. Mark gives us an authentic view of what it means to follow Jesus.

Church tradition tells us that Mark wrote his gospel to Christian believers in Rome. Mark is closely associated with Peter, and he is the most likely source for his material. For the believers in Rome, it was important for them to be confident in their faith and not afraid of the persecutions happening under Emperor Nero. To be a Christian in Rome came with a great cost. It might just cost you your life (Peter and Paul both were martyred in Rome by Emperor Nero). The Roman historian Tacitus tells us that it was during this time that Christians were being crucified and used as human torches for Nero's Garden parties (Annales 15.44).

Mark wanted people to believe in the good news of Jesus because belief in Jesus changed everything. Jesus is worth following because He is not dead but alive! What better way to help Christian believers experiencing a lot of fear, suffering, and persecution than to show them Jesus' journey to the cross? If Jesus was willing to endure the cross because of His great love for us, we demonstrate our gratitude and love by faithfully following Jesus' example. For the believers in Rome, that might mean your own death and being crucified upside down (that is how Peter was martyred).

The cross and resurrection are still central to understanding the gospel message today. When Jesus calls us to follow him, it is still a call to die. But the paradox is that we find life in him by dying to ourselves. Jesus calls us to believe in who He is and what He came to do. He calls us to respond in faith and place all our trust and life under His authority and power. Only then will we be able to see the beauty of God's Kingdom established through Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension into glory.

MARK 1:1-8

DAY 1

Mark, under the authority of Peter, begins his gospel account with the ministry of John the Baptist rather than the birth of Jesus (as do Matthew and Luke in their gospel accounts). For Mark and Peter (Jews by birth), the good news of Jesus is firmly rooted in the ministry of John the Baptist because it is connected to what God foretold through the Old Testament prophets. To understand who Jesus is, you must see clearly that Jesus is the continuation of what God has been planning since the beginning of time. However, what God was getting ready to do through Jesus was more than anyone expected.

MARK 1:1

Why would Mark's audience need to be reminded that the message of Jesus is good news to them?

Is Jesus good news in your life? If so, have you told anyone recently why Jesus is good news?

MARK 1:2-8

Who is John the Baptist, and how is he described? What was John's message according to verses 7-8?

How do people describe you? How does your faith in Jesus affect their description of you?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist isn't identified by his birthplace or family lineage, which was a common way to identify people in ancient times. Instead, John the Baptist is known by the content of his ministry. His ministry was so effective that many people traveled to hear him speak and be baptized in the Jordan River.

By including the description of John the Baptist's appearance, Mark connects John the Baptist to the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 2). In 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah's appearance is described the same way. This is important because the Jews in Jesus' time believed that God would send Elijah to prepare the way for God to restore His kingdom (Malachi 3:1, 4:5-6). Mark is revealing to his audience that John the Baptist should be understood as a prophet from God whose ministry was like Elijah's in that he was preparing the people of Israel for what God was about to do.

Lastly, Mark describes John the Baptist as preaching in the wilderness (Mark 1:4). For the Jews, the wilderness is where God was going to bring forth his messenger (Mark 1:3 quoting Isaiah 40:3). They would have been looking for signs that God was about to restore His kingdom. John the Baptist's message was clear: He was not the anointed one (Messiah), but the anointed one (Messiah) was coming, and when he came, he would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lived and ministered full of the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). After his resurrection, Jesus told his disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). A few days later, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples (Acts 2:1-4). God has always desired to live with His creation, and because of Jesus, a group of people was prepared to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

MARK 1:9-20

DAY 2

In ancient times, having multiple witnesses to validate a claim was important. So far, in the gospel of Mark, John the Baptist gave testimony to Jesus' claim that he is the Messiah. Then, at his baptism, both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit testify to Jesus' claim of Messiahship. Mark gives us three witnesses to validate Jesus' identity as the Messiah (anointed). To have true faith in Jesus, believers need to see clearly that Jesus came from the Father and is led by the Spirit. Shortly after Jesus' baptism and testing in the wilderness, John the Baptist will be imprisoned, symbolizing the end of John's public ministry and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

MARK 1:9-13

Where did the Spirit lead Jesus after his baptism? Why did the Spirit lead Jesus there?

What do Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 reveal about Jesus' conflict with Satan?

In what ways have you been, or are you currently being tested in the wilderness? How can you rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome Satan's schemes?

MARK 1:14-20

What mission is Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John to participate in?

How does their response demonstrate their new commitment to Jesus' ministry?

What must you leave behind to follow Jesus and participate in the Kingdom that Jesus is establishing? What are you still trying to hold on to?

JESUS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus starts his ministry by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is being established through his life and ministry. That is a bold claim because Jesus is claiming that the time of God's rule and reign is being set in motion. The people of Israel had been waiting for centuries, anticipating God would move and establish a renewed Israel. It had been over 900 years since Israel and Judah were a unified, self-governing nation. For most of the previous millennium, Israel had experienced conflict, war, and exile. The Israelites had been scattered across the known world and lived under the control reign of opposing nations. But God, through his prophets, had proclaimed that one day, the LORD would reign again from Jerusalem over the nations. Like the prophets before him, Jesus proclaimed a message calling Israel to repent and give their complete allegiance to God. There was no time to waste. God's Kingdom was imminent.

Jesus' claim that God's Kingdom was being established would have put him in direct opposition with Herod Antipas and Tiberius Caesar. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and was contracted by the Romans to rule over the region of Galilee. Ultimately, though, the Roman Emperor Tiberius was the supreme ruler. Many Jews expected the Messiah to be like their ancestor, King David, who defeated their enemies through military violence. However, Mark will make it clear that Jesus didn't come to overthrow those kingdoms. His primary focus was to overthrow the kingdom of Satan (Mark 1:13). He would rule like King David, but not the way they were expecting.

MARK 1:21-34

DAY 3

Jesus starts his ministry by proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. But so far in the gospel of Mark, we don't have a picture of what that means. As Mark will show us, Jesus' authority and power will draw people to him as he starts showing people what the Kingdom of God looks like. Whereas the teachers of the law and other religious leaders relied on the authority of those who came before them to teach the ways of God, Jesus sets himself apart by teaching the ways of God based upon his authority given by God. The faith that Jesus desires from his followers is to acknowledge the authority that God has given Jesus to establish the Kingdom.

MARK 1:21-28

To whom is Jesus compared to? Why are the people amazed at Jesus' teachings?

Why do you think Mark places the story of Jesus casting out a demon (exorcism) here at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry? What does it say about Jesus' primary focus as the Messiah?

What is the response of the people? What question are they trying to figure out about Jesus? What are you still trying to figure out about Jesus?

MARK 1:29-34

What does Jesus do after leaving the synagogue? Why is it important to notice that it is still the Sabbath?

Remembering that Peter was Mark's primary source for writing this gospel, how do you think this miracle affected Peter? Do you think it helped confirm Peter's decision to leave his trade as a fisherman and join Jesus' ministry?

Do you believe in the authority and power of Jesus?

JESUS' MESSAGE AND TEACHINGS

For the most part, Mark isn't as focused on showing the content of Jesus' teaching as Matthew and Luke do in their gospel accounts. Mark focuses more on how Jesus' teaching demonstrated his authority and power. Based upon Luke's gospel account, Jesus probably taught the people of Capernaum in a similar way as when he taught in the synagogue in Nazareth. In Luke 4:14-21, Jesus unrolled the scroll of Isaiah, which included the daily scripture reading, and then taught the crowds how he fulfilled that passage. No doubt, he continued with the message of repentance from sin and idolatry toward a new belief in God and what He was doing through Jesus.

Although we aren't given the content of Jesus' teachings on that Sabbath day in Capernaum, at some point during it, a man with an evil, impure spirit interrupts him. It isn't an accident that the first miracle Jesus performs in the book of Mark is a miracle where his authority and power are confronted by someone held captive by the power and authority of Satan. Jesus' authority and power aren't just shown by his teaching but also by his ability to cast out evil spirits and heal various sicknesses. Jesus is showing people that the Kingdom of God is focused on bringing creation back into harmony with its Creator. He is rescuing people from the clutches and dominion of Satan's kingdom and bringing them back to life in God's Kingdom. Fishing for people involves rescuing people from the sea (an image of chaos and evil) and bringing them into the light of God's Kingdom.

MARK 1:35-45

DAY 4

As Jesus begins his ministry in Capernaum, news spreads across the region of his authority and power. People are drawn to Jesus, and many are healed of their sicknesses and diseases. Mark continues highlighting Jesus' power over demons as a primary focus of Jesus' ministry. Leaving the crowds and disciples, Jesus retreats to a solitary place to pray to the Father, his source of authority and power. Even this act of faith catches the disciples off guard as they search for him. Jesus then highlights a vital part of his purpose as the Messiah (anointed one). He came not just for the people of one village but to establish God's kingdom over the whole world.

MARK 1:35-39

Where does Jesus' authority and power come from? How does he demonstrate allegiance to God the Father?

How important is prayer in your life? How can you develop a consistent time of prayer in your life?

MARK 1:40-45

What is the request of the man with leprosy (a term for a variety of skin diseases)? How does Jesus respond?

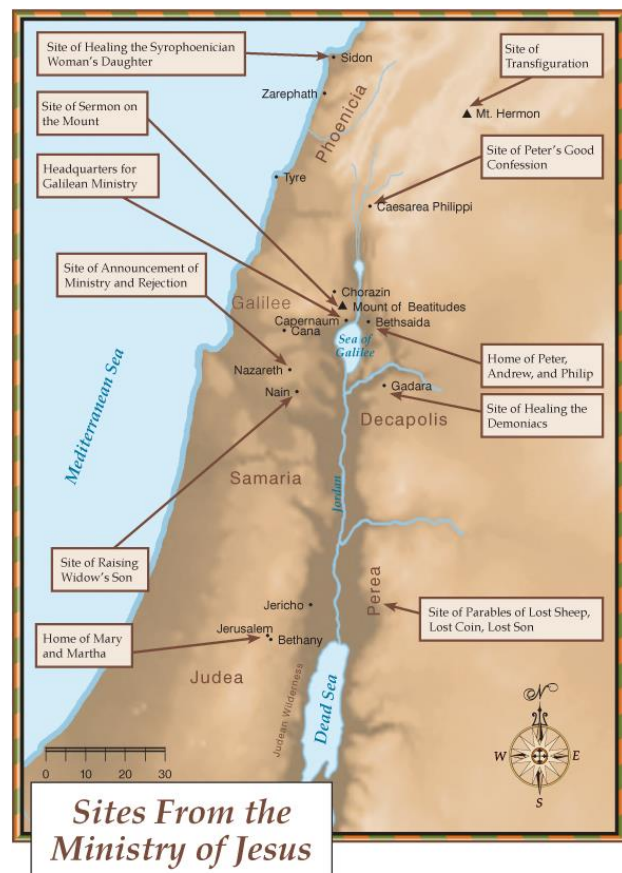
How does Jesus demonstrate his desire to see the man reinstated in the community of Israel? How does Jesus touching the leper show compassion?

THE IMPORTANCE OF GALILEE

Although Jesus grew up in Nazareth, he spent most of his early ministry in the villages near the Sea of Galilee. In Matthew's gospel account, he connects Jesus' early ministry as fulfilling Isaiah 9:1-2 (Matthew 4:12-17).

Galilee, located in the northern parts of Israel, was the spot where God was going to bring forth light out of the darkness. Jesus' ministry in and around Capernaum should be understood as bringing light to a dark world.

Even with that understanding of Jesus' ministry, it is still confusing why Jesus was indignant at the man's request to be made clean from his leprosy. Of course, Jesus was willing to heal the man of leprosy because the light always reveals the evil of darkness. For too long, this man had been isolated and deemed unclean to participate in religious and communal life. In a foreshadowing of what will come to all people, Jesus declared the man clean and seemed to trade places with the man. Whereas the man once had to live in isolation, now Jesus is going to be the one to live in isolated places.



MARK 2:1-12

DAY 5

Mark will reveal who Jesus is and why he came to Earth. Although the crowds are drawn to Jesus, he is going to be questioned and discredited by various religious leaders. Jesus is confronting everyone's belief about the type of Messiah he is. He is focused on establishing the Kingdom of God and calling people to embrace and live in that Kingdom. There is no middle ground regarding Jesus' message of repentance. He calls people to action—to embrace God and clearly see His purpose on earth as revealed through his life. However, who he claims to be is much more than some people are willing to accept.

MARK 2:1-5

Whose house was it that the friends dug a hole in? What was Jesus doing when the friends dug the hole?

What does Jesus notice about the friends that prompt him to talk to the paralyzed man?

To what extremes are you willing to take yourself and those around you to get to Jesus?

MARK 2:6-12

Is the question that the teachers of the law ask incorrect? What does it reveal about their heart condition?

What claim does Jesus make? How does he demonstrate his power and authority to make such a claim?

Do you believe that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins? In what ways do you need to receive forgiveness?

THE NAMES OF JESUS

Jesus is often referred to as the Messiah or the Christ. They are titles that reveal Jesus' identity and shouldn't be confused with his last name. Both Messiah (Hebrew version) and Christ (Greek version) mean "the anointed one". In the Old Testament, only a select number of people were anointed to carry out God's specific purpose. They were the priests, the prophets, and the kings. In Jesus, we see him fulfilling all three of those roles. The phrase "Son of God" carried the connotation of royal kingship since the kings of Israel were called the "Sons of God." It isn't until Mark 12:1-12 that Jesus seems to convey that there is more to that phrase than just royalty.

In this interaction with the teachers of the law, Jesus uses another phrase, "the Son of Man," to both reveal and conceal his identity as the Messiah (anointed one). The prophet Ezekiel is identified by this phrase over 90 times in his writings, and each time, it is a general reference to Ezekiel being called to proclaim God's message. Although Jesus could have chosen this phrase to connect him to the prophetic ministry of Ezekiel, it is more likely that he chose it because of how it is used in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel has a vision of "one like a son of man" approaching the Ancient of Days. Once in His presence, the "one like a son of man" is given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations will worship him, and his kingdom will be everlasting. In this veiled reference to his identity and purpose, Jesus calls his listeners to see him for who he is and what he came to do. Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God, and those who see through the veiled reference will be able to participate and live in this Kingdom.

MARK 2:13-28

DAY 6

As Jesus continues to set in motion God's kingdom, his authority will be questioned more and more. Already in the book of Mark, Jesus has made some big claims. He has claimed that he is continuing God's purpose by establishing the Kingdom. He made a man with leprosy "clean," which is something only God can do. Then Jesus claimed that he had been given the authority to forgive the sins of people who have faith in him, which is also something only God can do. Jesus' miracles, healings, and even exorcisms all testify to his power, but it isn't enough yet to convince the crowds and certain religious leaders. As Jesus' ministry grows, so will the questions and opposition.

MARK 2:13-17

What is surprising about Jesus calling Levi to follow him as one of his disciples? How does Jesus respond?

What behavior of Jesus are the Pharisees questioning? How does Jesus respond?

How does Jesus' example challenge you to value and spend time with those who are outcasted?

MARK 2:18-27

What is the opposition that Jesus is facing by his actions? Why were those such a big deal to the Pharisees?

How does Jesus respond to their questions? What is new and different about the kingdom that Jesus is establishing?

In what ways does God want you to participate in His Kingdom?

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

The way in which Jesus reveals his authority and power highlights that God's ways are higher than the ways of humans (Isaiah 55:8-9), especially that of the people Jesus interacted with. The Pharisees, who were focused on keeping all of God's commands, couldn't see how Jesus, who was claiming to be under the authority of God, acted differently from how they had been taught to keep the laws of God.

The Pharisees had been around for about 200 years and were focused on ritual purity of themselves and for the entire nation of Israel. They primarily oversaw the worship in synagogues and were known for creating their own traditions and rules to ensure that the commands of God were not broken. It isn't surprising that Jesus would have had many interactions with different Pharisees.

While they are trying to make sense of who Jesus is and what he is doing, Jesus is going to challenge everyone to reevaluate what it means to follow God. The different images that Jesus uses in this section all illustrate the point that God is doing something new in the world through the life and ministry of Jesus. The old way of relating to God (the first covenant made with Israel on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19-24) doesn't mix well with the new way of relating to God that Jesus is revealing. The old religious systems and ways of thinking won't be able to contain this new Kingdom.

Because Jesus has the authority of God the Father, he can accurately repurpose the days and festivals to align with the new Kingdom. Jesus seems to be very intentional about using the Sabbath as a day to proclaim the life and power found through Him.

MARK 3:1-12

DAY 7

After being confronted about the behavior of his disciples and himself, Jesus will challenge the Pharisees' interpretation of the law. For Jesus, the Sabbath is the perfect time to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom and restore the man physically and spiritually, for the man would not have been able to properly worship in the temple because of his withered hand. While Jesus' question is going to lead the Pharisees to silence, it will also motivate them to begin plotting Jesus' death. Their silence will reveal the condition of their hearts and lead to an ironic twist in the story. While Jesus wants to give life on the Sabbath by the healing, the Pharisees will start plotting evil against Jesus even on the Sabbath.

MARK 3:1-6

What is the challenge that Jesus presents to the Pharisees gathered that day in the Synagogue?

How does Jesus heal this man? How does it demonstrate his authority and power?

How does this challenge the attitudes of the Pharisees? In what ways do you have a stubborn heart for what God wants to do in the lives of all people on this Earth?

MARK 3:7-12

How many regions are represented in verses 7-8? What does that number symbolize?

Why are the crowds drawn to Jesus? Do they see Jesus clearly?

Why are you drawn to Jesus? What doubts or struggles do you have believing Jesus' power and authority as revealed in the book of Mark so far?

JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY

Mark tells us that large crowds are attracted to and follow Jesus even though he withdraws from the village to the lake. The locations listed in Mark's summary seem to symbolize that people were coming from the whole region. People came from the north, south, east, and west to see Jesus. However, their motivation for seeking Jesus is questionable. Mark tells us that it was because Jesus had healed many that they were seeking him. As Jesus' popularity grew, so did his opposition. Jesus has gained the honor and approval of the crowds but has taken it at the expense of the religious leaders and Pharisees from the region.

Even though Jesus is trying to reveal who he is and why he came, everyone seems to misunderstand his identity and purpose. The crowds see Jesus just as a healer and a teacher. The religious leaders who should be able to recognize that God's Spirit is now at work through Jesus can't seem to acknowledge Jesus' authority and power. The only ones who seem to identify Jesus correctly are the demons. They rightfully acknowledge that Jesus is the "Son of God," but their testimony isn't that valuable since they are connected to Satan and evil. As Jesus continues his ministry, he is going to leave the established places of worship and reveal his identity and purpose to those he meets along the way.

Several things hold people back from following Jesus, and the next several chapters in the book of Mark will show that. So far, Jesus has proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is near and has shown how the new Kingdom is breaking into this world. However, as Jesus calls people to follow him, fear and doubt are going to keep people from trusting him completely. As Jesus continues his ministry, he is going to set apart 12 disciples to play a special role within this new Kingdom. For any Jew, this number would automatically resonate with them since there were originally 12 sons of Israel who later became the 12 tribes of Israel (Genesis 29-30; 48-49). Jesus is pointing to how the new Kingdom is restoring the nation of Israel, starting with the 12 disciples Jesus sets apart to be apostles.

MARK 3:13-19

Who does Jesus call his apostles to be close to? What is the purpose of their calling?

Do those tasks still apply to believers today? If so, how can you join Jesus in his Kingdom?

MARK 3:20-35

Where do the teachers of the law come from? What do they say is the source of Jesus' power and authority?

How does Jesus' response point to his purpose on the Earth? Where does he actually get his power and authority from?

OPPOSITION TO JESUS' POWER AND PURPOSE

Mark has been presenting Jesus' life and ministry in a way that shows that Jesus came to defeat Satan's power in this world. Jesus' first miracle was to cast out a demon and restore a man who was once under Satan's dominion. Repeatedly, Jesus is directing his follower's attention to the fact that something bigger is going on than just what they can see. There is a spiritual aspect of Jesus' ministry where he is overthrowing the forces of evil by the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. However, those opposing Jesus refuse to accept that Jesus' authority and power come from God.

This time, a cohort from Jerusalem travels to Galilee to question him and even accuse him of getting his power directly from Satan. Jesus responds by pointing out the flaws in their argument because Satan wouldn't turn on himself. Instead, Jesus gives a parable to explain how his power is stronger than Satan's. Jesus uses the story of the strong man to highlight a key aspect of his ministry. In this story, the strong man is Satan, and the Earth is his house. His power is evident in the world, but Jesus is coming into his domain to defeat him. Jesus is stronger than the strong man and, because of that, can plunder his house. On a spiritual level, Jesus is waging war against Satan and rescuing humanity from his clutches.

Jesus tells the religious leaders that the worst thing they can do is to witness the power of the Holy Spirit working through him and attribute that to the power of Satan. The religious leaders are blind to Jesus' power, and their hearts are calloused to the very work of God. And it shouldn't surprise us that as Jesus gains the honor from the crowds at the expense of the religious leaders, Jesus' own family would be concerned about their family reputation in connection to Jesus' reputation. But once again, Jesus redefines what it means to live in the Kingdom. Being obedient to God is more important than preserving the honor of the family within the community.

Jesus is focused on establishing the Kingdom of God and calling people to embrace and live in that Kingdom. There is no middle ground regarding Jesus' message of repentance. He is calling people to action—to clearly see his purpose on earth as revealed through his teachings, healings, and ministry. Everyone who sees or hears about Jesus must decide to put their faith in him or not. Jesus isn't focused on the casual observer of his ministry. The determining factor is what you do with the truth about who Jesus is. Will you be like the calloused religious leaders and be pushed further away, or will you be like the disciples who are trying to perceive the secrets of the Kingdom and seek Jesus to ask him to reveal himself more?

MARK 4:1-20

How does Jesus explain the meaning of this parable? What do the farmer, seed, and soil represent in the story?

What happens when the seed meets the soil? What does the parable highlight as reasons that the seed does not reach maturity and bear fruit?

What is your response to Jesus' message to follow him? Is your faith producing fruit? If not, what does it reveal about the soil of your heart?

MARK 4:21-25

What is the purpose of a lamp? Why would it be silly to hide a lamp? What does this reveal about Jesus' identity and purpose?

Why would Jesus purposely conceal parts of his teachings? Why would he want his teachings to be revealed in the future but not right now?

How are you responding to Jesus' message to follow him? Do you want to go deeper and deeper in faith with Jesus or simply stay at a superficial level of faith?

WHY DOES JESUS TEACH IN PARABLES?

In all four gospel accounts, Jesus teaches in parables to differentiate between those who are perceptive to Jesus' identity and purpose and those who are blind to it. Jesus is trying to reveal kernels of truth about the Kingdom, but he does it in ways that require the listener to respond to his teaching. What happens when the message of Jesus meets the hearts of the listener? It all depends on how receptive your heart is to what Jesus is saying.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to his disciples to highlight why he uses parables. In Isaiah 1-5, God is casting judgment upon the Israelites for being a stubborn, rebellious nation. God discusses how He has provided and cared for them, but they rejected His love and turned to worship other idols. Because of their rebellion, God tells them that they will experience exile from the promised land as a consequence of their idolatry. Then, in Isaiah 6, God commissions Isaiah to be the prophet who goes to the people, calling them to repent and turn back to God. There is still time for the exile to be avoided if they repent of their idolatry. But God also knows the stubbornness of their hearts and tells Isaiah that even though He is sending Isaiah to warn the people, the people will not respond favorably. Jesus uses these verses to illustrate that what matters is how you respond to the secret of the Kingdom of God—that God's will is finally being revealed in and through Jesus the Messiah.

MARK 4:21-34

DAY 10

As Jesus continues his teachings by the lake, He is going to highlight that what God is doing through him is more than what meets the eye. The humble beginnings of Jesus' ministry shouldn't cause a person to dismiss what God is about to do. God's power at work might not be clear yet, but soon enough, it will be very evident that the Kingdom is growing. Only at the proper time will the Kingdom emerge as a place of refreshment and shelter for those who draw near to the Kingdom. Throughout the parables, Jesus calls people to acknowledge accurately what God is doing through him and participate in the mission of the Kingdom.

MARK 4:26-29

In what way is a farmer limited in his ability to produce a harvest? Who is in control of the growth of the seed? How is that reassuring to believers today?

What does this parable highlight about the proper timing of sowing, growing, and harvesting?

MARK 4:30-34

What is the picture that Jesus paints of the Kingdom of God? Can the power of the Kingdom be stopped?

How does Jesus demonstrate his patience with his disciples? How is that reassuring for believers today?

OLD TESTAMENT IMAGES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Not only are the parables meant to illuminate the spiritual perceptiveness of the listeners, but they also draw upon Old Testament images that would resonate with Jews in that time period. Jesus uses these images to point to his identity and purpose in fulfilling the will of God as foretold by the Old Testament prophets. If they are willing to connect the dots, they will understand that Jesus is setting in motion what God has promised to the ancient Israelites. The difficulty is that Jesus will fulfill those images differently than the Israelites were expecting.

For instance, Jesus uses an image of a sickle during harvest time in the parable of the growing seed. This connects his parable to Joel 3:13. In context, it comes at the end of the book of Joel, where God is describing how, after the terrible judgment is poured out upon the Israelites because of their idolatry, God is going to restore Israel. He is going to pour out his Spirit upon them and hold the nations accountable for their actions against Israel. On that day, the LORD will be "a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel" (Joel 3:16). In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus draws upon images found in Ezekiel and Daniel about God restoring the fortunes of Israel. In Ezekiel 17:23, the LORD says, "On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches."

These images of God's restoration of Israel and the establishment of His rule and reign from Jerusalem would have been held dearly by the Israelites. In Jesus' day, they were under the control of Rome and would have been longing for God to move once again on behalf of Israel. Jesus draws upon this imagery to highlight the purpose of his ministry, that the Kingdom is being established and that even though it is small, it will eventually grow to provide shade and refreshment to the whole world. In Jesus, the secret of the Kingdom is being revealed to those able to see who he is.

Following the four teaching parables, Mark is now going to show four miracles that further reveal Jesus' identity. Once again, the question is how people respond to Jesus' authority and power. Does Jesus' identity lead a person toward faith or towards fear? Even as Jesus demonstrates his authority over the raging storm, the disciples will ask, "Who is this?" The disciples have been the closest to Jesus so far in his ministry, yet they are still wrestling with understanding Jesus' identity. Perhaps in the incarnation, God in human form, people find the greatest mystery and challenge to accept Jesus' identity.

MARK 4:35-41

How is Jesus' humanity shown in this story? How is Jesus' divine power shown in this story?

What is the question of the disciples? Is their focus on the power of the storm or the power of the one with them?

How does Jesus demonstrate his power? What type of faith is Jesus asking his followers to have?

JONAH 1

What similarities and differences are there between Jesus and Jonah?

EXODUS 14

By whose power is the sea parted? What is the outcome for the Israelites, and what type of faith response does it bring?

GENESIS 1

What is hovering over the waters? By whose power are the waters restrained into appropriate boundaries?

STORMS AND THE IMAGE OF THE SEA

In ancient Jewish thought, the sea symbolized chaos and evil. It represented the dark force that was threatening to undo God's good creation. So, it is appropriate to understand Jesus' power over the stormy waters as a demonstration of his authority and power over the evil and dark forces at work in this world (Ephesians 6:12). But even more so, this miracle testifies that Jesus' source of power is God because only God is the creator and ruler of the sea. God is the one who brings peace and order out of the chaotic waters at the creation of the universe. That same creative power is now at work in the person of Jesus. He reveals his divine nature as having the authority to control the wind and the waves.

When Jesus rebukes the wind and waves, they have no choice but to submit to the will of Jesus. Unlike Jonah, who was running away from God's will, Jesus was right where God wanted him. However, the fierceness and terror of the storm kept the disciples from seeing clearly who was with them in the boat. Having Jesus with you in the boat, even a sleeping Jesus in the boat is more powerful than the storm raging around the boat. Jesus calls out their fear and their lack of faith in a way that points to the type of faith that Jesus desires and requires of his disciples. Faith in Jesus is total trust and dependance on Jesus' authority and power. Why fear the storm when the one with you is the one who created the wind and waves? Jesus calls his disciples to have more faith in him.

As the opposition and tension escalated between Jesus and the religious leaders in Galilee, Jesus got in a boat with his disciples to cross to the other side of the lake. He is heading to Gentile (non-Jewish) territory and, along the way, reveals his power to his disciples by calming the raging storm. Now, once on land, Jesus is going to come face to face with the powers of evil. The disciples have witnessed Jesus' power over the evil spirits before, but how will Jesus respond now that he is in Gentile (non-Jewish) territory?

MARK 5:1-13

How is the man described? Where does the man live?

How does Jesus demonstrate his ultimate authority and power?

What power do the demons have compared to Jesus? Can they even control their destination?

How should this story help build our trust and faith in Jesus?

MARK 5:14-20

How is the man described now?

What is the response of the townspeople to Jesus' power? What does their response say about the soil of their heart?

In what ways does this man become a missionary to the Decapolis (non-Jewish territory)?

In what ways does fear hold you back from total faith and trust in Jesus?

SATAN'S DOMINION AND TACTICS

This story is one of the clearest pictures of how evil and dark Satan's dominion is. Although the townspeople can't shackle the man, he is shackled by the demonic spirits. He is forced out of the community and lives among the dead. In his torment, he would harm himself but couldn't escape the hell he was living in—until he met Jesus.

Satan's tactics haven't changed much since the beginning of time. Satan's weapons are to isolate, harm, and destroy humanity. But Jesus came to bring life (John 10:10). When the townspeople come, they find the man clothed and in his right mind (Mark 5:15). Jesus is actively waging war against Satan and restoring people back to life. The man who once was held captive by evil is now free to experience life again. He can rejoin the community. He can experience a life that was only possible through Jesus.

But that display of power still doesn't bring about the proper type of faith from the townspeople. Like the crowds in Galilee, they are afraid to trust and believe in Jesus. Mark is showing us that both Jews and Gentiles have difficulty in placing their faith in Jesus. Fear hinders proper faith in Jesus. Unlike other encounters in the book of Mark, Jesus doesn't silence this man but sends the man back to his own people to testify about the mercy of God. And the man does exactly like, thus preparing the people for the next time Jesus is in the region of the Decapolis.

MARK 5:21-43

DAY 13

Back in Jewish territory, Jesus is going to perform two miracles that further reveal Jesus' identity and purpose of establishing God's Kingdom. So far, Jesus has demonstrated his authority and power over nature and evil spirits. Now, he is going to show his power over sickness and death. The next two stories are sandwiched together in a way that highlights Mark's purpose in describing the type of faith that Jesus requires in the new Kingdom. Faith doesn't come from just witnessing the miracles and teachings of Jesus. Faith only comes by putting your complete trust and dependence upon Jesus.

MARK 5:21-34

How does Jarius seek out Jesus? How is his faith in Jesus demonstrated?

Why does the woman seek out Jesus? How is her faith in Jesus demonstrated?

What did Jarius have to lose by trusting in Jesus? What did the woman have to lose by trusting in Jesus?

What holds you back from seeking Jesus with urgency and dependency?

MARK 5:35-43

How would Jarius' faith be tested when Jesus is interrupted on the way to his daughter? What is Jesus' response to Jarius at the report of his daughter's death?

How does Jesus demonstrate his power over death? Why do you think Jesus limited the number of witnesses to this miracle?

What type of faith is required for followers of Jesus? Would you describe your faith like this? Why or why not?

FAITH AND BELIEF IN JESUS

When Jesus started his ministry in Mark 1:15, he called people to believe in the good news that the Kingdom of God was being established through him. For people to see what God was doing through his life, they needed to believe in Jesus' identity and purpose. Belief is properly acknowledging Jesus' identity and allegiance to his Kingdom. All of Jesus' teachings and miracles are signs pointing to his identity and purpose but don't automatically lead a person to faith. For some, they rejected Jesus' identity and revealed their calloused hearts. But for others, they saw that Jesus was teaching and healing others with the power of God. Their belief in Jesus is what leads them to the proper faith response.

In the encounter with Jairus, Jesus tells Jarius to keep on believing. He is calling Jarius not to lose hope. To continue to trust and depend on him as the source of healing for his daughter. Faith isn't easy, but rather, it is the opposite. Faith requires total trust and dependence on Jesus' authority and power. The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years acted upon her belief in Jesus, and her response of faith is the avenue through which Jesus' power could heal her. If we properly acknowledge that God in all his fullness is in Christ (Colossians 2:9), then our response of faith is to live in total trust and dependence upon Jesus' authority and power. However, as we will see in Mark, having proper faith in Jesus is something that everyone will struggle with.

MARK 6:1-6

DAY 14

As Mark continues to tell the story of Jesus, he doesn't shy away from recounting the painful parts of Jesus' ministry. For it is in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth that one might expect Jesus to have a favorable ministry and large following since they knew Jesus the longest. However, as Mark reveals, the opposite is true. In Jesus' hometown, his identity and power are rejected the most, and the lack of faith displayed in Jesus hinders his ability to reveal the Kingdom of God to them. Ironically, this rejection is going to happen in the synagogue, where people should have been the most perceptive to what God was doing. This will be the last time Jesus teaches in a synagogue, according to Mark, for after this, Jesus will become even more focused on proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the surrounding areas.

MARK 6:1-3

Why did the people of Nazareth take offense at Jesus? What questions and doubts did they have about Jesus' identity and purpose?

How do their questions and lack of faith demonstrate the soil condition of their hearts?

MARK 6:4-6

In what ways does the townspeople's lack of faith limit Jesus' ministry?

What questions and doubts about Jesus' identity and purpose keep you from having faith in Jesus?

HINDRANCES TO FAITH

Jesus' amazement at the lack of faith from his relatives and townspeople in Nazareth highlights the role of faith in the Kingdom of God. It isn't enough to hear the message of the Kingdom or even see the miracles that Jesus performed. Like the parable of the Sower in Mark 4:1-20, what makes the difference is the type of response when the "word" meets the soil. So far in the book of Mark, most of the religious leaders can't acknowledge Jesus' power comes from God. The 12 Disciples let the severity of the storm keep them from proper faith. The townspeople in the Decapolis let fear hinder them from faith in Jesus. The people of Nazareth let the knowledge of Jesus' upbringing and family from responding in faith.

However, the people who seek Jesus out in their desperation and need seem to produce the type of faith that Jesus requires. In their desperation, they are willing to risk everything to reach Jesus. Even today, faith in Jesus requires a great leap. To solely trust in Jesus and depend completely on him through the easy and hard moments of life is challenging, but it is that type of faith that Jesus desires.

It took the greatest miracle for Jesus' brother James to convince him to respond in faith properly. It wasn't until after Jesus' resurrection that James would acknowledge Jesus' identity and purpose as the Messiah (1 Corinthians 15:1-7). James would then go on to be a pillar of faith and leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15). As Mark continues to show, if there is an incomplete understanding of Jesus' identity and purpose, true faith is going to be hindered. But once that is revealed and you can clearly see Jesus' identity and purpose, will you respond in faith, or will fear keep hindering you?

In Mark 3:14-15, Jesus set apart 12 disciples to be his closest followers. The connection between the 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus appointing 12 disciples should not be overlooked. As the Kingdom of God is established, Jesus is laying a new foundation in ways that echo the first covenant made with Israel. Now, in Mark 6:6-13, Jesus is going to send the 12 disciples out on an urgent mission that mimics his purpose. As the 12 disciples carry out the mission of the Kingdom, the faith required of them is to completely depend upon the power of God for their provisions.

MARK 6:6-11

Where did Jesus' authority come from? By whose power did Jesus perform miracles?

Where did the authority and power of the disciples come from?

In what ways would this missionary journey test the faith of the 12 disciples?

MARK 6:12-13

How did the 12 disciples respond to Jesus' sending? How does their response model faith for believers today?

In what ways did their journey mimic Jesus' ministry?

How do our identity and purpose today as believers mimic Jesus' ministry?

BUILDING FAITH IN JESUS

While the instructions given to the 12 disciples in Mark 6:8-11 traditionally have been understood as being for a specific time and place, some parallels can be made for today. Being "sent out" requires dependence upon Jesus' power and authority. So far, the disciples have witnessed enough signs to put their trust in Jesus, but now they must depend upon him for their authority and power. When the 12 disciples are "sent out" without bread, bags, or money, the quality of their faith is being tested. Will they rely on God to provide for their needs? And will they rely on God to orchestrate and prepare people who will house and provide hospitality to them? The purpose of the disciples as "fishing for people" is starting to be realized as the disciples must physically leave Jesus to carry out his ministry in the surrounding region. But as they go, they go with his power and authority.

It is often when God "sends" his disciples that faith is shaped the most. Being "sent" is when belief in Jesus manifests itself as faith in Jesus. Faith requires action. Even today, if you want your faith to be strengthened, then learn how to trust and depend upon Jesus when he "sends" you on his mission. Jesus is showing his disciples that in God's Kingdom, life is lived in complete dependence upon God. Life by the power of the Spirit is the way of the believer in Jesus.

Jesus modeled how we should live in the Kingdom. He spent time in prayer with the Father (Mark 1:35; 6:46; 14:32-39). He obeyed God even when he was sent into the wilderness to be tested (Mark 1:12). Jesus proclaimed a message of repentance (1:15) and was focused on defeating Satan (Mark 1:27; 1:34; 1:39). Ultimately, though, it is Jesus' example on the cross that shows us the clearest picture of what he calls his disciples to mimic. Mark 10:45 tells us that Jesus "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

As the disciples are sent out on a missionary task, Mark is going to turn the reader's attention to the fate of John the Baptist. By doing so, Mark is showing that true discipleship is not always glamorous but rather might cost the disciple everything. John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-14) obediently prepared the way for Jesus but also found himself in opposition to the kingdoms of this world. His judgment against Herod Antipas and his marriage to Herodias would lead to his imprisonment and eventual death. The life and ministry of John the Baptist are very much connected to the life and ministry of Jesus. While this section focuses on John the Baptist, it has larger implications for Jesus' ministry as well. News about Jesus has reached the palace of Herod Antipas, and he is forced to wrestle with Jesus' identity and purpose. It shouldn't surprise us that as Jesus is focused on establishing God's Kingdom, it is going to be opposed by the kingdoms of this world. As Mark will reveal, John the Baptist's fate is a foreshadowing of what is to come for Jesus.

MARK 6:14-16

How does Herod Antipas understand Jesus' identity and purpose?

MARK 6:17-29

How might this section reassure believers in Rome to who Mark is writing this gospel account?

THE HERODS IN THE BIBLE

The first Herod mentioned in the Bible refers to Herod the Great, who was the King of Judea when Jesus was born. He became governor of Galilee at age 25, and eventually, Rome would give him the title of King of Judea. He ruled the region of Judea from 37 BC – 4 BC. He is most famous for the numerous building projects that he funded throughout Judea. The most significant one was the renovation of the Temple in Jerusalem, which lasted for six decades after his death. Herod the Great was known to be a shrewd tyrant who, in his later years, had several family members killed because he thought they were trying to overthrow his reign. The murdering of innocent children in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2) displays his paranoia of a rival King.

After Herod the Great died in 4 BC, his kingdom was split between three of his sons. Archelaus inherited Jerusalem and the surrounding region of Judea and Samaria. Antipas became the tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip became the tetrarch of the region northeast of Galilee. Archelaus fell out of favor with Rome and was replaced by procurators in AD 6.

Herod Antipas is the most prominent Herod mentioned in the gospel accounts since he ruled over Galilee during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. He built the city of Tiberius and made it the capital city of Galilee (located on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, about six miles away from Capernaum). Not only did he play a role in the death of John the Baptist, but he is also going to play a role in the death of Jesus (Luke 23:6-12).

Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great, replaced Herod Antipas as ruler of Judea and Galilee in AD 39. He is the Herod mentioned in the book of Acts, which has James, the brother of John, killed and Peter arrested (Acts 12:1-4). After his death (Acts 12:20-23), his son Agrippa II inherits part of the region and is recorded in Acts 25:13-26:32 as listening to Paul's defense of the gospel.

In contrast to the feast that Herod threw that foreshadowed Jesus' death, the next story focuses on a meal meant to further reveal Jesus' identity and purpose in establishing God's dominion. As the crowds keep Jesus and the disciples from resting after their missionary journey, Jesus displays the type of leader that he is. When faced with the crowds, Jesus responds with compassion towards them. By doing so, he connects himself to imagery from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, "sheep without a shepherd" refers to the people of Israel struggling to follow God because they had no leader or king to show them how to live properly under God's rule. But one day, God himself would shepherd the people and rescue them by establishing a new Shepherd to rule over them (Jeremiah 23:3-6). By drawing upon this imagery, Mark is portraying Jesus as a true leader and king of God's people who abundantly provides for the people of Israel.

MARK 6:30-44

How does Jesus demonstrate compassion for both his disciples and the large crowds?

How does Jesus challenge the disciples to meet the needs of the crowds? How does their response demonstrate their lack of understanding of Jesus' power?

MARK 6:45-56

How does Jesus demonstrate his dependence upon God the Father?

What do you think verse 52 means? What is the connection between Jesus feeding the 5,000 and walking on the water? What were the disciples not understanding?

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS MIRACULOUS FEEDING

It is interesting that the only miracle that is recorded in all four of the gospel accounts outside of the initial proclamation of the Kingdom and the final week of Jesus' life is the feeding of the 5,000. Clearly, this miracle played a vital role in the ministry of Jesus and shaped how the disciples understood Jesus' identity and purpose. It is probably because this event pulled together so many Old Testament images that it is one of the best pictures of who Jesus is and how much the disciples still had to learn about Jesus' purpose as the Messiah.

The fact that this feeding miracle happens in a remote place seems to connect it to Exodus 16, when God provided manna for the Israelites to eat in the wilderness. Throughout the Old Testament, it is God himself who provides for the needs of His children, Israel. Similarly, God's provision was more than abundant in this event, and the crowd was satisfied. When one takes this miracle together with all the previous ones recorded in Mark, Jesus' identity starts to come into focus. If Jesus, who claims to have power and authority from God, can do things only God can do, then what conclusion should we make about who Jesus is?

Today, we have the benefit of hindsight. We know that Jesus is God in human flesh. We benefit from knowing the whole story, but the disciples didn't. They were trying to figure this out, and Jesus called out their hardened hearts. Jesus seems to be saying to them that by now, they should be able to accurately acknowledge his identity as being divine. But they don't fully understand. Thankfully, Jesus is going to be patient with them as they struggle, like we do today, to fully understand who Jesus is and what he came to do.

Once again, Jesus will be questioned about his disciples' actions. This time, a delegation of religious leaders from Jerusalem is going to oppose and challenge Jesus' authority and purpose. Jesus is going to respond to their challenge in a roundabout way, though. The Pharisees ask him a question about the state of purity of his disciples, but Jesus responds first by quoting Isaiah, a prophet from the Old Testament, as judgment against the Pharisees. Then, Jesus goes on to give an example that points out that religious leaders care more about following their teachings than following the commands of God in a way that reflects His heart. Even though they know the teachings and instructions of God, their hearts are not in sync with God. Their hearts are, in fact, far away from God. After Jesus calls them out for their hypocrisy, he gathers a crowd to teach what makes someone impure. By doing so, Jesus makes a bold claim about his identity and authority again. He isn't just responding to the teachings of the Pharisees but takes it a step further and reinterprets the instruction of God from the Old Testament.

MARK 7:1-13

How do Mark's explanatory comments in this section help us understand the conflict? How does this demonstrate that his audience is predominantly Gentile?

How does Jesus' case study in verses 9-13 highlight the point Jesus was trying to make by quoting the prophet Isaiah?

MARK 7:14-22

How does Jesus' teaching highlight his emphasis on the inner motive and attitudes of a person's heart? What truly makes a person impure?

If God is the one who established the command about purity, then what does that say about the authority and identity of Jesus to reinterpret them?

PURITY ACCORDING TO JESUS

In essence, the issue that the Pharisees are asking Jesus is what it means to follow God properly. The Pharisees were deeply concerned about following God properly, but as Jesus shows us, their approach to living properly was misguided.

The Pharisees had been around for about 200 years and, during that time, had developed a large tradition of oral teachings that were supposed to help people keep the commands of God. While the original intent is noble, it also added more rules for people to follow. The Pharisees wanted God to establish His kingdom, but their belief was that God wouldn't move until the people of Israel had purified themselves. To prepare the people of Israel for God to move, the Pharisees became hyper-focused on keeping God's commands from the Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament) and their oral teachings passed down through the last two centuries.

As Jesus points out in this section, they had missed the heart of God. Jesus is teaching his disciples that to follow God properly is to be concerned about the purity of one's heart. Jesus understood that purity ran deeper than just outward cleanliness. What people need is a new heart. The promise of God to cleanse the people of Israel and give them a new heart and a new spirit is being made possible through Jesus (Ezekiel 36:24-27). To understand Jesus properly, one must see Jesus as fulfilling the promises of God made in the Old Testament and continuing God's restoration plan.

Wanting to lie low for a bit after the conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus retreats north to the non-Jewish territory of Tyre. Jesus' interaction with the Syrophenician woman reveals a great amount about the larger implications of God's Kingdom being established through him. Desperate for her daughter to be healed, the woman responded in faith when she heard Jesus was in the area (Matthew 15:28). Jesus' answer, although complicated, points to the purpose of Jesus' ministry and the larger results of what his ministry will achieve. Jesus is highlighting that his primary focus was being sent to the people of Israel. While it wouldn't stop him from healing her non-Jewish daughter, it wasn't the proper time for Gentiles to be included in the Kingdom of God. That would come shortly, but right now, Jesus still has work to do in Israel. Surprisingly, the woman accepts Jesus' message and faithfully takes him at his word. So far in the book of Mark, many barriers have kept people from having proper belief and faith in Jesus, but Mark makes clear in this section that being a Gentile isn't one of them.

MARK 7:24-30

How does the previous section of Mark 7:1-23 help us understand the importance of Jesus healing the non-Jewish woman's daughter?

In what ways does Jesus model his authority to cross multiple barriers to reveal God's mercy to Jews and Gentiles alike?

MARK 6:31-37

What region does Jesus travel to after leaving Tyre? When was he in this non-Jewish territory before?

Why were the people amazed? What miracle did Jesus perform?

BLESSING TO THE GENTILES

After Jesus redefines the application of the purity laws from the Old Testament in Mark 7:1-23, Jesus then demonstrates how this affects his ministry as well as the future ministry of the disciples. In the story of the Syrophenician woman, Jesus crossed geographical, religious, ethnic, and even gender barriers. The old way of following God and interacting with Gentiles was being transformed through the ministry of Jesus in a way that was establishing God's Kingdom for all people. The new ways of God's Kingdom would challenge everyone to reconsider what it meant to follow God properly.

It is even more noteworthy that after healing the woman's daughter, Jesus performs another miracle in Gentile territory. Jesus heals a man who is both deaf and mute. In Isaiah 35:5-6, God tells the people of Judah that the blind will see and the mute will shout for joy when His glory is revealed on Earth. On that glorious day, the land that once was barren will be filled with life and abundance. As Jesus continues his purpose of establishing the Kingdom, He gives glimpses of God's abundant life and blessing breaking into this world. Shockingly, though, Jesus performs this messianic sign in Gentile territory, signifying that God's purposes are for the whole world, not just the people of Israel.

Even in Genesis 12:1-3, one can see a foreshadowing of God's redemptive plan. In Genesis 12:3, God tells Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." The identity and purpose of Jesus reveal something that God has been working towards from the very beginning of Scripture. God is working to bring all of creation, including Jews and Gentiles, back to himself through Jesus.

MARK 8:1-21

DAY 20

Still, in a predominately Gentile region, Jesus once again has compassion on the crowds that have sought him out. The necessity of this miraculous feeding is highlighted by the fact that this time, they are gathered in an area even more remote than before and have been gathered for more days. But all of that doesn't change Jesus' compassion for people, especially those seeking him out. What Jesus did for the Jews when he fed the 5,000, he can do again for the 4,000, even in Gentile territory. The abundance and power of God's Kingdom are evident as Jesus once again satisfies the hunger of the crowds. As the rest of the section makes clear, the disciples fail to understand the importance of Jesus feeding the 4,000. Jesus makes it clear that the disciples aren't seeing or hearing clearly. Jesus' authority and power should help them see his identity and purpose clearly, but they are in danger of missing it. God, through Jesus, is restoring all of creation back into His Kingdom.

MARK 8:1-10

What similarities are there between the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6:30-44?

What details are different between the two feeding stories?

Why do you think Jesus involves the disciples in the distribution of the food?
What did he want to teach his disciples?

MARK 8:11-21

Why do you think Jesus refuses to give the Pharisees a sign when they ask for one?

What is Jesus referring to when he talks about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod?

What do the disciples not understand about Jesus' identity and purpose? What do we miss today about Jesus' identity and purpose?

LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

Jesus is very concerned about the disciples having the proper belief and faith in him. Jesus understands the urgency and necessity of the disciples clearly seeing his identity and purpose. But Jesus is also patient with them because they don't see the whole picture yet. They only see what has been revealed to them up to this point in Jesus' ministry, which is why it is so important for Jesus to warn the disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod.

A little yeast has tremendous power as it grows and expands. The Pharisees ask for another sign to validate Jesus' authority and power. But Jesus won't give them another one because he knows the hardness of their hearts. Someone could raise from the dead, and they still would deny the power of God (spoiler alert). It doesn't matter how many miracles of divine power someone sees; if they have a hardened heart, the power of Jesus' life won't be able to produce fruit in them. As for Herod, he was indecisive about responding to John the Baptist's message of repentance. He cared more about his own reputation than John's life. The Pharisees denied Jesus' identity, and Herod misunderstood it. Jesus wants his disciples to believe and accept what God is doing through him. He wants them to properly respond in faith by completely trusting and depending upon Jesus' authority and power every moment. They have Jesus with them; what more could they need?

So far, everything in the book of Mark has been building to this section when Jesus directly asks the disciples about his identity. But right before Peter's confession comes a two-stage healing of a blind man. The blind man needs Jesus to restore his sight, and Jesus is the only one who has the power and authority to open the eyes of the blind. In a sense, this miracle speaks towards the spiritual blindness of the disciples. They have been blind to Jesus' identity and are just now starting to acknowledge his identity accurately. However, their understanding of Jesus' identity and purpose is still out of focus. They need Jesus to heal their spiritual blindness and help them to see fully. Now that they are going to properly acknowledge Jesus' identity as the Messiah, Jesus can prepare them for the rest of his ministry.

MARK 8:22-26

In Mark 6:45, where did Jesus tell the disciples to meet him? Where did they end up at Mark 6:53?

Where does this story take place? What lessons had to be learned before the disciples could make it to Bethsaida?

MARK 8:27-30

What is significant about the location of Caesarea Philippi? Why would Jesus choose this location to question the disciples about his identity?

Why would Jesus warn his disciples not to tell anyone about his identity as the Messiah?

PETER'S CONFESSION

Who is Jesus? That is the question that everyone in the book of Mark has been wrestling with since Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's Kingdom in Mark 1:14-15. Jesus has been calling people to believe in him but has been doing it in a way that only the spiritually perceptive can see clearly who he is. Although Jesus wants his followers to acknowledge his identity and purpose properly, there is some level of secrecy because Jesus still has much to teach and show his disciples about what it means that he is the Messiah. Remember that Messiah means "anointed". It didn't carry the connotation of divine or that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. While those are true about Jesus' identity, that is not the focus of this admission of Jesus' identity and purpose.

In the Old Testament, only a select number of people were anointed to carry out God's specific purpose. They were the priests, the prophets, and the kings. So far, Jesus' teachings and reputation match those of the great prophets of the Old Testament. But just seeing Jesus as a prophet, even a prophet who had returned from the dead, as Herod thought, wasn't enough. Jesus wasn't just announcing the coming of the kingdom but was claiming to be the King of that coming kingdom. So, by acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, Peter is declaring that Jesus is the long-awaited king they were waiting for.

It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus would want to keep this declaration a secret from the crowds. There were other powerful people who claimed the title of king. Herod Antipas wanted to be called King of the Jews, but ultimately, the title belonged to Tiberius Caesar, who was Emperor of the Roman Empire. For Jesus to accept the identity of King would put him in direct opposition to both of those leaders. Jesus knew what still had to be accomplished through his ministry, but the disciples still would have to learn.

Jesus seems to accept Peter's confession as accurate since he doesn't deny or correct Peter's confession. However, Jesus is now going to reveal the part of his purpose that he has kept secret. Jesus is going to teach them plainly about the role God's Messiah must fulfill. When Peter (the source behind Mark's gospel account) rebukes Jesus, he, in turn, gets rebuked. Jesus is clear that he is now heading towards the cross, and any attempt to keep him from that is the work of the adversary, Satan. As this next section of Mark will make clear, the disciples will consistently focus on human concerns rather than seeing things from a godly perspective. However, Jesus knows his time is limited and keeps refocusing the disciples. Jesus wants his disciples to be prepared to follow his example even if that leads to a cross.

MARK 8:31-33

Why would Jesus wait to teach his disciples about his impending death until after they confessed that he was the Messiah?

Why would Peter rebuke Jesus? How is his understanding of the Messiah different than what Jesus knew the Messiah needed to do?

MARK 8:34-9:1

What picture does the cross represent for a first-century Jew? Who typically was crucified on a cross?

What is Jesus trying to teach the crowds and disciples who want to follow him? How is the cross bigger than just a burden to bear?

How is faith in Jesus a paradox? How does a believer find life by losing their life?

MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS

When Jesus starts teaching the disciples about his death, it challenges their expectations and understandings of the Jewish Messiah. While there wasn't a clear-cut expectation for a Messiah figure, there were a few commonly held beliefs. The first is that God would move through an "anointed one" and cleanse the people of Israel and, more specifically, the temple. In essence, God's anointed one would reinstitute proper worship of God in Jerusalem. The second common belief is that God would restore His reign over Israel. That God's justice and mercy would prevail, and the land would be restored to an Eden-like state. The third belief is that Israel would be exalted, and the enemies of Israel would be defeated. Their belief was that God's judgment and retribution would be carried out upon their enemies.

Many Jews expected the Messiah to be like their ancestor, King David, who defeated their enemies through military violence. However, Jesus is going to make it clear that he didn't come to overthrow those kingdoms. His primary focus is to overthrow the kingdom of Satan. He is going to sit on the throne of David, but the way he will ascend to the throne will be through his death (violence done to him) and not through violence towards the Roman oppressors. Jesus tells his disciples that the Kingdom of God is going to come with power, and soon, some of them will even see that glorious power.

Now that Peter has accurately acknowledged Jesus' identity and purpose as the long-awaited Messiah (anointed King), he is going to join Jesus, James, and John on a special revelation of Jesus' identity. Jesus is going to take the three disciples up on a mountainside, which, for a Jew, is symbolic of a place of divine revelation. It is on the mountaintop where the veil between heaven and earth is opened, and the three disciples catch a glimpse of Jesus' glory. In Luke's account, Moses and Elijah appear and talk with Jesus about his departure (Luke 9:31). However, in Mark's account, the focus isn't on Jesus as much as it is on the disciples' lack of perception. They need to understand Jesus from a godly perspective instead of their limited human perspectives. The divine presence from within the cloud confirms Jesus' identity and commands them to listen to him. Then, for the first time in the book of Mark, there is now a time on the horizon when the disciples can tell people what they saw.

MARK 9:2-8

In the Old Testament, what does Moses represent? What does Elijah represent? How might they be able to prepare Jesus for his coming suffering?

How are the disciples described in this section? Why do they need to listen to God's voice from the cloud? What is coming that might make them doubt Jesus' identity and purpose?

MARK 9:9-13

When will the disciples be able to tell people about what they saw? Even for us today, how is the resurrection central to understanding Jesus' identity and purpose?

According to Mark 1:1-9, who fulfilled the role of Elijah? In what ways did he prepare the way for Jesus through his life and death?

JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF RESURRECTION

Mark tells us that Peter, James, and John discussed what "rising from the dead" meant. Even for a Jew, this would have been a puzzling statement. For starters, not all Jews believed in a bodily resurrection, but for those who did, it was connected to their understanding of God's final restoration of creation. Many Jews saw resurrection as part of that process when those who are righteous are resurrected, and creation is set back in proper order. However, for an individual to be resurrected while there was still pain, sorrow, injustice, and oppression in the world would simply be unimaginable.

Repeatedly in the book of Mark, Jesus has been telling people not to talk about him and what he did (Mark 1:34, 44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30). This time, however, is different. Now, there is a definite time when Jesus will give permission to the disciples to talk freely and openly about him and his ministry—after he rises from the dead. Mark has been weaving this truth into his gospel account—a disciple can't fully understand Jesus' identity and purpose without understanding the resurrection. The disciples can correctly acknowledge Jesus' identity as the Messiah but must still learn what that means. Mark wants his audience to know that proper belief and faith come only by understanding Jesus' death and resurrection. Once you understand the power and glory of the resurrection, it changes everything. While the disciples have been commanded to be silent before the resurrection, Jesus is making it clear that after his resurrection, that silence will be removed.

While Jesus was up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John, the rest of the disciples were faced with their own failure to heal a boy possessed by an impure spirit. Not surprisingly, this caused a commotion and drew a large crowd to the scene. Upon arriving, Jesus gets to the heart of the issue. There is a father with a desperate need. His son has been suffering and afflicted since childhood, and the father asks Jesus to help. Jesus questions the man's wavering faith and reassures the father that belief in him changes everything. Then, to display his power, Jesus casts out the demon and restores the boy back to life. Later, in a private conversation with his disciples, Jesus reveals that prayer and communion with God are what the disciples need to focus on because only God has ultimate power over spiritual forces.

MARK 9:14-22

In what ways is the boy's condition a picture of Satan's dominion and ill intent toward humanity?

In what ways does the father demonstrate faith in Jesus' authority and power? In what ways does the father demonstrate partial faith?

MARK 9:23-29

How does Jesus challenge the father's partial faith? How does Jesus help strengthen the father's belief?

What type of belief does Jesus desire from his disciples? In what ways is your faith wavering or uncertain about Jesus' authority and power?

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF IN JESUS

The father's response— "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief"—is one that resonates with many believers today. Belief and faith in Jesus are hard, and the circumstances of life affect one's belief in Jesus. For the father, it was his son's condition that led him to seek out Jesus. However, once he got to Jesus, he demonstrated that his belief needed to grow. He acknowledged Jesus as a teacher, which wasn't wrong but not completely right either. Then, he questioned Jesus' ability and willingness to help him and his son.

Back in Nazareth, Jesus' ability to heal and perform miracles was limited because of their lack of faith (Mark 6:1-6). In this story, Jesus heals the father's son, demonstrating that his power to heal isn't based upon the perfection of the father's faith. Instead, it is based on the father's trust in Jesus, who has the power and authority to heal the boy. Faith always requires total trust and dependence upon Jesus' authority and power.

The truth about discipleship is that Jesus is always leading us to greater trust and dependence upon him. It is in those moments when our faith is stretched that our belief in Jesus grows as well. When we see Jesus do something that seems impossible, we get a better understanding of who Jesus is. It is only with those faith-shaping moments that we can begin to understand and see Jesus' identity clearer in our lives. It is also in those faith-shaping moments that prayer becomes the lifeblood of our faith. For in prayer, we can acknowledge our inadequacies and shortcomings. But it is also through prayer that we can experience the power of the creator of the universe leading and guiding us— calling us to trust and depend upon him.

MARK 9:30-50

DAY 25

As Jesus and the disciples travel back to Capernaum, this will be Jesus' last time in Galilee until after the resurrection. As the cross looms in the background, the disciples are completely unaware of what Jesus is preparing them for. Instead, they are focused on honor and prestige according to worldly standards. Their focus seems to be on themselves and the positions of power they will receive when Jesus establishes the kingdom of God. However, Jesus is going to keep teaching them what his kingdom values and where their focus needs to be directed. Jesus knows that true discipleship requires sacrifices and suffering. The disciples will one day follow Jesus' example, so they better learn quickly what it means to live in the Kingdom of God.

MARK 9:30-37

What were the disciples arguing about on the way back to Capernaum? How does Jesus redirect their focus to what his kingdom values?

In what ways do we still struggle with the same issues that the disciples struggled with? What does it mean for you to be a servant of all?

MARK 9:38-50

What does Jesus teach his disciples in this section? What should their focus be on instead of which one of them is the greatest?

What is the stern warning that Jesus gives about the war between his kingdom and the forces of Evil? What picture does Jesus give of Hell?

THE VALUE SYSTEM IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As it becomes clearer, what Jesus demands of his disciples contrasts with what the world promotes and teaches. Even growing up as a Jew, the worldly systems of honor and prestige have infiltrated their hearts. Jesus calls them to be at peace with each other (Mark 9:50) instead of arguing about which one of them would be the greatest (Mark 9:34). Life in the kingdom that Jesus is establishing will require a heart and life change.

Jesus uses the image of a servant and a child to illustrate his point. In the ancient world, both the servant and the child served the master of the house. It would be humiliating and even shameful in some cases to reverse societal roles. However, Jesus doesn't value people according to worldly standards and tells his disciples that if they want to be first in the kingdom, then they need to take the attitude of a servant. They need to get rid of the power struggles and desire for domineering positions.

Not only that, but Jesus also confronts John's belief that only the 12 disciples were authorized to drive out demons (Mark 9:38-39). Ironically, this comes after the nine disciples were unsuccessful at driving out a demon (Mark 9:18). Jesus tells the disciples not to stop that disciple because the kingdom of God is bigger than just the 12 disciples. Yes, Jesus called them to follow him, which is a specific role, but that doesn't exclude other people from participating in the ministry of Jesus. Then, Jesus goes on to warn the disciples about causing others to sin and their commitment to oppose sin at all costs. Their quarreling and disputing about greatness do not lead the disciples to be the true salt of the Earth like Jesus expects (Mark 9:50; Matthew 5:13-16).

MARK 10:1-16

DAY 26

Leaving Galilee, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem by crossing the Jordan River and traveling to the region of Judea. As Jesus is focused on heading to the cross, some Pharisees are trying to trap him in his words. Interestingly, the Pharisees picked the exact topic of debate that landed John the Baptist in prison. Mark 6:17-18 tells us that John the Baptist, whose ministry was also in the Judean wilderness across the Jordan, was teaching against Herodias' unlawful divorce from her husband Philip and her remarriage to his brother, Herod Antipas. While the Pharisees ask Jesus about the legitimacy of divorce, their concern is not on understanding Jesus' teaching on this matter but rather on finding something they could use against him. Jesus sees through the test and objects to their hardness of heart. Jesus' judgment is that it was because of the sinful hearts in humanity that there needed to be guidelines and processes on divorce in the first place. Sin had kept Israel from upholding God's original design and intent for the marriage relationship.

MARK 10:1-12

What question do the Pharisees ask Jesus?
What is the motive behind the question?

How does Jesus answer? What part of scripture does Jesus appeal to?

How does marriage transform two individual people into one flesh? How does this highlight the sacredness of marriage?

MARK 10:13-16

In the kingdom of God, are the 12 disciples greater than the children? How does this challenge the worldly standards of status and privilege that the disciples were arguing about in Mark 9:34?

How does a little child receive a gift? How is this a picture of how everyone should receive the gospel message of Jesus?

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

It is important to remember that Jesus teaches his disciples about God's original design for marriage in response to the Pharisee's trap. This is not an exhaustive teaching about divorce, and one should also look at Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-12, and 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:16 for a broader New Testament teaching. Both the Matthaean and Markan accounts recall Jesus using Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 as the basis for his response. Jesus is once again refocusing his audience to see things from a godly perspective instead of a human perspective.

Jesus first appeals to the truth that God created both male and female. This highlights the equal value of both husband and wife, which seems to be an issue behind the question in Matthew 19:3. Then, Jesus goes on to discuss the truth about marriage—there is a new creation. Two become one. To go backward and undo that one flesh union would be to go against God's creative act. Similarly, Jesus privately teaches his disciples that the one who actively breaks the marriage bond to marry someone else is guilty of adultery (it is the same for both husband and wife). Jesus reminds his audience that divorce is a result of humanity's hardened hearts and not God's intent for creation. It is good news, then, that Jesus came to deal with the sin in our hearts and create a new community of people who can live out God's design for the world through the power of His Spirit. Even for the person who initiates a divorce, there can be grace and forgiveness because, according to Mark 3:28-29, there is only one unforgivable sin, and that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

MARK 10:17-31

DAY 27

Continuing the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus once again shows us what it means to follow him. Jesus demonstrates his love and compassion for the man but also does not soften his message when the man walks away. Faith in Jesus requires action, and there is no middle ground. The man is faced with the decision to either trust Jesus and obey his commands or hold on to the wealth he has acquired. This leads the disciples to question how anyone might be saved and enter God's Kingdom, to which Jesus responds that with God, all things are possible. Jesus is reminding the disciples that it is God's power working in Jesus that establishes the Kingdom. To enter that glorious Kingdom and experience a taste of the age to come requires accepting it like a child (Mark 10:15). Following Jesus brings a whole new way of living, and putting your faith and trust in anything besides Jesus is the same as turning your back and walking away from Jesus.

MARK 10:17-22

How does the rich man's initial posture towards Jesus indicate faith? How is his question focused on his ability?

How has his current approach to following God left him searching for more? Is your current or past approach to following Jesus left you satisfied or searching for more?

What does Jesus call the rich man to do? How does the man's response reveal a lack of trust and dependence upon Jesus? In what ways is Jesus calling you to trust and depend upon him?

MARK 10:23-31

How can wealth be a hindrance to faith? Does a lack of wealth ensure faith? What is the proper response of faith for both those with wealth and those without?

What did Peter have to give up to follow Jesus? How does Jesus reassure them that their commitment to following him won't go unnoticed? In what ways do believers in Jesus get to experience some of the benefits of God's kingdom in the present age?

Why is persecution included in this list? How might this encourage Mark's original audience to continue in faith?

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

For the disciples, Jesus called them to leave their occupations, sense of security, and even the consistency of being home with their families (Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14). For the rich young ruler, it was the great wealth that he had acquired. The thing that makes all the difference is the response. The disciples responded immediately and obeyed Jesus' calling. The rich young man walked away saddened. Faith in Jesus is always decisive. Only one response will lead to eternal life because it is focused on Jesus being the only important thing in life to hold on to.

Is there a reward for those who leave everything to follow Jesus? That seems to be the motivation behind Peter's question. Jesus' answer reveals that as God's kingdom is established, there is much to be gained from believers in this present age. For in the kingdom of God, believers are brought into a new family that can care for and support each other. It is a powerful community to be part of, but allegiance to God's Kingdom might also lead to persecution. Even if a believer loses their life, it will be worth it because they have found the only thing that matters—Jesus (Mark 8:35).

MARK 10:32-52

DAY 28

With the cross getting closer and closer, Jesus is going to begin the ascent to Jerusalem (3,370 feet of elevation change in about 15 miles). Mark makes it clear that Jesus is leading the way to the cross and won't let his fate keep him from making the journey. Misunderstanding what is about to happen in Jerusalem, James and John ask once again for positions of honor and prestige. Naturally, this causes more tension among the 12 disciples as they continue to focus on human concerns. Enduring their shortcomings, Jesus once again teaches them what it means for him to be the Jewish Messiah. The way in which the "Son of Man" (Daniel 7:13-14) gains authority and glory is not by lording it over others, like the rulers of this world. Instead, Jesus will gain authority, glory, and sovereign power by giving his life as a ransom. He will pay the price required to redeem humanity from slavery. While the disciples are still blind to Jesus' identity and purpose, Bartimaeus can clearly see who Jesus is—the awaited King from the lineage of David who is ready to ascend to the throne. However, as Jesus has made clear, his throne will look more like a cross, and his crown will be made of thorns. The road to Jerusalem is one of suffering and pain, not the type of glory James and John were expecting.

MARK 10:32-45

What were James and John expecting would happen when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem as their king?

What is Jesus' motivation and attitude, as described in verses 43-45? How can we have that same mindset in our lives?

MARK 10:46-52

Does Mark reveal the names of any of the other people that Jesus heals? What is interesting about learning the name of Bartimaeus?

How does Bartimaeus demonstrate faith in Jesus' identity and purpose? What can we learn from Bartimaeus's example?

IMAGES OF JESUS' SUFFERING

As Jesus describes the suffering he is about to experience at the hands of the Gentiles (Romans), he uses language from the Old Testament that points to suffering and punishment. While the disciples expect Jesus to arrive in Jerusalem and receive glory, Jesus reveals that their understanding of glory is misplaced. Jesus will achieve glory and honor, but it will be in a way that no one expected. Jesus speaks of that glory in terms of a cup and a baptism.

In the Old Testament, the cup typically referred to God's wrath and judgment that was being poured out on both Israel and non-Israelite nations (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17-23; Jeremiah 49:12; Ezekiel 23:31-34). Jesus is equating his death on the cross as drinking from the cup of God's wrath. Likewise, Jesus understood his death as a form of baptism, in which he would be swallowed and engulfed by the depths of the Earth. Although he will pray for the cup to be taken away (Mark 14:36), he knows that is exactly what he must endure in order for the redemption price to be paid.

Both Jews and Gentiles would understand the language of ransom and redemption. A "ransom" was the price that had to be paid to "redeem" or set free a slave or condemned person. The payment would ensure that any charges would be cleared and the status of the person changed. Jesus reveals that his purpose as the Jewish Messiah was to serve humanity by paying the "ransom" price. That through the cross and resurrection, Jesus might achieve freedom for us so that we can be raised to life in him. We are no longer slaves to sin but made alive in Jesus Christ (Romans 6).

Before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus sends two disciples to retrieve a colt for him to ride on as he finishes the last stretch of the journey. Every step of this journey has made it clear Jesus is not running away but moving towards the cross. As he enters Jerusalem, there is a buzz in the air. No doubt, the celebrations and mood of the upcoming festival of Passover are fueling the excitement. Passover was the time when God had powerfully moved and freed his people from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-15). Each year, this festival was a celebration and reenactment of God's deliverance from oppression and would renew hope that God would once again liberate his people. Without fully understanding what was happening, the disciples entered town with Jesus (John 12:16). The disciples had acknowledged Jesus was the long-awaited King, and now he entered Jerusalem in a way that symbolized his royalty. However, in an anti-climatic way, Jesus enters the temple courts and then leaves town because it is evening.

MARK 11:1-6

How does Jesus display his authority and power by his entrance into Jerusalem?

How do Matthew 21:1-9, Luke 19:29-38, and John 12:12-15 describe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? What details do they focus on?

MARK 11:7-11

How does the crowd respond to Jesus' entrance? How is it a picture of Kingship? Do you view Jesus as King? In what ways does your life reflect that?

How is Jesus' entrance a picture of his humbleness? How far are you willing to travel with and follow Jesus? Would you follow him to the cross?

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

While Mark doesn't give any extra explanations for Jesus' triumphal entry, it is full of imagery from the Old Testament. Jerusalem is the center of Jewish life. It was the political, economic, and religious capital of Israel. It is where the former Kings of Israel reigned on the throne. Not only that, but it is where God chose to establish his name. There was only one temple for the God of Israel, and it stood at the highest point of Jerusalem, reminding the people of the God they served.

Both Matthew and John highlight the symbolism of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. In Zechariah 9:9, God commands Jerusalem to rejoice because "your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Zechariah had proclaimed this message nearly 500 years before Jesus fulfilled it. In context, Zechariah 9 is all about God's power and judgment over Israel's enemies and how God is exalting Israel once again. While there once was oppression and war, God is going to liberate his people and extend his peace to the nations. On that day, God will appear to his people and save them like a "shepherd saves his flock" (Zechariah 9:16).

In Luke 19:41-44, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because they fail to understand and see Jesus as God's agent establishing the promised Kingdom. Instead of seeing Jesus as bringing peace to the world, they will respond in violence towards Jesus and demand his death. Because they have failed to acknowledge Jesus' authority and power that comes from God, they will experience judgment when Jerusalem is sacked (The Jewish War of AD 69-70).

MARK 11:12-25

DAY 30

As Jesus enters Jerusalem again, he is going to cast judgment upon the Temple and disrupt the sacrifices and rituals taking place in the Temple. While his actions are going to lead to the escalation of the conflict between him and the religious leaders, they are also symbolic of his role as the Messiah. This is made clearer since Mark “sandwiches” the story of Jesus clearing the temple within the story of the fig tree. Throughout the history of Israel, God has desired for his people to produce fruit in line with his character. God has desired for his people to follow him and work with him in extending His goodness to the world. However, for the most part, the Israelites chose to live in rebellion and worship idols and false gods. Even the Temple, which was supposed to be a place of worship towards God, had become a hideout for the religious leaders to abuse their power and identity as leaders of God’s people. Israel was supposed to be a “blessing” or “light to the Gentiles” but instead was bent towards violence (Mark 11:18). By casting judgment upon the Fig Tree and thus the Temple, Jesus is pointing to the end of its purpose. God is doing something new through Jesus and transforming the concept of the Temple.

MARK 11:12-19

Why does Jesus curse the fig tree? What is the fruit that Jesus sees when he is in the temple courts?

What is symbolic about Jesus shutting down the temple rituals and sacrifices? In what ways is Jesus going to transform the location and purpose of the temple?

MARK 11:20-25

What happened to the fig tree? How is this a picture of Jesus’ judgment? What is it supposed to teach us about the temple?

What type of faith does Jesus desire from his followers? How do prayer and a willingness to forgive demonstrate a heart producing the proper type of fruit?

THE END OF THE PHYSICAL TEMPLE

Jesus is casting judgment upon the Temple not only because it is failing to uphold its original intent but also because God is doing something new through the sacrifice of Jesus. The Temple is a picture of God’s Holy Presence dwelling on Earth. Once Jesus resurrects and the Holy Spirit comes, the existence of the physical temple will no longer be needed. In Jesus, he becomes the new temple.

Both the Temple and the Tabernacle before that were a place for the Israelites to make atonement for their sins. It was instituted by God to provide a way for Him to live within the center of the Israelite camp and not destroy the Israelites due to their unholiness. To be cleansed of their sin and achieve atonement for a time, the Israelites would have to sacrifice different animals on a regular basis. However, this practice highlights the importance of Jesus’ death. Hebrews 10:10 tells us that Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice. Animal sacrifices and burnt offerings are no longer required to be made at the temple for the atonement of sins.

Not only that, but the rest of the New Testament makes it clear that followers of Jesus have become the new temple of God. Both individually and together as a community, we form the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:10-17; 6:19-20). Our proper worship is to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1). For those who put their faith in Jesus, there is a new way of worshipping and relating to God. The new Kingdom coming meant that the old had to be ended.

Once again, the issue of Jesus' authority is going to be questioned. This time, it is going to come from the very top of Israel's religious leaders. As Jesus makes clear, they aren't interested in the actual truth. Instead of answering them directly, Jesus pushes them to silence. They refuse to answer his question because if they answered truthfully, they would answer their original question about Jesus' authority and source of power. To make matters worse, Jesus gives another parable. This time, though, it doesn't need any explanation because the point was easily understood. The leaders of Israel stand in opposition to what God is doing; therefore, they will be judged accordingly.

MARK 11:27-33

Why do the religious leaders refuse to answer Jesus' question about John the Baptist?

How is Jesus' ministry threatening their positions of honor and power? What would it take for them to repent and believe in Jesus?

MARK 12:1-13

Who does the vineyard represent? Who is the man who planted the vineyard? Who are the tenant farmers?

What is the judgment that Jesus pronounces upon the religious leaders? How does this point to the new thing that God is trying to do through Jesus?

ISAIAH 5

In the opening chapters of Isaiah, God pronounces judgment against the people of Israel for their rebellious and sinful hearts. They are full of idolatry and all forms of wickedness. They neither hear God nor heed his commands. In chapter five of Isaiah, God even sings a song for the Israelites and uses the image of a vineyard. While the details are a little different than the parable in Mark 12, the concepts are the same.

In Isaiah 5:1-7, God uses the image of a vineyard to describe His children, Israel. God selected a fertile place for the vineyard and did everything He could do to ensure a fruitful harvest of good grapes, but it still produced bad grapes. His love for his vineyard was evident, but it wouldn't produce the fruit that he desired. Instead, Israel only produced bloodshed and distress (Isaiah 5:7). God used that imagery in Isaiah 5 to warn the people of the coming wrath and destruction. If the people of Israel only heeded God's warning and repented, then exile could have been avoided. However, as the book of Isaiah made clear, the people were stubborn and refused to repent. Their hardness of heart did not allow them to respond appropriately to God's warning.

Similarly, Jesus uses this familiar imagery of Israel as a vineyard to cast judgment upon the religious leaders and the rebellious nation of Israel. There is still time for them to repent and respond appropriately to what God is doing, but history has shown that they won't. They didn't repent when God sent the first servant or the several after that. Now, God is sending his son (a rare claim to Jesus' divinity in the book of Mark) in hopes that his son would enjoy the fruit of the vineyard. However, the story ends violently with the rejection of the son as well as a judgment upon the tenants of the vineyard. The warning for all of us is, are we going to repent and join in with what God is doing, or will we be like the tenant farmers who persist in their wicked and rebellious ways?

MARK 12:13-27

DAY 32

After Jesus escalated the conflict between him and the religious leaders in Jerusalem by speaking a parable against them, Jesus will once again face a round of questions. The first question brought by the Pharisees and Herodians (an unusual combination since they typically didn't get along) was a question meant to ensnare Jesus in his words. Their goal was to get Jesus to say something to isolate himself from the crowds or say something incriminating against the Roman authority. However, Jesus wisely avoids the trap. Later, a group of Sadducees come to question Jesus. Their question takes a different approach by presenting an absurd, hypothetical situation that would lead to an answer that would cause other theological questions. Once again, Jesus responds in a way that reflects his wisdom and authority in understanding and applying God's intent with Scripture.

MARK 12:13-17

What is ironic about the flattering description that the Pharisees and Herodians give about Jesus? In what ways does it highlight Jesus' character? In what ways does it highlight the character of the Pharisees and Herodians?

Whose image are humans created in (Genesis 1:27)? How does that understanding elevate Jesus' response to "give back to God what is God's?"

In what ways are you withholding part of yourself from God? How do you need to surrender those parts and give them to God?

MARK 12:18-27

According to Mark, what do the Sadducees not believe in? What does that reveal about their motivation for asking Jesus this absurd, hypothetical question?

How does Jesus talk about the resurrection? Will it be the exact same as our present life on Earth?

How is the resurrection consistent with God's character? Why would this be an important truth to remind followers of Jesus? How would this truth affect Mark's audience, who was tempted to live in fear rather than in faith?

THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE RESURRECTION

Following the parable of the tenants, where Jesus casts judgment upon the religious leaders for withholding the fruit of the vineyard from the owner, Jesus redirects their focus away from the insignificant piece of metal that bears the image of Caesar to the fact that true discipleship is lived by giving God what is due—your whole self. If humanity is created in God's image, then we bear his name and inscription. Therefore, our lives belong to God and should reflect a proper posture of honor and respect towards God, which the religious leaders are guilty of neglecting.

Not only that, but Jesus says the Sadducees don't rightly understand the Scriptures or the power of God. Jesus uses a well-known passage from Exodus (the Sadducees viewed only Genesis-Deuteronomy as authoritative) to prove the existence of the resurrection. To deny the resurrection is to deny a vital part of God's character and faithfulness. In the life to come, God will continue to provide and take care of his creation; therefore, the question of provision and protection for the widowed wife isn't necessary. God will continue to be faithful in this life and the next.

MARK 12:28-34

DAY 33

Once again, Jesus is going to be asked a question about properly understanding the instructions and teachings of God. However, this time, the question doesn't seem to be a trap; it is genuine. The question was a common question in the life of Israel—what does it mean to follow God properly? Jesus responds by quoting the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The *Shema* functioned as a sort of confession of faith and was typically prayed in the morning by good Jews. Jesus then attaches to his answer a second command from Leviticus 19:18. By answering the way he does, Jesus not only focuses on the heart of God but also points to how he is the fulfillment of the commands of Scripture. No longer will the temple be necessary for burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus will institute proper worship of God through his ultimate sacrifice. In the Kingdom of God, the focus of our relationship with God is one built upon His love for us. God's love for us enables us to live in a way that demonstrates our love for Him, ourselves, and our neighbor.

MARK 12:28-31

If you had to summarize what it means to follow God, how would you answer? What would you prioritize and focus on?

How does Jesus summarize the instructions of God from the Old Testament? What does he prioritize? How do you need to focus on these things this week in your life?

MARK 12:32-34

How does Jesus' view of God lead to proper worship and living? Can the honor and worship due to God be shared with anything or anyone else?

In what ways does the teacher of the law understand the heart of following God? Is that enough to be part of the Kingdom of God?

THE FRUIT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Surprisingly, this is the first time in the book of Mark that a teacher of law agrees with Jesus and is said to be near the Kingdom of God. His perspective and understanding of the heart of God revealed through Scripture puts him close enough to the Kingdom to respond with proper faith, but we aren't told the outcome.

However, Jesus' answer in this section does continue the theme that he has been teaching since he arrived in Jerusalem. Good fruit is expected from the followers of God because they reflect the image of the God who created them. Proper worship is to give God the proper respect and honor. Since God created each person in His image, He is worthy of our entire lives being offered to him. If that is the starting point for living properly in God's Kingdom, then it leads to proper respect and honor for the image-bearers of God. The disciple of Jesus must love their neighbor as yourself—not instead of. The more one worships and loves God, the more one will be able to reflect his love better.

Since arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus has also made it clear that the religious leaders stand in judgment for neglecting God's commands and instructions. Their fruit is not in line with what God desires. Their failure to recognize and acknowledge God's power and authority in Jesus has led them to produce bad fruit. They have failed to respond in faith to Jesus and have condemned themselves. Because of Jesus' wisdom and authority, he silences the religious leaders (in the temple courts of all places, which was their primary stomping ground).

MARK 12:35-44

DAY 34

After being questioned in the temple courts by various religious leaders, Jesus responds by initiating the questions this time. As Mark presents these stories, this is the final set of teachings of Jesus in the temple courts. The opposition and conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders have escalated to the point where they are actively trying to arrest him. Now that Jesus has launched an offensive question and warning against the religious leaders, there will be no resolution of the conflict. His death is now going to be on the immediate horizon. Only then will everything make sense. His identity and purpose that he has been revealing throughout his ministry will become clear. He isn't just a human called by God but is God in human form, bringing about God's salvation.

MARK 12:35-40

What lineage did the Jews believe the Messiah would come from? In their understanding of the Messiah, who was superior, the father or the son descended from the father?

Jesus points out that David calls the Messiah his Lord. How does this point to Jesus' understanding that the Messiah is superior to David? What matters more—the human lineage or the Messiah's divinity?

MARK 10:41-44

Why does Jesus warn his followers about the religious leaders? What behaviors and motivations should believers avoid? Why? In what ways are you or aren't you living in accordance with what Jesus desires?

What made the widow's sacrifice truly incredible? How should believers imitate her offering? In what ways does this foreshadow Jesus' offering on the cross?

JESUS AS LORD

Once again, Jesus is shifting attention towards a godly perspective of the identity and purpose of the Messiah. While he is born into the line of David (his mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph, who was from the lineage of David), that is just part of his identity. So far in the book of Mark, Jesus' identity as Messiah has pointed to his kingship as being part of the royal lineage. He is the long-awaited King that God had promised. However, that is just part of identity.

In this encounter with the teachers of the law, Jesus quotes the opening line of Psalm 110, pointing to his superiority. David wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that this future one (Messiah) would become his Lord. He goes on to write that his kingdom would be established by God. For Jesus, who just reaffirmed monotheism in the previous interaction with a teacher of the law (Mark 12:29), this is a bold claim. Jesus isn't claiming to be a second God to worship, but the only God of Israel now present in the human person of Jesus. Jesus is more than just fully human; he is also fully God. That is why he has the authority to teach and do the things that he is doing. When Jesus claims authority over the temple and its function, he can rightly do so because, as God, he instituted it. He has the authority to change its function and institute a new temple in himself and through the church.

While not explicitly stated, Jesus' selection of Psalm 110 also points to another aspect of his identity. After talking about the Kingdom of the future Messiah, David writes that the Messiah will be a priest forever. Jesus isn't just King, but also our high priest (Hebrews 4-10) forever.

MARK 13

DAY 35

As Jesus leaves the temple courts, the disciples comment on the magnificence of the Temple. Herod the Great had sought to make the Temple the most spectacle building in the ancient world. However, as Jesus is going to make clear, the temple is going to be destroyed. Since arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus has been casting judgment upon the temple and highlighting that its purpose is coming to an end. It is vital to remember that this whole teaching is sparked by the disciples' question of when the Temple will be destroyed and what will be the sign of its destruction. What follows will be a lengthy answer to the disciples' question about the destruction of the Temple.

MARK 13:1-13

What question is Jesus answering? How should we keep that the focus of this whole section?

What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of the believer? When is His power most evident? What is to be expected of those who believe in Jesus?

MARK 13:14-31

Once again, what is the question that Jesus is answering?

What is the sign that will signify the coming destruction of the Temple? While not specific, how would Daniel 11:31 help the reader understand the sign?

MARK 13:32-37

Will there be a clear sign of the final judgment of the whole world? If not, what is supposed to be the focus of the believer?

What does it mean to be watchful?

MAKING SOME SENSE OF MARK 13

The first part of Jesus' answer (verses 5-13) is preparing the disciples to be patient as they wait for the signs of the end of the Temple. During that time, there will be many rumors meant to deceive, and believers will have to endure afflictions. These are not the signs of the temple's destruction but reminders that the end of the temple is coming. The point is to patiently stand firm in the gospel.

The second part of Jesus' answer (verses 14-31) focuses on the urgency to respond when the sign of the temple's destruction finally comes. This period also requires discernment because there will be plenty of false teachers who will claim to be the Messiah and will lead people astray. When the Temple is finally destroyed, it is because of God's judgment against it (similar language is used in Isaiah 13 and Ezekiel 32 as divine judgment against Babylon and Egypt as is used in verses 24-25). When the Temple is finally destroyed, it validates Jesus' power and authority since he issued judgment against it and predicted its destruction. Jesus makes it clear that the destruction of the temple will happen within the present generation since they have persisted in their rebellion, and their hardened hearts have kept them from proper belief and faith in Jesus.

The final part of Jesus' answer (verses 32-37) shifts the disciples' focus away from the destruction of the temple with its clear signs to the unpredictable time when the whole world will be judged. Unlike the destruction of the temple, which had clear warning signs, this time, there will be no signs. The command that Jesus gives is to stay awake and alert. The parable Jesus uses highlights the need to be on guard. There will come a time of judgment for the whole world. The only question is, what will you be doing when that time comes? Will you be living in faith or rebellion?

MARK 14:1-26

DAY 36

The conflict and tension between Jesus and the religious leaders have reached its breaking point. There is no longer any doubt about what will happen to Jesus. What he has predicted will come true. The timing of Jesus' death and sacrifice wasn't a coincidence. For the Israelites, Passover signified the start of the exodus from slavery. Passover was the final meal before the difficult exodus journey and preceded the death of the firstborn. Passover was how Israel lived under God's protection and was covered from His judgment. In Jesus' day, the Israelites weren't technically enslaved but weren't technically free. They had been conquered by Rome and had to submit to Roman rule. During this festival and meal, God chose to reveal Jesus' identity and purpose to his closest followers. Everything that Jesus had been doing and teaching was getting ready to find completion in his death and resurrection. Jesus was getting ready to lead his followers on a new exodus from slavery, but it wasn't the type of freedom people expected. Jesus wasn't going to defeat the Romans but was focused on a different enemy of God's people—Satan.

MARK 14:1-11

How is the woman offering a picture of the faith Jesus desires from his disciples? How much is Jesus worth to you? Is there a cost too great?

How did the woman's offering highlight what was getting ready to happen to Jesus? How is the woman's example different than what Judas is about to do?

MARK 14:12-26

How does Jesus demonstrate his authority and power by the way he sends the disciples to prepare for the Passover?

In what ways does Jesus take symbolic elements from the Passover (read Exodus 1-14 if you aren't sure) and transform them into a new meal focused on his sacrifice? How does the Passover provide a rich foundation for understanding Jesus' death?

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BREAD AND CUP

The command to take and eat signifies involvement on behalf of the one eating. It is not passive but requires action. In the act of eating, participants consume that which is offered to sustain and fuel the body. Jesus knows that his body is about to be beaten and pierced, and he wants his disciples to see that his sacrifice is what sustains and fuels believers.

Once again, the command to drink from the cup signifies involvement on behalf of the one drinking. It is not passive but requires action. In the act of drinking, participants consume what is offered. Jesus uses the cup to symbolize what he will achieve on the cross. He is using sacrificial language to describe the effects that his shed blood will have. According to the Old Testament, blood was required to atone for sins (Leviticus 16-17; Hebrews 9:22). Jesus is using the cup to represent his blood that will cover the sins of the world. But there is a second aspect that the cup represents. Through Jesus' blood, God will establish a new covenant with His people. This new covenant is described as God cleansing his people and removing their hearts of stone. In the new covenant, God gives His children His Spirit and creates in them a new heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:22-36).

When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we testify to the salvation and freedom found in Jesus. We find strength and perseverance to respond in faith and align ourselves under Jesus' authority because he has earned the right to be called our Lord.

MARK 14:27-52

DAY 37

After eating one final meal with his disciples, Jesus and his disciples head out to the Mount of Olives. It is here in Gethsemane (meaning olive or oil press) that Jesus is going to show his dependence and intimate affection for God the Father. Through his prayers, Jesus is clearly distressed and suffering immensely. He knows the cup of wrath that is coming and asks for another way. However, he knows that there isn't another way to achieve God's will. Jesus must endure the suffering till the end. Sadly, he must endure it alone, for even his closest followers will desert him.

MARK 14:27-31

Once again, how does Jesus show his concern for his disciples? What does he tell them is going to happen?

What emotions do you think Peter felt when recalling Jesus' warning to him about falling away?

MARK 14:32-42

What is the picture of Jesus as he prays? How does Jesus convey his agony and distress?

How does Jesus demonstrate his trust and dependence upon God the Father?

MARK 14:43-52

How did Jesus respond to Judas' betrayal? How might he have felt to be abandoned by all his disciples?

In what ways have you abandoned and deserted Jesus?

FOLLOWING JESUS

When Jesus left Jerusalem and headed east to the Mount of Olives, he faced a choice. The first option would be to continue along the route and cross the peak of the Mount of Olives. From there, he would have been able to disappear into the Judean wilderness and avoid the cross. But Jesus doesn't give in to that temptation to run. Instead, he turned off the path and fell to the ground in a garden of olive trees. Jesus chose to stay and face God's will for him. The immense weightiness of Jesus' praying in Gethsemane is hard to imagine. The agony and sorrow that Jesus faced were almost enough to lead him to death (Mark 14:34).

However, the journey to the cross that Jesus began in Mark 8:31 is finally upon him. With every step he took toward Jerusalem, it was another step closer to this moment of suffering. Jesus didn't refuse it or avoid it. Instead, Jesus led the way the entire journey (Mark 10:32). Jesus is the perfect example of faith. He displays total trust and dependence upon God the Father's authority and power. He was confident that on the other side of the cross was his resurrection (Mark 14:28).

In contrast to Jesus' example of faith, the disciples are shown to desert Jesus in this time of suffering. Interestingly, Mark doesn't even call them disciples when he writes about their abandonment in Mark 14:50. They aren't acting like disciples; instead, they resemble Adam and Eve, who hid in the Garden because of their fear, nakedness, and shame. They have disgracefully abandoned Jesus.

But there is hope for the believer today. We know that the disciples (except for Judas) found forgiveness and restoration after Jesus was resurrected. Even after abandoning Jesus, the disciples were still entrusted and commissioned to be the first ones to continue his ministry. This one moment did not define them, nor did it keep them from participating fully in the Kingdom of God after the resurrection. May we have faith like Jesus and the disciples to keep going, even if it leads to death.

MARK 14:53-15:15

DAY 38

After being arrested, Jesus is led to the house of the High Priest to be accused. From there, he will be handed over to the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Throughout the different trials and accusations, Jesus remained silent for the most part. This is his purpose as God's Messiah. The cup of suffering is for him only. He must endure it. While Jesus is confident in his identity, Peter is going to deny his. Going before Pilate, Jesus' death is going to be sealed. Pilate will hand Jesus over to be flogged and eventually crucified. The cross was the symbol of Rome's violent power. It was a brutal picture of what happened to rebels who tried to oppose Rome. The cross was a political message sent to anyone who might dare to test Rome's authority or power.

MARK 14:53-65

What were the accusations brought against Jesus? What is Jesus' response?

What does Jesus say that outrages the high priest? What does Jesus say about his identity?

MARK 14:66-72

How does Peter fulfill what Jesus predicted in Mark 14:27-31?

What is Peter's response to the realization of his denial? In what ways have you been like Peter, both in error and remorse?

MARK 15:1-15

What is the main accusation against Jesus? How does Jesus respond?

In what ways does Jesus swap places with Barabbas? In what ways is that a picture of what Jesus does for you?

ISAIAH 53 – THE SUFFERING SERVANT

Hidden in the backdrop of the second half of the book of Mark is the portrayal of Jesus as the suffering servant described in Isaiah 53. Even though Jesus was innocent, he remained silent. Take time today to read Isaiah 53 and meditate on the significance of Jesus' death.

Isaiah 53:3–10 (NIV)

³He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low
esteem.

⁴Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on
him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken
away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was
punished.

⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and
cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an
offering for sin,

Jesus started his ministry by proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was coming. Then, through his teachings and miracles, Jesus gave testimony that God's Spirit was at work through him. People were being given a foretaste of God's everlasting dominion breaking into this world. No longer would humanity be held captive in the darkness of Satan's domain. God established his Kingdom through the person and work of Jesus. The challenge was how to respond. Repeatedly, Jesus called people to see his identity and purpose as being the Messiah that was sent by God to establish His Kingdom. The problem was that the way in which God's Kingdom was going to be established looked different than anyone expected. For Jesus, he made it clear that the only way for it to be established was through his death. The way to defeat evil wasn't through violence done to others but by violence done to him. The way to defeat Satan was to let Satan defeat him (well, at least that is what it appeared like until he was resurrected). For Jesus, his royal robes were stripped from his body, his crown made of thorns, and the seat of honor and power was the cross. Mark has skillfully led us to this point when we are confronted with Jesus' death and what it means for our lives.

MARK 15:16-32

How is Jesus properly identified? What is ironic about the religious leaders wanting him to come down from the cross so that they might "see and believe"?

Who is Jesus? How has his identity and purpose been revealed throughout the book of Mark?

Do you "see and believe" Jesus' identity and purpose? How are you going to respond in faith?

MARK 15:33-47

What's the significance of the temple veil being torn from top to bottom?

What is the confession of the Roman centurion? What is ironic about a Roman soldier being able to see clearly who Jesus is when Jews couldn't?

How does Joseph of Arimathea demonstrate proper faith in Jesus? What is he willing to risk and do for Jesus?

THE CENTRALITY OF THE CROSS

A person cannot understand Jesus' purpose accurately without understanding the cross. So many images and concepts find their completion in Jesus' death. Perhaps one of the clearest and best pictures of this is when the temple veil was torn when Jesus breathed his last. The veil marked the separation between God and the rest of his creation. Ever since Adam and Eve, humanity has been living in rebellious sin. But God has always desired more for His creation than to live in rebellious sin. Therefore, God demonstrated His great love for us through Jesus' sacrifice (Romans 5:6-8).

The punishment and consequence of our sin is death. But instead of making us die for our sins, Jesus journeyed to the cross to pay our ransom. He took our place. He endured our pain. He drank our cup of wrath. Jesus, who is God in human form, came to Earth to serve us and meet our greatest need (Mark 10:45). Our King took our punishment upon Himself. When he died, the barrier between us and God was removed. The veil of separation is now gone. Humanity can enter the presence of God and experience His life-giving Kingdom. Surprisingly, it is a Gentile Roman soldier who is the first one to acknowledge Jesus' proper identity on the cross.

After watching Jesus die on the cross, it is three women who set out to prepare Jesus' body for its burial (spices would mask some of the smell of the decomposition of the body as it lay in the tomb). Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome expect to find Jesus' dead body in the tomb, but instead find the stone already rolled away. A young man dressed in white (presumably an angelic messenger) proclaims the good news that Jesus has risen. It is the three women who are the first to learn about Jesus' resurrection and are given the task of proclaiming it to the other disciples. They are told that Jesus will be waiting for them in Galilee, but when they leave the tomb, their fear keeps them silent.

MARK 16:1-7

Why is it important that the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb were three women? How does this point to the validity of Jesus' bodily resurrection?

What were the women expecting to find? What did they find? In what ways do you have expectations about Jesus that are misplaced?

What is the message that the angel proclaims? In what ways does this message require the women to respond properly in faith?

MARK 16:8

What is the response (at least at first) of the women? How does this demonstrate a realistic picture of discipleship?

Did the news about Jesus' resurrection stay a secret? In what ways do fear, trembling, and bewilderment have to be overcome in order to tell others about Jesus?

How does the resurrection of Jesus change your life? Who are you supposed to tell about Jesus? To where has the Lord gone ahead of you and called you to meet him there in faith?

THE ABRUPT ENDING OF MARK

The good news (gospel) of Jesus cannot be understood properly without seeing the resurrected Lord. It is the resurrection that changes everything. Up until this moment, the disciples couldn't see clearly who Jesus was. But now, they will see Jesus in His glory and power. The grave could not hold him because his rightful place is at the right hand of God the Father. It is because of the humble sacrifice that he receives all authority, glory, and sovereign power (Daniel 7:14). Jesus is on the throne, and his Kingdom is everlasting.

The abrupt ending has baffled Christians for centuries. The earliest and best manuscripts stop after verse 8. The first alternative ending is known as verses 9-20, and the second, even shorter, ending is typically included as a footnote in many Bibles after verse 8. Neither of those endings line up linguistically with the rest of the book and seem to be added at a later date, no doubt due to the abruptness. With that being said, it is possible that Mark wrote a different ending to the book that has been lost, but he also could have chosen to end it after verse 8. Either way, this shouldn't cause us to worry. The Holy Spirit has preserved the book of Mark in this form for a reason. Its abruptness causes us to see ourselves in the story and ask, "What's next"? Will the good news of Jesus be proclaimed, or will fear have the final say? Now that I know about the resurrection, what will I do?