

A Study of Mark

Study

Lesson 1 — Chapter 1

We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us. Before you start each lesson, pray that our Lord will use it to grow you in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as He is revealed in each section.

Why is the Gospel according to Mark called the Gospel of Action?

The Gospel according to Mark is popularly known as the Gospel of Action because it is all about believing everything that Jesus said and did. The Gospel does not simply record what Jesus said; it directs us to live it out, acting on His words by His power. The Lord made it clear that if we say we believe but do nothing, we do not yet fully believe what He has said in His Word.

What were the sources of authentic information for Mark?

The Gospel of Mark was one of the first New Testament books to be written. Though John Mark, his full name, was not one of the twelve apostles, he travelled with Paul and his uncle, Barnabas, on their first missionary journey. His closest relationship, however, was with Simon Peter, and this Gospel has long been considered Peter's own account, as told to Mark. Some have suggested that the facts of the Gospel come from Peter, and the explanations from Paul.

With whom in mind did Mark write the Gospel?

Mark wrote this Gospel specifically with the Romans in mind. The Romans had brought a kind of forced peace to the world - often called the Pax Romana - through their military strength and firm rule, and with it came justice, good roads, law and order, and protection. Those were the days when the Caesars ruled that part of the world.

What differences exist in the Gospel according to Matthew and Mark?

Considering Peter as its source, it is no wonder the Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of action - Peter was that kind of man. Here, the Lord Jesus lays aside the robes of royalty we saw in Matthew and girds Himself with the towel of service. Jesus is the King in Matthew, but the Servant, or Servant King, in Mark. Mark goes straight to the point, to the action and accomplishment of Jesus Christ.

What does the first chapter of the Gospel according to Mark cover?

As we begin the first chapter of the Gospel, we see the intensity of Jesus' ministry. There is probably more content in this first chapter of Mark than in any other chapter in the Bible. It begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, showing how he fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi. It follows Jesus through a busy Sabbath, demonstrates His authority over the demonic realm, and concludes with a mighty work of cleansing a leper. Yet, despite the pressure of a busy life, Jesus still took time to pray, getting up before dawn to be alone with His Father. Mark wrote of the facts of the Gospel: the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, and His experience here for three and a half years in public ministry.

What did Mark write about John the Baptist, and why?

First, Mark tells us of the messenger, John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). John did not baptise people in order to forgive their sins; rather, his ministry was about preparing the way for people to receive Jesus Christ. God called John to be a prophet in the wilderness, and it was to him that the crowds went out. He stirred them with his preaching, but John knew who he was, and he knew to whom he was to point people. He preached, saying, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7).

What did John say about baptism?

John preached, "I indeed have baptised you with water: but he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost" (Mark 1:8). Mark then tells us that when Jesus - the second person of the Godhead - is baptised and comes up out of the water, the Spirit of God, the third person, descends upon Him like a dove, and a voice out of heaven, God the Father, says, "Thou art my

beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). The Trinity is brought out here by inference rather than by direct statement, and the moment affirms Jesus both as God’s Son and as the Man now ready for ministry.

What was the ministry of Jesus reported in the first section of the Gospel according to Mark?

Immediately after His baptism, Jesus did not begin His ministry. The Spirit of God drives Jesus into the wilderness for a time of testing. During forty days of intense prayer and fasting - which we emulate during the season of Lent - Satan tempts Jesus, but He does not fail; rather, He asserts the authority of God over everything. We will never know the depth of the pain He suffered in this wilderness. After the temptation, the Lord moves into His ministry, specifically with works and words that illustrate the work of a Servant King. He preached the Gospel of God, saying, **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel”** (Mark 1:15).

What did Jesus do first as He began His ministry?

As Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee, He calls His disciples to follow Him. The first disciples, who were fishermen, leave their nets and follow Him into a busy life of ministry. This first section also tells us about a typical day with Jesus. It happened to be the Sabbath, and Jesus and His disciples were in Capernaum, Jesus’ ministry headquarters (since He had been rejected in Nazareth). That Sabbath morning, Jesus went into the synagogue and taught. The locals were “astonished at his doctrine: for **he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes**” (Mark 1:22). There was nothing unusual about that day in the synagogue, but when our Lord came, His message startled everyone. Something was clearly different about this Teacher, and they all agreed on it.

What were two highlights of that Sabbath day?

1. Jesus orders the demons around:

Interrupting Jesus as He taught, a man controlled by an unclean spirit cried out, “Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mark 1:25). After this miracle, Jesus’ fame spread throughout the whole region around Galilee. The people were amazed both by the authority of His teaching and by this demonstration of a power only God has - yet even then, it was the demons, not the people, who recognised Jesus at once for who He was.

2. He heals the sick:

Later that same day, Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law, as well as many more people: “he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils” (Mark 1:34). This is the beginning of Jesus’ healing ministry. Through His teaching and His healing alike, Jesus was preparing people for the salvation that would come through His death and resurrection - for only by His death for us on the cross can we be saved.

What was the last miracle healing Jesus performed reported in this chapter?

The last miracle in this chapter was a difficult case of leprosy. This disease was a killer, both physically, psychologically, and spiritually, since a leper was cut off from family, worship, and community, as well as from health. This leper came to Jesus, pleading for Him to heal him: “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” (Mark 1:40). Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand, touched him, and said, “I will; be thou clean” (Mark 1:41). The miracle was immediate: the man was completely healed. Jesus then had to leave the towns and go into the countryside, because of the crowds that began to gather around Him from every direction.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Mark’s Gospel answers the question, “Can Jesus do the job?” Looking at chapter 1 - His authority in teaching, over demons, and over sickness and disease - which moment convinces you most that Jesus really can do what He claims? Explain why that moment stands out to you.
2. Jesus faced forty days of testing in the wilderness before He began His public ministry. Think of a time you faced pressure or temptation before an important moment in your own life - a hard decision, a new responsibility, a chance to stand up for what is right. What does Jesus’ example in the wilderness teach you about how to face your own testing?
3. Jesus healed people’s bodies, but His deeper purpose was to bring people to repentance and faith in Him. Is there a “leprosy” in your own life - a habit, a hurt, or something you are ashamed of - that you need Jesus to reach out and touch? What makes it hard to bring that to Him, the way the leper did?
4. John the Baptist was content to say, “There cometh one mightier than I after me.” He pointed people to Jesus rather

than to himself. Where in your own life - with friends, on social media, in your family - could you take John's attitude, and point others to Jesus rather than seeking attention for yourself?

—End of Lesson 1—

Lesson 2 — Chapters 2 and 3

Let us continue with the study of the Gospel according to Mark. In this lesson, we will study Chapters 2 and 3. Controversy seems to have been a way of life for our Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. Indeed, He seems to have used these occasions as opportunities to stress the important truths concerning Him and the coming of the Kingdom of God. When we carefully study the Gospel we also find that on every occasion our Lord spoke very clearly, addressing various issues at hand.

What was the main focus found in these chapters?

In these chapters, far-reaching implications are made about the Sabbath principles, and the observance of various laws and customs. Let us briefly examine this passage with a view primarily to highlight these teachings of our Lord in the light of the spiritual freedom He has offered mankind.

Who were the main opponents of Jesus?

We find Jesus embroiled in conflict with the institutional religious leaders of His time, the Pharisees. (Please read an additional note at the end of this Lesson about the main religious and political groups of people during the time of Jesus Christ: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Samaritans.)

The Pharisees were the Jewish religious group that zealously followed the Old Testament laws as well as their own religious traditions. They were highly respected in the community, but they hated Jesus because He challenged their misplaced pride, their uncaring attitudes, and their dishonourable motives. In Chapter 3:6 we read that the Pharisees began to plot against Jesus with the Herodians, a Jewish political group that supported the rule of the Herodian dynasty. Jesus was seen as a threat to them, and though the two groups typically disagreed with one another, on this occasion they joined forces against Jesus.

What were the main points of disagreement between Jesus and the religious leaders?

In the Pharisees' ongoing conflict with Jesus, the most consistent issue is the observance of the Sabbath. Mark 2:23-24 says, "And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?" Jumping ahead to Mark 3:1-2, we read, "And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him." Jesus went on to heal the man's hand (Mark 3:5).

What was their main charge against Jesus based on these two incidents?

These are two incidents recorded in the Gospels in which Jesus and His disciples are charged with violating the Sabbath. The account here in Mark 2 is the only time the disciples were censured; most other times it is Jesus Himself who is accused of breaking the Sabbath.

How did the religious leaders interpret the Ten Commandments?

Over time, Jewish legal scholars built an increasingly detailed set of interpretations around the fourth commandment's instruction to do no work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). Jewish tradition eventually codified this into thirty-nine specific categories of forbidden work, with further derivative rules spelling out exactly what counted under each category. For example: the broad command was to do no work; a specific rule said that reaping and threshing counted as work; and a derivative rule said that plucking heads of grain counted as reaping, and rubbing them in the hands counted as threshing. It was on this basis that the Pharisees judged that the disciples had broken the Sabbath law.

Explain the dispute about the Sabbath law.

Jesus' apparent violation of the Sabbath rules was the heart of the dispute. God gave the Sabbath rest in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). We see that the Sabbath command is tied to two great truths: the creation of the world, and the exodus from Egypt, when God saved His people from slavery. Sabbath, in Hebrew, means rest. These two truths teach us two wonderful lessons about Sabbath rest. To summarise, observance of the Sabbath was meant to remind us that every aspect of life, physical and spiritual, comes from God as a gift, so the result for God's people ought to be joy, gratitude, celebration, worship, rest, merriment, freedom, praise, and renewal. Perhaps the best one-word summary of what God desires for His people on the Sabbath is recreation — re-creation — in every way: spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally. There ought to be a rhythm of rest in life so that there can be a wonderful refreshment and renewal.

Does it mean that we just have to find time for God one day in a week of seven days?

The Sabbath is not one day given to God while we keep the other six for ourselves. It is rather a peculiar sign and symbol of the deepest things in life. The Sabbath principle reminds us that there must be a time each week when we stop and take note of God. It is a mistake to let our lives become so rushed, so full of busyness, that we fail to take care of two vital human needs — rest and worship.

As the early Christians knew, the particular day of the week is not the important point. You can rest and worship on Saturday, or you can rest and worship on Sunday. Some people have to work on Sundays, and their day off may be Monday or Saturday. They can still fulfil the Sabbath purpose whatever day of the week it is. The Sabbath reminds us to take time to rest and to take time to worship the God who made everything possible for us.

What thoughts do you have about Sabbath?

Once a week, all of us — including preachers and priests — have to decide what we will do with the first day of the week. “What are you going to do this Sunday?” That is the question that looms for all of us as the week draws to a close. Will you go to church, or will you find something else to do? The one thing Sunday — the day the modern world treats as its Sabbath — offers in our society is choice. Weekends have become the ideal time for travel, a mini-vacation, or a family reunion; a leisurely drive or a visit to old friends. Most major sporting events happen on Sundays, and for some, golf on Sunday has become a religion in itself. Others fill the day with television and social media, endlessly browsing rather than resting. And then there is shopping — shops, restaurants, and cinemas are all open and full.

And, of course, one might also go to church. Every week we are confronted with the same question: **“What will you do on Sunday?”**

What did Jesus mean when He said the Sabbath was made for man?

As Jesus explained, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus stood firmly against legalism. He stood consistently for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of people over religious tradition, and He remains the Lord of the Sabbath. As we walk into difficult, confusing circumstances, we have to make calls like this: do we love Him enough, trust His Lordship over our lives enough, stand with Him against legalism, and then follow Him, listen to Him, and hold on to Him, moving into freedom? It is exciting, but it is also demanding. Legalism asks nothing of you but obedience to a rule. Following Jesus asks you to think, to process, to pray, and to listen to the Word of God. It is the only way to truly live.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Mark 2 shows Jesus forgiving a paralysed man’s sins before healing his body. What do you think it means that Jesus deals with our hearts before our circumstances? Is there something in your own life you need to bring to Him for forgiveness?
2. Think of one specific way Jesus Christ has made a difference in your life, whether it feels big or small. Write down what you would say if you had thirty seconds to tell a friend about it. What makes it hard to actually say it out loud?
3. Paul wrote, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Where in your life do you find it hardest to trust that God is not finished with you yet? What would change if you truly believed He would see it through?
4. Jesus said, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Think about the rhythm of your own week. Do rest and worship serve you, or do you feel ruled by busyness and schedules? What would it look like for you to actually keep a Sabbath this week?
5. The Pharisees prided themselves on keeping the rules perfectly, yet Jesus said they had missed what mattered most. Where are you tempted to focus more on looking right than on loving God and other people? What would it take to change that?

— **End of Lesson 2** —

The Pharisees, Sadducees and the Samaritans

Over 2,000 years after the life and death of Jesus Christ, we tend to view biblical events through the filter of our own modern Western culture. But Jesus is intricately linked to the Jewish religion and society of His day. To truly grasp His message, we must have a historical understanding of the time in which Jesus lived. This requires a basic knowledge of first-century Jewish culture and society.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees

The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the two most well-known Jewish sects from the time of Jesus the Messiah. Both, to some extent, opposed Him during His ministry and received condemnation from Him. In this article, we will briefly examine the origins, beliefs, and impact of these two rival groups.

Historically, all of our knowledge of the Pharisees and Sadducees has been derived from three main sources: the works of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus; the early rabbinical writings, composed from around the third century onward; and the New Testament. Recently, however, references to these parties have also been found in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls unearthed at Qumran.

What was the difference in their faith and beliefs?

While the Pharisees primarily came from middle-class families and were zealous for the Mosaic Law, the Sadducees were generally wealthy members of the Jewish aristocracy who had embraced Hellenism. Around this same period, the Pharisees became distinct from the Hasidim, who had fought against the Hellenising forces during the Maccabean revolt. The Pharisees emerged as a significant force in Jewish affairs because they had influence among the common people.

What did the Sadducees believe about life after death?

Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees rejected the idea of a bodily resurrection, along with the existence of angels and spirits, teaching instead that the soul perished with the body (see Acts 23:8). This is precisely what lay behind the Sadducees' pointed question to Jesus about the resurrection in Mark 12:18-27, where He corrected their misunderstanding of both the Scriptures and the power of God. The Pharisees, by contrast, did believe in the resurrection of the dead — one of many reasons the two groups so rarely found common ground.

What custom did Herod break?

When Herod was appointed king by the Romans, he no longer nominated the chief priests from the ancient lineage, but conferred the honour upon certain obscure individuals. Herod also became the first ruler to lock away the high priest's sacred vestments under his own private seal, so that the high priests no longer had free use of them.

This broke the custom of the high priesthood being attached to a particular family. Herod also abolished the practice of the high priest holding the position for life. According to Josephus, in the 107 years from the beginning of Herod's reign to the fall of Jerusalem, there were 28 high priests. Herod's decision to appoint the high priest had a major impact on the operation of the Temple.

What was the situation during the time of Jesus?

By the time of Jesus, the Sadducees included the high-priestly families as well as other wealthy Jerusalem aristocrats. Most members of the Sanhedrin, the central judicial authority of the Jewish people, were Sadducees. Thus, the Sadducees were the party of those with political power, allied with the Herodian and Roman rulers, but they were not a group with much influence among the people themselves. The views of the Pharisees prevailed among the common people.

Who were the scribes mentioned in the New Testament?

The scribes, who were lay teachers of the law, eventually supplanted the priests in the synagogues. The model for the scribes was Ezra, who was designated by the Hebrew title sopher. After the Jewish return from exile in Babylon, this term came to mean one who was learned in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). In the New Testament, these men are primarily called "the scribes," but they are also referred to as "lawyers" and "teachers of the law." Although not all Pharisees were scribes, the vast majority of the scribes were Pharisees, and they regulated the synagogues, teaching and interpreting the law. The Pharisees were devoted to the daily application and observance of the Mosaic Law and the "oral law," known as the Oral Torah.

Paul Johnson, the historian, describes this "oral law" of the Pharisees as follows:

They followed ancient traditions inspired by an obscure text in Deuteronomy, holding that God had given Moses, in addition to the written Law, an Oral Law, by which learned elders could interpret and supplement the sacred commands. The practice of the Oral Law made it possible for the Mosaic code to be adapted to changing conditions and administered realistically.

What did Jesus think of the Pharisees?

While Jesus disdained the hypocrisy of some Pharisees, He never attacked the religious and spiritual teachings of Pharisaism. The sharpest criticisms of the Pharisees in Matthew's Gospel are introduced by an unmistakable affirmation: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that

observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matthew 23:2-3).

Though the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed on most matters, what did they jointly agree on?

For several reasons, a group of leading Pharisees and Sadducees conspired to put Jesus to death. But because of His popularity, they knew they had to do so secretly or risk the wrath of the people, since many considered Him at the very least a prophet, and quite possibly the long-awaited Messiah. Through the treachery of Judas Iscariot, the Pharisees and Sadducees managed to arrest Jesus in the dead of night. He was illegally tried, tortured, and crucified before the Passover feast.

How did the Sadducees treat the early Church?

The Sadducees were the continual opponents of the early Church and the apostles; no Sadducee is ever mentioned in the Bible as having become part of the community of believers. After the day of Pentecost, the Sadducees were very active against the infant Church. Along with the priests and the captain of the temple, they arrested Peter and John and put them in prison. A little later, they arrested all the apostles and took counsel to slay them (Acts 5:17, 33). Their hostile attitude persisted throughout the rest of the Acts of the Apostles, and there is no record of a Sadducee being admitted into the Christian Church. According to Josephus, the Sadducees were also responsible for the death of James, the brother of the Lord.

The Samaritans

What relationship did the Jews have with the Samaritans?

If there is one quick way to describe the Samaritans, it is that they were the group the Jews despised most and kept at the greatest distance. The history of enmity between Jews and Samaritans goes back several hundred years before Christ, though there were wrongs on both sides. Beyond the fact that Jews and Samaritans were at loggerheads for centuries, the Jews also considered the Samaritans to belong to a lower class of people.

How did Jesus tackle tricky questions put to Him?

Everyone, including those who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, will agree that Jesus was very wise and insightful. His insightfulness showed up whenever someone asked Him a question, invariably with the intent to trap Him into saying something they could hold against Him. Jesus usually did not answer in terms of what others wanted to hear; instead, He answered with what the person needed to hear. These encounters gave rise to Jesus’ most famous parable, that of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37. Jesus knew He was speaking to a Jew, and He used the one group that Jews hated the most, perhaps even more than their hatred for the Romans and the tax collectors, to make His point. In this parable it is the enemy who is the hero, not the priest, not the temple assistant — the hero is the one from the other side of the tracks, one of those considered least desirable. The impact of this parable on the Jews and others who heard it must have been so great that it became one of the most quoted stories even in the present day. Even those who have never heard the story use the expression “Good Samaritan” as figurative speech.

What do we know about the Samaritans’ origins?

The Samaritans were the inhabitants of Samaria, the territory that had been the heartland of the northern Kingdom of Israel. After the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom in the eighth century before Christ, they deported many Israelites and resettled the land with foreign peoples from places such as Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim (2 Kings 17:24). The Samaritans of Jesus’ day were descended from the intermarriage of the Israelites who remained with these foreign settlers, which is part of why other Jews regarded them as religiously and ethnically compromised. The Samaritans also built their own temple on Mount Gerizim and worshipped there instead of at Jerusalem (see John 4:20), a rivalry that deepened the hostility between the two communities.

What are the two major narratives concerning the Samaritans in the New Testament?

In Luke 10:29-37 we find Jesus narrating the Parable of the Good Samaritan in answer to a question from a Jewish legal expert about who counts as a neighbour. The great importance of this parable, then and now, needs no special mention. Jesus ingeniously turned the tables and showed that the Samaritan is the one who can rise above the prejudices of centuries and show mercy and compassion for the injured Jew, after the Jew’s own countrymen had passed him by. No matter which party one belongs to, everyone is capable of doing good.

We can understand the surprise of the Samaritan woman in the incident found in John 4:5-27, when Jesus rises above the social and religious restrictions — not only of a man speaking to a woman, but of a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. In the background we should remember centuries of opposition and ugly incidents between these two peoples. In this

incident Jesus makes it explicit that God is not the God of the Jews alone, but the God of all mankind. He said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). We also read in Isaiah 63:16, “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” He is God of all.

What do we know about the earliest Samaritan converts to Christianity?

The disciples of Jesus Christ understood the need to preach the Word to communities beyond the Jewish people. This is evident from what we read in Acts 8:25, that “they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” Aside from Jewish converts, the rest of the early Christian believers were called “gentiles,” a term that included the Samaritans, the word gentile generally meaning simply “non-Jew.” Incidentally, the term gentile comes from Latin; it is not an original Hebrew or Greek word from the Bible, but a translator’s term.

— End of special note on the communities of Jesus’ time —

Lesson 3 — Chapters 4 and 5

Jesus was the Master Teacher. He was often addressed as Rabbi, meaning teacher. This was recognised by the great leaders of His day, by His followers, and through the ages by the entire Christian and even non-Christian world, right up to today. If we recognise our calling to teaching, even though we might have been trained through methods courses or have come to our positions because of experience and years of study, what better way to gauge our teaching ability than by finding out how Jesus taught?

What methods of teaching did Jesus use?

(a) Jesus spoke with certainty and authority:

While on earth, Jesus utilised many different teaching methods during His years of public ministry. One approach He used was to speak by His own authority; He spoke with certainty. The Bible states, “they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). We find ourselves quoting other teachers or experts in our field of study, but Jesus did not have to do this. He spoke with His own authority, for He said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18).

(b) Jesus used storytelling, teaching through Parables:

The art of storytelling is one of the most ancient and universal means of communication devised by man. Long before historical events and codes of law were recorded, the customs of tribes and peoples were transmitted from one generation to another through stories and legends.

Jesus regarded storytelling as one of the best methods of making known the truths He wanted to impart. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how some of His truths could have been imparted, to such good effect, in any other way. As it is, His stories are not only remembered; they are studied, again and again, challenging each generation afresh with the truths they contain. Here is a list of some of the Parables Jesus used in His teaching:

1. The house built on the rock, Matthew 7:24-27
2. The sower, Matthew 13:4-9
3. The wheat and the tares, Matthew 13:24-30
4. The unmerciful servant, Matthew 18:23-35
5. The labourers in the vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16
6. The wicked husbandmen, Matthew 21:33-43
7. The guests at the marriage feast, Matthew 22:1-14
8. The wise and foolish virgins, Matthew 25:1-13
9. The talents and their use, Matthew 25:14-30
10. The good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37
11. A friend in search of bread, Luke 11:5-10
12. A rich man and his barns, Luke 12:16-21
13. The barren fig tree, Luke 13:6-9
14. Chief seats at the feast, Luke 14:7-11
15. The lost sheep, Luke 15:3-7
16. The prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32
17. Stewardship commended, Luke 16:1-9
18. Lazarus and the rich man, Luke 16:19-31
19. The unfortunate widow, Luke 18:1-7
20. Two men at prayer, Luke 18:9-14

Advantages of using Parables as a means of teaching:

- The stories were credible: they had nothing to dispute, so were accepted.
- His stories were contextual: people could relate to the subject matter.
- His Parables were imaginative and thought-provoking.
- These parables carried elements of surprise, catching the imagination of the people who heard them.
- The stories were purposeful, and not told for their own sake.
- The Parables were memorable and spread quickly by word of mouth, making the work of His disciples easy when they began their ministry.

What places did Jesus choose for teaching?

Wherever Jesus saw people gathered, He would teach. He taught in the Temple, in the synagogues, sitting atop a mountain, and sitting in the bow of a boat. Whatever Jesus did always carried a useful lesson, for the witnesses then and for us now.

1. Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:3-9)

Jesus told one of His first parables about a farmer's field. The sower is the Son of Man, and the seed is the Word of God. Jesus describes four kinds of ground the seed fell on. Three are unfruitful: the wayside, where the birds ate the seed (the devil takes away the Word); the stony ground, where the sun withered it (those who let affliction and persecution turn them from God, having no depth of their own); and the thorny ground, where thorns choked it (those who let the cares of the world crowd God out). So many people today let the world shut them out from Him. **Then Jesus describes what happened to the seed that fell on good ground:** these are the ones who receive the Word and are saved.

His enemies had rejected His teaching, and the crowds had grown indifferent to spiritual truth; they were interested in miracles, but not in the spiritual lesson the miracles taught. So Jesus turned to parables to reach them. To those who were merely curious or hostile, the parables remained a puzzle; but to those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, the meaning was opened to them. People understand what they are willing to understand - they must want the truth before it can be made real to them.

2. The Candle under a Bushel (Mark 4:21-22)

This next parable deals with light. Light creates responsibility: we are held responsible according to the light we have been given. You and I were in darkness until the light of the Gospel reached us. If we do not accept the Light - if we do not accept Him - we remain lost. This parable calls us to act on God's Word, for faith is acting on what God has said. It also tells us that the knowledge of Jesus and the Gospel we have received is not to be kept to ourselves, but shared abroad to enlighten others too.

3. The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)

This next parable is a bit unusual. Jesus speaks of how a seed grows into a plant of its own accord, the farmer neither understanding nor controlling it. Even today, for all our science, there is real mystery in how a single seed becomes a living, fruit-bearing plant. It is worth pausing simply to notice the sheer power packed into something so small: plant it in good soil, and day after day a shoot appears, then a plant, and in time it can become a great tree bearing fruit. This is a picture of the quiet power the Word has in our hearts and lives once it takes root. Our task is to sow the seed of the Gospel among the unreached; God the Holy Spirit will nurture it, and a soul will be saved.

The narratives that follow show us the authority and power of God the Son, Jesus Christ, over everything: nature, the elements, and even the demons.

| *Jesus Stills the Storm (Mark 4:35-41)*

We must have undoubting faith in Jesus:

One day, once Jesus had finished teaching, He and the disciples set out across the lake. Jesus was tired and fell asleep in the stern of the boat. As they crossed, a storm blew in, with wind and waves so high that it threatened to sink the boat. These experienced fishermen woke Jesus and said, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" Jesus rose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace, be still." And there was a great calm. Then He said to them, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" Do you see what a wonderful thing this is? **Jesus allows the storms of life to come so that we will draw closer to Him, and know Him better.**

Mark 5 records three outstanding miracles, each one only an omnipotent hand could perform, each illustrating Jesus' power.

1. Jesus overpowers the demons

The first miracle illustrates Jesus' power over demons. When Jesus and His men got out of the boat, on the eastern shore of the lake - Gentile territory, which is why a great herd of pigs was being kept there - they were met by a man controlled by demons. He was violent and tormented, driven half out of his mind by the demons within him. Yet despite his condition, Jesus saw the man. He lived among the tombs, no longer welcome in the company of ordinary people, and because of the demons' hold on him he had such strength that no one could bind him, even with chains. He was a wild, wretched figure, an object of both fear and pity, crying out and unable to speak sense.

Yet when the man saw Jesus, he ran and worshipped Him. At times the man spoke for himself, and at times the demons spoke through him - a vivid sign of how completely they had taken hold of him.

Jesus asked the man's name, and the demons replied, "My name is Legion: for we are many." The demons begged Jesus not to send them out of that country, but to let them enter the herd of pigs feeding on the hillside nearby. Jesus allowed it, and the demons went into the pigs - about two thousand of them - which then rushed down the bank into the lake.

The possessed man was completely healed, restored to his right mind and set free.

2. The power of Jesus over illness and death (Mark 5:21-43)

Here we learn of two incidents, one woven into the other.

(a) All of Galilee knew of Jesus' miracle-working ministry, and crowds came to Him with their needs. Jesus was on His way to help the daughter of a man named Jairus, making His way through the throng, when He stopped and said, "Who touched my clothes?" It was a woman who had touched the edge of Jesus' garment from behind, as He walked through the crowd. His disciples answered, "Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?" But Jesus knew that only one person had touched Him in faith for healing, and He brought the woman's twelve years of suffering to an end.

(b) Meanwhile, Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter had passed from light into the darkness of death. While Jesus was still speaking with the woman, Jairus must have been desperate for Him to hurry - his little girl was dying at home, and every moment mattered. Yet the Lord did not move any faster; He stopped and healed the woman first. While this was happening, messengers came from Jairus' house and said to him, "Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?" But Jesus said to him, "Be not afraid, only believe." Only then did Jesus go to Jairus' house. Some there did not believe, and He put them outside. Then He went to the room where the little girl lay dead. He took her by the hand and said in Aramaic, "Talitha cumi" - which is, being interpreted, "Damsel, I say unto thee, arise." In other words: get up, little one - spoken as tenderly as any father waking a sleeping child. And immediately the girl rose and walked, to the utter astonishment of everyone there.

These three great miracles demonstrate the great message of the Gospel of Mark: Jesus is God's own Servant, carrying the full power of God. He is a man of action, and He has come not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. It is time for us to hear "Talitha cumi" spoken over us. We are dead in sin, but with Jesus knocking at our door, we must wake to His call and let Him in.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Of the three parables in this lesson - the sower, the candle under the bushel, and the growing seed - which one describes something you have actually noticed in your own life or in someone else's? What happened?
2. Picture yourself on the boat when that storm blew in. How do you identify with the disciples in that moment of fear? What would you have said to Jesus - and what do you say to Him now, when life feels like that storm?
3. The demon-possessed man was an outcast long before anyone understood what had happened to him. Where do you see people today who are pushed to the edges the way he was, and what would it look like to see them the way Jesus did?
4. The woman with the issue of blood risked everything - pressing through a crowd, in a condition that made her an outsider - just to touch the edge of Jesus' clothes. What is something in your own life that takes that same kind of quiet courage to bring to Him?
5. Jairus had to go on trusting Jesus even after the worst possible news reached him. Have you ever had to keep believing when circumstances seemed to say it was too late? What helped you hold on?

Lesson 4 — Chapters 6, 7, and 8

In our journey with Mark through Jesus’ ministry, we now see Jesus, busy as always, interacting with people in the northern country. These are the packed days at the peak of Jesus’ ministry.

His own people rejected Jesus — who were they?

As we follow Jesus, we arrive in Nazareth. Jesus returned to His hometown several times, even though they had rejected Him as Messiah. Because of that, He had moved His headquarters to Capernaum, but He returned to visit because He wanted to reach His hometown people with the Gospel.

As a good Jew, it was the Lord’s custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day wherever He was. He both needed to worship God, and it was the place to reach out to the most people. His words, His works, and His wonders all amazed the people who knew Him. His teaching prompted their questions. But they did not believe Nazareth could produce anyone like Jesus. They could not put their trust in one of their own, because they had no faith in themselves.

Why did Jesus send His disciples out to preach the Good News?

Next, Jesus organised His disciples and sent them out two by two, equipped with the same message of repentance He had been preaching, and given authority over unclean spirits. They were told to travel light - no bread, no bag, no money in their belts - trusting God to provide for them through the hospitality of the towns they entered. When people refused to receive them, they were to leave and, in Jesus’ own words, “shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.”

How was John the Baptist a courageous man who feared God alone?

John told Herod plainly, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife,” because Herod had taken Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for his own. This enraged Herodias, who then plotted to kill John. When the opportunity presented itself, she put her plan into action. Herod threw a birthday party and invited all the most important men in Galilee. Herodias told her daughter to dance for the guests, because she knew exactly how to appeal to him in front of his guests - and it worked. Herod, delighted, promised the girl anything she wanted, up to half his kingdom. Prompted by her mother, the girl asked for John the Baptist’s head on a platter. That sobered Herod up fast, but afraid of what his guests would think if he went back on his word, he granted her wish and committed cold-blooded murder. In an instant, John the Baptist’s life on earth was over.

Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44)

In addition to helping the people who sat under Him as a teacher, Jesus saw this as an opportunity to teach the disciples. Faced with a hungry crowd, He told them, “Give ye them to eat.” The disciples had to learn, as we do too, that Jesus often commands the impossible - because He intends to do the work Himself. All the disciples had to work with was five small loaves of bread and two small fish. Jesus directed the people to sit down on the grass in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then He thanked His Father in heaven and kept passing the disciples the food - enough for everyone to be fed, with twelve baskets of leftovers besides.

Another lesson we learn here concerns the unnamed boy who supplied the bread and fish (John 6:9). His mother may well have packed it for his own lunch. **He was generous enough to give it away, even at the cost of going hungry himself.**

Jesus Walked on the Water

After the miracle, Jesus sent the people home and told the disciples to get into the boat, cross to the other side, and meet Him in Bethsaida. Jesus wanted time alone to pray. What should have taken them no time at all took the disciples hours; a wind had kicked up, and they fought the waves all night, straining at the oars and fearing they would sink.

Well into the night - in the fourth watch, the hours between three and six in the morning - Jesus saw them straining against the storm, so He went out to them, walking on the water. Read that again: He saw them straining at the oars, and then He walked out to them.

What do we learn from this account of Jesus walking on the turbulent water?

Do you ever feel like you are sitting alone in a corner of darkness? Are you facing temptations and problems too great to bear? Do you feel like you are out on a stormy sea and your boat is about to go under? Here is good news for you, Christian: Jesus sees you before you even cry out to Him. In times of darkness, commit your way to Him.

Jesus got into the boat with them, and they were “sore amazed in themselves beyond measure.” The wind ceased.

When they came to land, the crowds were waiting for Jesus. People brought their sick on stretchers for Him to heal. Everywhere He went, people begged for His help; they reached out to touch Him, even grasping at His clothes. Whoever touched Him was healed. His healing was real - which is why not even Jesus' enemies ever denied that He performed healing miracles.

How did Jesus deal with the hypocrites?

We all know hypocrites, and, if we are honest, we have all been hypocrites - going through religious motions without engaging our hearts. The Pharisees followed the law without their hearts; they substituted man's traditions for the Word of God, and their worship became empty. Too many churches today do the same, replacing the Word of God with their own words, thoughts, and rituals.

Jesus went into detail about how they had substituted external rules for what matters internally. He pointed out what is real. The way our Lord defended Himself is itself clear proof of His deity; on another occasion, even one of His enemies admitted, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). The Pharisees could not counter Him.

You do not have to look any further than today's news to see it: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, murder, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. Jesus taught that all of these come from within, out of the heart - not from failing to follow a list of external rules.

This is why the Lord Jesus tells us, "Ye must be born again."

BELIEVE IN HIM TODAY

What was the true mission of Jesus?

Is the Lord Jesus able to save us completely, for eternity? Yes - and we will see this now as He reveals Himself as God's Servant. As we follow Jesus around the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, keep in mind that we are now roughly six months before He goes to the Cross for us.

Jesus was still attracting thousands of people - not all of them His followers; some were critics, and others simply hoped to see miracles. Just weeks before, Jesus had fed thousands on a hillside with nothing but a boy's lunch. Now we find Him in the Decapolis, a region of Gentile cities, with an engaged crowd that had listened to Him teach for three days.

Before we are too hard on that crowd, do we not often have the same experience? God does something gracious and good for us, and we soon forget it. When a new difficulty arises, the crisis feels brand new all over again, as though His past faithfulness never happened.

Why is leaven, or yeast, mentioned in the Bible?

Whenever leaven is mentioned in the Bible, it represents wrong or corrupting teaching. When bread is made, leaven is added to make it rise and taste good. In the same way, a great deal of "Bible" teaching today tries to make God's Word more palatable, even to those who do not know the Lord, by mixing wrong teaching in with the truth of the Gospel - just as the Pharisees did. The Word of God is the Bread of Life, because the Word of God reveals Jesus. Fill yourself up on the truth of God's Word, and stay on guard to recognise false teaching.

Jesus heals the blind man (I call him a blind man with 20/20 vision)

There has to be some special reason why this particular healing was singled out by Mark. Let's see what that might be. We read several times in the Gospels about Jesus opening the eyes of the blind, and each time He used a different method. When He healed blind Bartimaeus, Jesus spoke the miracle from a distance (Mark 10:46-52). On another occasion, Jesus told a man born blind to wash in the pool of Siloam, and he was healed (John 9:1-7). Now in Mark 8, Jesus is in Bethsaida, a town that had already witnessed many miracles. A crowd brought a blind man to Jesus. First, Jesus spat on the man's eyes and laid His hands on him; the man looked up and said, "I see men as trees, walking." Then Jesus laid His hands on his eyes again, and the man was restored, and saw every man clearly.

Never miss a chance to be touched by Jesus.

The spiritual lesson here begins when we can say, with the man born blind, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). When Jesus saves us, we regain partial sight - even now we "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). But someday, when we come into Jesus' presence, we will see with perfect clarity. That is when our vision will be complete. When the Lord finished with this blind man, He had healed him perfectly; someday that will be our story too. Though this man could not see Jesus coming toward him, he did not miss his chance to be touched and healed by Him. We should not miss our chance to run to Jesus when we are in trouble.

Jesus reveals His plans

Now that the disciples had walked closely with Jesus for some time, He judged it was time to reveal to them who He truly was. He took them on a retreat far from the crowds, to Caesarea Philippi, a Gentile city at the foot of Mount Hermon, roughly twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. There He asked them, “Whom do men say that I am?”

“John the Baptist,” they answered, “but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.” (Elias is the King James Version’s rendering of the name Elijah.)

People were confused about who Jesus was. Most thought highly of Him but fell far short of the truth. Jesus then asked His men directly, “But whom say ye that I am?” And that, friends, is the question you must answer too. Who do you think He is? Being united to Him, joined to Him as your Saviour, is the one thing that matters. Are you in a right relationship with Jesus Christ?

Peter answered for all of us: “Thou art the Christ” - the Messiah, the Anointed One. This is the finest thing he ever said.

“Jesus” is His personal name; “Christ” is a title - the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word for “Messiah,” meaning “Anointed One.” This title, Jesus Christ, gathers up all the rich meaning of the Old Testament promises. Jesus came to reveal God in the flesh. (A few of the many Old Testament references to the Messiah include Micah 5:2, Isaiah 7:14, Psalm 2:2, Psalm 45:6-7, and Malachi 3:1.)

Jesus praised Peter and the rest of the disciples for grasping this truth about Him, but told them to wait until the Gospel story was complete before speaking of it publicly. Then, for the first time, He told them plainly what lay ahead: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

Jesus only revealed Himself as Messiah once He had explained His purpose of redemption. Our salvation depends on who He is and what He did.

This was the first time the disciples had heard about the Cross, and they were unprepared for it. Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him, essentially telling Him this must never happen.

This is the worst thing Peter ever said. But Jesus knew exactly where it was coming from - the enemy of our souls. He rebuked Peter in return: “Get thee behind me, Satan.” Satan denies the value of Jesus’ death.

Do you acknowledge Him as Lord today? Do you serve Him and want to glorify Him? Ask yourself this important question.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Of everything Jesus did across these three chapters - feeding thousands, walking on water, healing the sick, confronting the Pharisees - which moment stands out most to you, and why does it strike you personally?
2. Even in the busiest season of His ministry, Jesus made time to withdraw alone and pray (Mark 6:31, 46). What does that tell you about the place of rest and quiet prayer in a full life? Where could you make more room for that in your own routine?
3. “He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea” (Mark 6:48). Think about that - especially if you are in a hard spot right now. Do you ever feel like you are out on a stormy sea with your boat about to go under? What difference does it make to know that Jesus sees you before you even cry out to Him?
4. Jesus asked His disciples, “But whom say ye that I am?” (Mark 8:29). If someone asked you that same question today, how would you answer in your own words - not the answer you think you are supposed to give, but what you actually believe?
5. Jesus taught that it is what comes from inside a person’s heart, not outward rule-keeping, that truly defiles them (Mark 7:20-23). Where are you most tempted to focus on looking religious on the outside rather than letting God change you on the inside?

— End of Lesson 4 —

Lesson 5 — Chapter 9:1-13 (The Transfiguration)

The subject of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ is an extremely solemn and intrinsically complex one. Let us look up that mountain and see if we can grasp a glimpse of the glory of our Lord, which Peter, James and John were so very fortunate to witness almost two thousand years ago.

The Transfiguration of Jesus is one of the most difficult events in the Gospels to fully grasp. Most of us struggle to understand its dynamics and, in doing so, lose sight of the many blessings contained in it. We forget that our Lord will reveal, in His good time, all that has not yet been revealed to us in Scripture - whether it is the mystery of the Transfiguration, the mystery of what happened on both sides of the Cross during His death, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the doctrine of the Trinity, or finally His Second Coming.

What were the statements of Jesus Christ that His disciples failed to understand?

Our Lord's disciples were already reeling from His revelation that He would be put to death and rise again, Mark 8:31. On the heels of that stunning statement, Jesus called His followers to a life of total commitment and absolute separation. His words must have come as a shock to their system. They had left everything they knew to follow Jesus, expecting Him to destroy Rome, deliver Israel, and establish His Kingdom on earth. Now Jesus tells them that following Him is a costly business - He has just shown them the hard side of being His follower.

What did Jesus mean when He said some of them would see the kingdom of God come with power before they died?

As soon as Jesus tells His men that He is going to die, and as soon as He calls them to a life of total surrender, He makes a very strange statement. He tells them that some who are standing there will not die before they see the kingdom of God come with power. He softens the blow of His earlier words with the promise that His followers will enjoy His glory in the future.

Let us praise the Lord that there is a better world waiting for the people of God - a world with no sin, sickness, separation, violence, abuse, terrorism or war; a world where Jesus is glorified and His people see the Redeemer in all His glory. This precious passage gives us a small glimpse of the glory we will see on that day. Besides that truth, there are several other special blessings contained in these words.

Some people have difficulty with verse 1, in which Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." Some say He was pointing to the Transfiguration; others, probably more accurately, say He was referring to His Resurrection, when He defeated death and Satan; and yet others think He was pointing to His Second Coming. What we can be sure of is that He spoke these words to encourage His already discouraged and confused disciples.

So today, I want to look at the blessings we can find in the account of our Lord's Transfiguration: the place, the people, and the presentation of His glory - and then what it all means for us. Let the Lord speak to your heart as we catch a glimpse of His glory together in these verses.

The Place (Verse 2)

This passage opens with the mention of a mountain. We are not told which mountain it was. Many modern commentators favour Mount Hermon, given its nearness to Caesarea Philippi, where this part of Mark's narrative is set; church tradition since at least the fourth century has instead pointed to Mount Tabor, farther south in Galilee. Either way, Mark does not name the mountain for us, and perhaps he wants us to focus on what happened there rather than exactly where.

If it was Mount Hermon, the mountain rises some 9,200 feet above sea level and lies roughly twelve miles north of Caesarea Philippi, near the place Jesus had been ministering. Those who have seen it tell us that even in the hottest months, its summit stays wrapped in bands of snow.

Remember, mountains occupy a very special place in the Word of God.

1. It was on a mountain called Moriah that God manifested His grace to Abraham when he willingly offered up his son Isaac, Genesis 22.
2. It was on Mount Sinai that God handed down His Law to Moses, Exodus 19.
3. It was on Mount Carmel that God demonstrated His power to Israel through Elijah, 1 Kings 18.
4. It was on Mount Horeb that God ministered peace to the troubled heart of Elijah, 1 Kings 19.

5. It was on Mount Calvary that Jesus died for our sins on the Cross, John 19.
6. It was from the Mount of Olives that Jesus ascended back into His heavenly glory, Acts 1:9-11. It will be that same mountain that greets His feet when He returns in glory, Zechariah 14:4.

The Implications of the Transfiguration

When we try to understand the implications of the Transfiguration, we realise that it was not only Peter, James and John who were blessed by His grace that day on the mountain. Mountains occupy a special place in our own lives as well. Let us praise the Lord that He sets aside a few mountaintop experiences along the way for you and me. We walk through our own valleys - the valley of the shadow of evil, our hardships, our sufferings, our sicknesses and our problems - but let us praise God for the mountaintops of life that come along when the going gets difficult. We should be glad that there are a few places along the way where we are allowed to see His glory and His power. Let us praise Him for those times when He leads us onto a “high mountain”. The men who were with Jesus on that mountain never got over what they experienced there; the mountains of life will help us make it through this life as well.

Now and then we are blessed with a mountaintop experience. Friends, do we recognise those experiences as the special blessings our Lord has showered on us? Do we stop to thank Him for leading us up the mountain for such experiences? During our quiet times, do we recall all such experiences and know how blessed we were? If we have not done so, now is the time to do it.

The People

There is also a mention here of people. We are told that Jesus selected Peter, James and John for this special trip to the top of Mount Hermon. Jesus had twelve disciples, so why just these three? The answer to that question is not an easy one, but it is clear from the Gospels that these three men held a place of particular closeness to Jesus among the Twelve - and two of them, Peter and John, would go on to become leading figures in the early church, as Acts and their own New Testament letters show. Perhaps they were allowed to witness the events of this day in preparation for the places of leadership they would later occupy.

This is not the first time Jesus singled these men out for a special time of ministry, nor would it be the last. He first singled out these three men when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, Mark 5:37. He singled them out here to witness His Transfiguration. He would also take these men “a little deeper” with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the Cross, Mark 14:33. These men were privileged to see things the other disciples never witnessed.

But we all know that God has “no respect of persons”, Romans 2:11. This simply means that He does not prefer one person over another because of any special merits that person may have. He does not love you more than He loves me, and He does not love me more than He loves you. “God does not have favourites, but He does have intimates.” Some are simply closer to Him than others. And those who are closer to Him will see more of His glory and more of His power than those who stay farther away.

Therefore, we are as close to God as we desire to be, James 4:8. We can experience as much of His glory and His power as we desire to. Do you ever wonder why some people seem so full of love for the Lord? Do you ever wonder why they always seem ready to worship and praise Him? Do you ever wonder what their secret is?

Their secret is no secret at all. They have simply made up their minds to live close to Him, and He has promised to live close to them in return. They walk with Jesus in every aspect of their lives, keeping diligently to all His directions, and the result is the sweet presence of Jesus in their lives.

Can I encourage you to get as close to Jesus as John was at the Last Supper, John 13:23-26? John laid his head on the breast of the Lord. From that position, he could hear the Lord’s heartbeat, feel His breath, and hear the Lord speak in a “still small voice”. That is where I want to be. How about you?

Why Did Jesus Choose Three of Them?

We may never fully know why Jesus chose Peter, James and John rather than the other nine - but their story raises an even bigger question: why would Jesus choose you and me? To think that He would take a sinner like me, save me by His grace, and then allow me to experience His glory is more than I can understand. But the fact that I cannot understand it will not stop me from enjoying it. I want to get as close to Him as I can. Do you want that too? Then today is the time to begin.

The Transfiguration

Then Moses and Elijah appeared on the mountain with Jesus. Mark says they were “talking with Jesus”, verse 4. Luke

tells us that they were discussing His “decease”, Luke 9:31.

Why Moses and Elijah, and not some of the other great figures from the Old Testament? Moses and Elijah are the great representatives of the Law and the Prophets. Between them, these two men represent the whole Word of God that had pointed forward to the coming of the Word made flesh. Moses was the great lawgiver, and Elijah was the first and greatest of the prophets. Both had come to encourage the Lamb of God as He drew closer to Calvary. What that conversation sounded like, I do not wish to speculate.

These two men also represent the two ways in which God’s people meet death. Moses died and was buried, Deuteronomy 34:5-6. Elijah was taken up alive into Heaven, 2 Kings 2:11. Our Lord would experience both: death and burial, then resurrection and ascension into glory.

The Presentation

The climb up the lower slopes of Mount Hermon would have taken much of the day. Luke tells us that Jesus began to pray once they reached the top, Luke 9:28-29. That time of prayer went on for some while, since the disciples fell asleep, Luke 9:32. By now the day had probably given way to night, and the peaceful mountain lay under a sky filled with stars.

Suddenly, Jesus changed. His face changed, Luke 9:29. His garments changed, verse 3. He was transfigured.

In other words, Jesus changed form on the mountain. The divine glory that had been concealed within Him was revealed there. This was not, in fact, the first time Jesus had been transfigured. When He was born in Bethlehem, He had concealed the glory of His deity behind the veil of a human body; on the mountain, the glory that had always been within Him burst forth to the outside. I am less interested in exactly how this transfiguration took place than in the glory of our Lord that it reveals. Even though the nature of the Transfiguration is not fully explained, Mark reports it as a genuine event, not merely a symbol. Sometimes even the person who experiences such a moment struggles to explain exactly what happened - Luke, for example, records that in Peter’s miraculous escape from prison, he “wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision”, Acts 12:9.

We know that Mark was writing history, not myth or metaphor, even though this incident, like so many in the Gospels, is easier to describe than to explain. And that is where I want to leave this aspect of the Transfiguration for now.

The dark mountain was instantly bathed in a light brighter than the sun. Anyone looking up at Mount Hermon that night would have seen it lit with the glory of God. It was a remarkable sight: Peter, James and John were given a glimpse of the glory of our Lord that God’s children will one day see in Heaven. One day, we too will see Jesus in all His glory, 1 John 3:2.

The Three Disciples

The three disciples have been asleep. They awake to find the mountain bathed in supernatural light. Jesus, their leader and friend, is no longer the same man He was. When they walked up the mountain, Jesus appeared to be an ordinary Jewish teacher; when they wake, He is shining brighter than the sun. When they see this, they are terrified, verse 6.

Peter does not know what to say, verse 6, so he blurts out something anyway. He suggests that they build three shelters: one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Jesus, verse 5. Some people have something worth saying, and some people simply feel they have to say something - the first sort is worth listening to; the second sort will get you into trouble!

Peter may have been hoping that they could simply stay on the mountain, prolonging this extraordinary moment. Perhaps he even imagined Mount Hermon becoming the headquarters of the kingdom he expected Jesus to establish at any moment.

Whether Peter, James and John experienced a vision, or whether Jesus was, however briefly, transfigured before their very eyes, the dazzling light itself is secondary to what the voice from the cloud affirms: this Jesus, whom the disciples followed, was not merely a gifted teacher or a bold reformer - He was God’s own beloved and appointed Son. Having been given this fleeting glimpse of His future glory, the conclusion is inevitable: “hear him”, Mark 9:7.

After the Transfiguration

As Jesus and His men leave the mountain, He tells them not to tell anyone what they have seen until He has risen from the dead, verse 9. They do not understand what He means, verse 10, because they will not grasp the truth of the Resurrection until Jesus has actually died and risen again. Jesus tells them to keep this to themselves for two reasons: they do not yet have all the information they need, and they do not yet understand the information they do have. Had they gone around telling everyone what they had seen, they would have confused many people and hindered the rest of

Christ's earthly ministry.

As they come down the mountain, the three men are confused. They want to know why the scribes say that Elijah must come before the Messiah, verse 11, when they have already seen the Messiah - and have just watched Elijah appear on the mountain besides. Jesus tells them that Elijah will indeed come, verse 12, and then turns the question back on them.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. In Mark 8, Jesus performed a miracle He had already performed once before - feeding a huge crowd by multiplying a few loaves and fish - yet the disciples had already forgotten what He had done on another hillside just weeks earlier. Before we judge them too quickly, is it not true that we do the same? God graciously meets a need, and before long we have half-forgotten it, so the next hard moment can catch us off guard as though it were the first trial we had ever faced. Think of a specific time God met a need of yours in the past. Who could you tell about it this week, and how might telling that story help you trust Him with what you are facing right now?
2. If a friend who had never been to church asked you, "Who is Jesus, really?", how would you answer in your own words, in under a minute? What from this lesson - the voice from the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him" - would you want them to know?
3. Peter wanted to build shelters and stay on the mountain, prolonging that extraordinary moment (Mark 9:5). Have you ever had a "mountaintop" experience of God's closeness - at camp, in worship, in prayer - that you wished would never end? What helped you, or could help you, carry that sense of His presence back down into ordinary, everyday life, the way Peter, James and John had to come back down the mountain and keep following Jesus toward the cross?
4. Before the Transfiguration, Jesus had just told His disciples that following Him would cost them everything, and that He Himself would suffer and die. It would have been easy for the disciples to want to skip straight to the glory on the mountain and avoid the hard road ahead. Where in your own life are you tempted to want the "mountaintop" without the "valley" - the reward of following Jesus without the cost? What is one concrete way you can keep following Him this week, even in an ordinary, unglamorous moment?

Editorial note (retained on closure): this lesson has been retitled from "Lesson 5 - Chapters 9 and 10" to "Lesson 5 - Chapter 9:1-13 (The Transfiguration)" to reflect its true scope: the lesson only ever narrated Mark 9:1-13 and did not go on to cover the remainder of Chapter 9 or the whole of Chapter 10. This gap was surfaced to the author and, on his instruction to close the Study as drafted, has been left as is rather than expanded with new material.

--End of Lesson 5--

Lesson 6 — Chapters 11, 12, and 13

After much travelling, Jesus arrives at Jerusalem. Mark structures the Jerusalem narrative carefully, giving Jesus just a few days before the sorrowful events leading to His crucifixion and burial. The entire time is filled with parables about His mission and symbolic actions referring to His identity. The entire scene is rife with Old Testament allusions. Jesus begins at the Mount of Olives, a traditional location associated with the coming of the Jewish Messiah (see Zechariah 14:4). Jesus' entry is "triumphal," but not in the military sense that people assumed of the Messiah. Military leaders of the day rode war horses into a conquered city, while a king coming in peace, or a messenger bringing good news, traditionally rode a donkey (compare 1 Kings 1:33, where Solomon rides David's own mule to his coronation).

We have here Mark's report of Jesus Christ's public entry into Jerusalem. Typically, He came into the city sending out two very clear signals. First, He showed that He was not afraid of the power and malice of His enemies in Jerusalem; He did not slip into the city in secret. Rather, His entry was so dramatic that people could not fail to notice Him — an encouragement to His disciples, who were fearful and intimidated at the thought of their enemies' power and rage. Second, He showed that He was not cast down or troubled at the thought of His approaching sufferings and death on the cross. He came not only publicly but cheerfully, with shouts of joy, fully assured of complete victory over evil — triumphant in the certainty that His Father's purpose would be fulfilled.

The initial reaction of Jesus:

According to Mark's account of the entry into Jerusalem, our Lord went straight away into the Temple, looked around, and went to Bethany with the twelve, as it was getting late in the day. But we read in Luke 19:41, "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it." Let us briefly examine what made Jesus weep over Jerusalem.

The road Jesus and His companions travelled crested upward, just outside the little town of Bethphage, then dipped down into the valley, and the plateau just beyond it came into view. On that plateau stood the beautiful city of Jerusalem. The walled city seemed to rise straight out of the ground, the glistening golden Temple occupying centre stage. From this vantage point, Jesus could see the entire city — the Temple with its courts, the magnificent city behind it, and the gardens. He could also see the thousands of travellers camped on the hillsides surrounding Jerusalem. They were there for the Passover celebration. The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus claimed that as many as two or three million pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the feast each year, though most modern historians regard that figure as a considerable exaggeration; even allowing for that, Jerusalem's population still swelled many times over during the festival, with vast numbers of additional visitors from Judea, Galilee, and beyond. And seeing all this — the city and the crowds — Jesus wept.

He wept because those people were choosing to be blind.

- **blind to the coming of their King,**
- **blind to the significance of that coming,**
- **blind to the message of the Kingdom,**
- **blind to the consequences of their actions,**
- **blind to the actions of their leaders against the Messiah**

And because of that blindness, they were going to suffer a tragic consequence. Jesus said that not one stone would be left upon another, that a powerful enemy would come and invade them and destroy the city. This took place a little less than forty years later, in the year 70, when the Roman legions under Titus besieged and destroyed Jerusalem, just as Jesus had foretold.

This was the horrible and tragic end of Jerusalem. They had not received Jesus for who He was — their Saviour and their Messiah. Their hearts were hard, and so Jesus' heart was broken. Friends, what do you think Jesus is doing when He looks at the world today? A world founded by God is going blind. I tell you, friends, Jesus is weeping when He looks at us right now. The question before us this evening is: does your relationship with God cause you to weep about the things that break the heart of God?

Expectations of the crowd

Let us understand that up until now Jesus has been very guarded about His identity as Messiah (see, for example, Mark 8:30). Rather than using the term Christ (Greek for "anointed one") or Messiah (the Hebrew word for "anointed one"), He identifies Himself as Son of Man. If Jesus had previously acknowledged publicly that He was the Messiah, the political implications would have been such that He could not have completed His intended ministry of teaching, healing, and proclaiming the Kingdom. But now that ministry is complete. All that remains is to accomplish His

“exodus” in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). Jesus now moves to fulfil messianic prophecy, and directs His disciples to find the donkey that His Father has prepared for His public entry into the City of Zion.

His claim as King must now be made clear. Indeed, this open claim of Messiahship and Kingship seems to precipitate His death; it was certainly on the lips of everyone in Jerusalem that week (Luke 22:67; 23:3, 35, 38, 42; 24:26, 46). Jesus is not crucified for His good works. He is killed for His claim to Kingship.

Yet none of the crowd called Him Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, or any of the titles Christians would later use of Him. They welcomed Him as someone coming “in the name of the Lord” (Mark 11:9-10, echoing Psalm 118:25-26). They also praised the coming of the “kingdom of our father David,” which is not quite the same thing as welcoming the King himself. Did they take Him for a prophet, or something else? Their laying of clothing and branches (which John identifies as palm branches, though Mark leaves this open) along His path shows that He was honoured — but in what way? Let us examine this in some depth.

Prophecies fulfilled:

We will look at a couple of Old Testament references, and see how Jesus here is fulfilling ancient prophecy. First, consider Zechariah 9:9:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

The coming of the king is a cause for rejoicing, for he brings justice and salvation — though he is humble, not arrogant or proud. He enters not on a warhorse as a conqueror, but on a donkey, as a peaceable authority.

The second prophecy we want to consider is Psalm 118. The setting of this Psalm is an attack on the people of Israel. It looks as though all is lost, but the nation is delivered through the king’s reliance on God. Let us begin reading at verse 10; note that this section through verse 21 is spoken by the king himself. As I read, listen for parallels with what we have just read in Mark:

“10 All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. 11 They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. 12 They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. 13 Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me.”

(Note that the king has been speaking; now the people respond)

“22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. 23 This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. 24 This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. 25 Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. 26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD.”

(In Hebrew, “Save now” is the very cry transliterated “Hosanna” — the word the crowds shout as Jesus enters Jerusalem in Mark 11:9-10.)

Do you see the many parallels between this Psalm and Jesus’ triumphal entry?

1. Setting: In both cases the people are threatened and oppressed — in the Psalm, by an external military threat; in Mark, by the Roman Empire on a political level and by spiritual blindness on a spiritual level. They need a king to save them.
2. The phrase “in the name of the Lord”: In verses 10-12, the king in the Psalm says three times, “in the name of the LORD I will destroy them,” and the people respond in verse 26 with the very phrase the crowds later use for Jesus: “Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD.”
3. In both settings the people praise the king with branches from trees.
4. The goal of the procession in each case is the Temple.

The people identify Jesus with the king in Psalm 118 but fail to understand the purpose of His coming. What do the people expect Jesus to do? What are they so excited about?

Undoubtedly most are thinking about Jesus “cutting off” the Roman oppressors. Some may want Him to do away with the present religious establishment (see Mark 12:35-37). Few, if any, see Satan and indwelling sin as the great enemy whom Jesus has come to destroy “in the name of the Lord.” But this is the battle Jesus has come to Jerusalem to fight: by dying Himself, to redeem His people from sin and death; to open the eyes of the spiritually blind; to shed light on those walking in darkness; to proclaim salvation to Gentile and Jew alike — to complete and make possible the good

news of the gospel of God that He began to preach in Mark 1:14.

But the crowds do not understand Jesus' purpose. They just do not get it. They are so completely focused on the relatively minor problem of political oppression that they cannot see the forces of darkness that hold almost the whole world captive. So although the crowd praises Jesus, even using the words of Scripture to do it, they, like crowds throughout His ministry, have not grasped the nature of the gospel He preaches.

Recall that much earlier, after the first feeding of a multitude, a crowd wanted to make Jesus king (John 6). They wanted relief from the Romans. They wanted free, plentiful bread every day. The crowds did not repent of their sins and seek spiritual healing; they focussed on meeting their present material needs. So Jesus refuses their offer of kingship, even though He is their king.

What had Jesus come to offer?

Because the people were so self-absorbed, they failed to see the significance of the salvation Jesus had come to give — a far different kind of salvation than the one the Jews thought they needed. His salvation would run far deeper than merely getting rid of Roman rule; His salvation would provide deliverance from sin, death, and Hell.

Here is the twist. As long as the people limited Jesus' delivering power to freedom from Rome, they received Him with shouts of jubilation. As long as He fulfilled their expectations on their terms, they would follow Him.

But as soon as they discovered that Jesus' arrival was on His terms, not theirs, their shouting changed — just a few days later, on the Friday of that same week, it had turned to, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Friends, when you think about it, this is not very far from what we do. When things do not turn out the way we think they should, whom do we blame? We get angry at God, or we worry endlessly, or we try to punish God by shutting Him out of our thoughts, or we run away from Him rather than running to Him. In essence, that is its own way of shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him! Get out of my life. Leave me alone. You didn't follow my agenda, God. I wanted to be God. I know what's best for me. I'll turn my back on You, and I won't trust You for anything. Life is in my hands now."

But the Triumphal Entry shows us that the scope of God's plans is far greater than what we can see or comprehend at any given moment. Therefore we have to trust God's agenda and His timing, not our own. We have to let God be God, rather than placing demands on Jesus to act according to our plans for ourselves.

A Strange Command:

It is in this context that Jesus issues a very strange command. He asks His disciples to go into the village, find a colt on which no one has ever sat, untie it, and bring it back to Him. Now, inquiring minds want to know — why did Jesus want to ride into Jerusalem on a colt?

The reason had to do with His character and the character of His Kingdom. Humanly speaking, this was an unusual way for a king to approach a city. Most kings, entering a city, wished to project the image of a mighty warrior.

But Jesus did not use a war horse for His Triumphal Entry, because He was proclaiming the Kingdom of God, not the kingdom of man. By the very nature of what He rode into Jerusalem, Jesus surprised people, and declared that the Kingdom He came to establish was not one of power and might, but one of humility and meekness.

Let us talk about that donkey for a few more minutes. The Lord needed that donkey to fulfil His mission here on earth. Is that not amazing? Jesus is God, and He could have accomplished this any way He chose, yet He chose to use a little donkey.

By the way, He is still using little donkeys to get His work done on earth. He uses the likes of you and me. He could have assigned the task to angels, but He chooses to work through human instruments. I am glad to be a part of the Lord's business. I am glad He can use a little donkey like me!

Let us note a few important things about this donkey before we leave it behind.

That Donkey Had To Be Released — It was bound, and had to be set free before the Lord could use it. Before you and I can be of any use to Him, the chains of our sin must be broken, and we must be set free. Let us praise His Name, for that is exactly what He does for His believers (compare Romans 6:14 and John 8:36: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed").

That Donkey Had To Be Redeemed — Under the Law, every firstborn donkey had to be redeemed with a lamb (Exodus 13:13; 34:20). That little donkey was alive and useful to the Lord because it had been redeemed by the blood of a lamb. Praise God, that is why we have life today. That is the only reason you and I have any usefulness to the Lord — the redeeming power of the blood of Jesus.

That Donkey Had To Be Ruled — Someone had to take charge of that donkey. Mark 11:2 tells us that the donkey had never been broken in. Yet it submitted itself to the Lord Jesus and yielded to His control. It was not frightened by the crowds or their noise; it surrendered itself to the Lord. That is what He expects of us: total submission, total surrender, total faith (compare Romans 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”).

Our good Lord could save sinners and accomplish His work on earth perfectly well without us. Yet He chooses to use frail human instruments for His glory. When we are like that donkey — released, redeemed, and ruled — He can use us too.

Jesus desires to give glory back to the Father, but He wants to do it through us. In other words, God the Father receives glory through what God the Son is doing in the life of someone who desires the character of Jesus to be seen in his or her life, and who desires the advancement of God’s Kingdom here on earth through what that person says and does.

So how should we then live? If nothing can harm us, we can take risks. If no one can stop us becoming like Christ, then we can love and love and love. If God is in control, then we can give and give and give, without worrying about our next meal or our future.

The Gospel of Mark is a Gospel of action, but today the action might seem to have paused — it is the calm before the storm. The fiercest encounter with the religious rulers is building. Both sides bring up their heaviest arguments and prepare for the coming clash of heaven and hell, night and darkness, God and Satan.

For three years, Jesus and the religious rulers have engaged in periodic verbal skirmishes. Jesus takes the initiative; they try to trap Him with loaded questions, hoping to turn the crowds against Him. But Jesus always wins the exchange.

The parable of the vineyard

Jesus brings this pattern to its height with the most pointed, plain, and direct parable of His ministry — the vineyard. He tells of a man who planted a vineyard and then went to a far country. He had given his tenants a God-given inheritance — the only people who ever had the visible presence of God among them.

In the parable, the man sent a servant from a distance to collect some of the fruit. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Repeatedly he sent other servants; they beat some and killed others. Finally he sent his son, thinking they would honour him. Instead they killed him too. What should the lord of the vineyard now do?

The religious leaders understood exactly what Jesus meant by the parable, and it enraged them. The “certain man” who owned the vineyard is God the Father. The vineyard is the nation of Israel, which God had chosen and protected. The servants sent were the prophets. The tenant farmers were the religious rulers. Finally He sent His Son — and that, of course, is the Lord Jesus.

The Lord delivers a deliberate and direct thrust at the religious rulers.

He knew they had plotted His death, and now He brings their plans out into the light. He foretells their every step and anticipates their next move. He charges them with murder before they commit it. Then He pronounces their judgement.

The religious rulers would have seized and executed the Lord Jesus on the spot, but they were afraid of the crowds. The parable of the vineyard set off a verbal war, so next they sent further delegations to trap Him with questions.

What about taxes?

“Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” Their question was a masterpiece of a trap, but He knew what they were trying to do. They flattered Him first, and He called them hypocrites. He asked them for a penny — perhaps He did not have one Himself. “Whose is this image and superscription?” “Caesar’s,” they said. **“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”** (Mark 12:13-17).

Their mouths hung open, speechless. Jesus had brilliantly turned their question back on them. If He had told them to pay taxes to Caesar, He would have seemed to put Caesar ahead of Moses. If He had told them not to pay, He would have been guilty of rebellion against Rome. They thought they had Him trapped, but they did not have Him at all.

Jesus’ answer reveals that, as children of God, we are responsible to pay our taxes to our government. We also have responsibilities to our loved ones and our church. Just as the coin has two sides, we have responsibilities both on earth and in heaven. Even as citizens of heaven, we pay our taxes here; and as pilgrims here, we should also be laying up eternal wealth in heaven. We are answerable to God for both.

Then the Sadducees came with a question.

The Sadducees were a priestly, aristocratic party who accepted only the five books of Moses as fully authoritative and denied the resurrection, angels, and spirits (compare Acts 23:8) — though they still prided themselves on knowing the Scriptures well. Their question was a far-fetched scenario built on the levirate-marriage law that Moses had given (Deuteronomy 25:5-6; compare the related kinsman-redeemer custom in the book of Ruth). If a woman's husband died and, one after another, seven brothers married her and died in turn, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? Jesus pointed out their two errors: they did not know the Scriptures, and they did not know the power of God. This was just another attempt to trap Jesus, and He would have none of it.

The most important commandments

A scribe then asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answers by quoting the Law: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

This commandment is for us too. If you say you obey God and do not need Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then ask yourself: do you love God as you should — with all your heart and mind and soul? If you do not, then you are breaking His commandment and you need a Saviour. Do you love others as you should? Until you do, you need a Saviour. Jesus affirmed what the scribe said — that to love God and neighbour is better than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices put together. This ended their questions; the enemy could not trap Him. Now Jesus turns the questioning around.

As Jesus taught in the Temple, His audience was the scribes, the men who devoted their lives to studying the Scriptures. He asked them, "How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?" Jesus then quotes Psalm 110 and asks how David could call his own descendant "my Lord." The only way that makes sense is if great David's greater Son is not merely his descendant but his divine Lord — eternally the Son of God. The Lord is teaching the Temple crowd about Himself.

Teaching from the mountain top

Now Jesus moves His conversation and teaching from the Temple to a hilltop overlooking Jerusalem. We sit with Him now atop the Mount of Olives, just across the Kidron Valley from the Temple. Here Jesus teaches about the events that will bring this age to a close. He describes God's power at work in the great tribulation, and then in His second coming.

From this vista overlooking the Temple Mount, the disciples remarked on how glorious the scene below them appeared. But Jesus asked them, "Seest thou these great buildings?" They looked at man's works for their beauty, strength, stability, and permanence. But all those buildings were temporary. "There shall not be left one stone upon another," Jesus said, "that shall not be thrown down."

"Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus privately (Mark 13:3-4). According to early church tradition, the Gospel of Mark was written with a Roman audience in mind, and so Jesus calls attention to that which reveals power, action, and drama. Jesus then warns them — and us — about false teachers and people claiming to be the Messiah. Other signs of the coming age will be rumours of war, then earthquakes, famines, and troubles. This is only the beginning of the end.

Jesus said that the gospel must first be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10) before the end comes. All salvation is by the grace of God, and God has never had but one way to save sinners: the blood of Jesus Christ. Families will turn against one another, and believers will be hated and persecuted for His name's sake (Mark 13:12-13).

A note on what follows: the next few paragraphs weave together material from Daniel, Mark 13, and Revelation into a single connected timeline — three and a half years of false peace, an "Antichrist," 144,000 sealed witnesses, and so on. Mark 13 itself speaks only in more general terms about false christs, false prophets, tribulation, and the abomination of desolation; the more precise sequence and terminology come from reading Daniel, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 7 and 14 alongside it. This is a well-established teaching tradition, but it is one interpretive framework among others held by faithful Christians, and Scripture itself is more reserved about the exact timetable than this section may suggest. The author may wish to review this passage and decide how much certainty to attach to the details.

This is the beginning of what is often called the great tribulation. The first three and a half years are comparatively quiet — a false peace. Then, in the midst of it, there appears the "abomination of desolation" that the prophet Daniel wrote about (Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Mark 13:14). In the Holy Place, an abomination will take place, and the desolation that follows will come so quickly that Jesus says His hearers should not even go back to pack their

belongings, but should simply run. Those will be terrible days — so terrible that God has set a limit on them, “for the elect’s sake,” so that not all life is destroyed (Mark 13:20). Empowered by Satan, false Christs and false prophets will perform signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen people (Mark 13:22).

Jesus’ second coming will be heralded when the whole created order is shaken: the sun darkened, the moon giving no light, the stars falling from the sky (Mark 13:24-25). Into that great and solemn display of power, Jesus, the Son of Man, will come in glory, His Arrival filling the sky. He will dispatch His angels to gather His chosen from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other (Mark 13:27).

All of this describes events that will take place after the tribulation, when Jesus Christ returns to the earth in glory and judgement. While Jesus was still teaching about these things to come, He compared it to a young fig tree, budding in the spring and so signalling that summer is near — many understand the fig tree here as a picture of the nation of Israel. These events, once they begin, will unfold quickly, and Jesus promises that those who see the beginning of them will also see them through to the end.

Jesus concluded this teaching with a challenge for God’s people:

Watch and pray, for you do not know God’s timetable. This instruction is for us today too. We can watch with anxiety, or we can watch with joyful anticipation. If you are God’s child, look for that blessed hope and His glorious appearing.

BARTIMAEUS: A BLIND MAN WITH TWENTY-TWENTY VISION

The Christian life

What is the role of suffering in the Christian life? Jesus said, “There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time... and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). But Jesus also says, in the same breath, that along with the hundredfold of houses and brothers and farms, we will receive persecution. Persecution is not something we welcome the way we welcome joy and peace. And yet, in many ways, suffering brings with it a kind of rescue: it rescues us from ourselves, because we are never more open to our Lord’s bigness than when we are most aware of our own smallness and helplessness. Suffering disrupts our agendas, but more than anything else it shapes us into the likeness of Jesus — softening us, and opening us to a Christ-likeness we would not otherwise experience.

Here we see our Lord on the final leg of His journey towards the cross. He is entering Jerusalem knowing that crucifixion awaits Him. The disciples and other followers are astonished and afraid. Nevertheless He goes forward purposefully, even though it means walking into danger, persecution, and suffering. And in the midst of all that, He is ready to shower His blessing on a poor, blind beggar.

Let us pause for a moment and reflect on those occasions when we were passing through bad patches in life — perhaps that is happening to some of us right now. During those times, do we notice the greater sufferings of others around us and try to extend a helping hand? Or are we so caught up in our own suffering that we become blind to the suffering of others?

To endure suffering, we need to open our eyes and see Jesus; we need to experience the joy of glorifying God, of being His treasured possession. We need to see others with the eyes of Jesus. Mark gives us this wonderful account of blind Bartimaeus to illustrate these very points.

The Background:

They say there is no one as blind as he who will not see, or he who refuses to see. I suspect you will agree that many people are walking around in this world today whose eyes work perfectly well, yet they cannot seem to see that the way they are living will lead them into eternal ruin. In Mark’s account we are presented with a man who was blind. Bartimaeus could see nothing with his physical eyes, yet he could see, on a spiritual level, what many with perfect eyesight could not.

As we look at the people around us, everywhere — including in church — we are reminded again of the truth that not everyone can see. Their eyes work fine; none need a white cane or someone to guide them. And yet there are those among us who simply cannot see. Though they can see the world around them, they cannot see the truth of our Lord’s love and His plan for their lives, because they are blind spiritually.

I. HIS PITIFUL CONDITION

(a) He Was Blind — Mark’s account does not tell us whether Bartimaeus had been blind from birth or lost his sight later in life, but blindness of every kind was common in the ancient world, largely because of disease and poor sanitation, and it usually meant a lifetime of poverty.

(b) He Was A Beggar — Beggars were a common sight in most towns. Because of his physical condition, Bartimaeus was unable to find work and earn a living. In those days there was no state welfare system to turn to, and he was entirely dependent on the generosity of others to survive — even though God’s law commanded His people to care for the needy (Leviticus 25:35-38). He was in a pitiful and wretched condition.

In his condition, Bartimaeus is a good picture of every person who has yet to accept Jesus and is lost in sin. A lost person is spiritually blind (2 Corinthians 4:4) — blind to their condition, to their sin, and to their impending eternal doom. Only Jesus can open their eyes. The lost person is also a spiritual beggar: they can do nothing, and they have nothing within themselves to produce salvation. They simply sit by the roadside, begging, as Jesus passes by, wholly unaware of Him.

II. HIS PERSISTENT CRY

(a) He Recognised Who Jesus Was — Bartimaeus had evidently heard about the miracles Jesus performed. He must have heard about the lepers, the lame, the demon-possessed, even the dead, whom Jesus had touched and made whole. As he sat by the road, he heard the travellers talking to one another. He had heard about Jesus, and he knew that what Jesus had done for others, He could do for him too.

“Son of David” was a popular way of addressing Jesus as the Messiah, since it was known that the Messiah would be a descendant of David (Isaiah 9:7). That Bartimaeus called Jesus the Son of David shows that he recognised and accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and his faith in Jesus as the Messiah is what brought about his healing.

This is the first step in coming to Jesus for our salvation: we must recognise and accept who He is, and know that what He has done in the lives of others, He can do for us too. We must accept what the Bible teaches about Jesus; when we do, we can be certain of salvation (Romans 10:9).

(b) He Realised What Jesus Could Do — Bartimaeus exercised faith in Jesus, which is the key ingredient for receiving anything from God. Beyond that, this poor, blind man saw things that most of the crowd around him never saw — things that many of us have never seen, things we need to see today.

What did Bartimaeus see?

We will look at it in four parts.

He saw that his greatest opportunity had come. For years this man had sat by the road begging, helpless and hopeless. As Jesus passed by, it dawned on Bartimaeus that if Jesus was who He claimed to be, this was the day of his greatest opportunity — and so he began to cry out for the Lord to have mercy on him. Bartimaeus, though blind, seized the opportunity the moment it was in front of him. There are those around us who need to see that today may well be the greatest opportunity they will ever have. You have the opportunity this evening to come to Jesus and be forever saved by His grace. If we ignore that opportunity and choose to go on in our sins, then there is nothing ahead of us but judgement (2 Corinthians 6:2).

He saw that this opportunity could easily pass him by. Had Bartimaeus sat still that day and said nothing, the next day would have been like all the others: he would have gone on sitting by the roadside begging until he died. He may have been blind, but even he could see that unless he did something about his situation, he was doomed to a life of misery and darkness — such an opportunity might never come again. Every lost person needs to understand that Jesus Christ loves them so much that He died on the cross to save them, and He will do exactly that today if only they will come to Him. However, He will not force Himself into our lives. If God has been calling us to come to Him, our task today is to obey that call; if we refuse, this golden opportunity will pass us by.

He saw that this opportunity might never return. Jesus had apparently never passed that way before, and for all Bartimaeus knew He might never pass that way again. He knew that if he was to receive help from Jesus, he had to call on Him while He was near. You cannot be saved just any time you choose. The only time to come to the Lord is while He is calling you — when you feel that pressure on your heart, when you know you are lost and heading in the wrong direction and want to change. That is the time to come to the Lord (John 6:44); to delay may mean losing the opportunity to be saved altogether. Isaiah’s advice is still good today: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6). That is exactly what most people fail to do — but it is exactly what Bartimaeus did.

He saw that Christ’s way was far better than his own. After Bartimaeus had been healed, he was told, “Go thy way.” But he saw that Christ’s way was better than his own, and he followed Jesus instead. According to Luke 18:43, he glorified God as he followed Jesus along the road. There is a lesson here for every person who has been saved, especially those who have come to Jesus recently: after salvation there will be a change of direction in your life. As we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all

things are become new.”

He Repeated the Cry

Those standing by, and those travelling with the Lord, tried to make Bartimaeus stop crying out. But so great was his determination to get help from the Lord that he continued to cry out, only louder. He was not hindered or troubled by the opinions of others; he needed something from the Lord, and he was determined to get it, regardless of what anyone thought or did.

My friends, there is nothing and no one worth going to hell over. Situations, circumstances, and people may try to stand in your way and keep you from Jesus, but let nothing keep you from the Lord who loves you and wants, more than anything, to save you. Be like Bartimaeus and get serious about coming to Jesus. He is worth any price. He is worth any loss. He is the only One worthy of your inmost self.

He Received A Response

When Jesus heard the cry of this beggar, He stopped in His tracks and called for Bartimaeus to come to Him. What a glorious moment that must have been for this poor, blind beggar! His faith was honoured, and he received an audience with the Lord.

Jesus Christ is never too busy to hear your cry either. Like I said in another study, when we call on Jesus, we will never hear Him say, “Your call is important to Me, but I am busy attending to other believers — please stay on the line and call back later.” There is nothing in this universe more important to Him than we are. Remember the price He paid for us: He proved His love when He climbed Calvary and paid for our sins on the cross. If only we will cry out to Him, He will save us today.

III. HIS COST

When Jesus called, Bartimaeus got up to go, and the Bible tells us that he cast away his garment — he threw aside his outer coat and jumped up to go to Jesus. That coat must have been valuable to a man with so little; he risked losing it for good, with no means of replacing it. Yet he counted the cost and was willing to pay whatever price was necessary just to get to Jesus.

IV. HIS POWERFUL CURE

When Bartimaeus came to Jesus, he was asked a very important question, and his answer was one of pure faith. He trusted Jesus to heal him, and then the impossible happened: the blind man received his sight, and was made whole at the word of Jesus. Jesus said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (Mark 10:52). Bartimaeus received far more than physical healing that day; he received spiritual healing too.

This is what happens when a lost person responds to the gospel of grace. The moment faith is exercised, the power of God moves into that person’s life, and God saves them completely and eternally. In this age of religion and self-righteousness, we need to remember that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). If you are trusting in anything other than Jesus for your salvation, you are in for a rude awakening when you leave this world. It is Jesus Christ, or it is nothing.

V. HIS PREFERRED COURSE

As mentioned, after Bartimaeus was healed, Jesus told him to go his way. He, however, wanted to stay near the One who had healed and saved him — a theme repeated several times in the Gospels. This reminds us that when salvation comes into a life, there follows a desire for the things of God. The saved person will want to walk with the Lord in holiness. They will want to be around other believers, to be part of the church, and to share in what God is doing in the local congregation. There will be a profound, dramatic change in life — in many cases as dramatic as what happened to Lazarus when Jesus raised him from the dead (John 11). When Jesus saves you, He makes you alive in Him (Ephesians 2:1-10). When that happens, you will be different.

Conclusion

Friends, we do not need a set of worthless external changes. What we need this evening is to be born again. We need to seek Jesus and let Him clothe us with a new self.

And those who are already saved should be cautioned: many of God’s children are walking around like blind beggars. If you are saved, you are not meant to live like one who is lost. If there are things in your life that need to be made right with the Lord, come to Him right now. He will receive you, forgive you, and restore you this evening, if you will only come to Him.

May we be like those of whom Peter wrote: “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

Jesus is passing by! Please do not let this opportunity pass. Come to Him, and receive your sight.

Discussion Points:

1. The religious leaders kept trying to trap Jesus with hostile questions, yet Jesus always answered honestly, because He knows our hearts. If you could ask Jesus one sincere, honest question right now — not to trap Him, but because you genuinely want to know — what would it be, and why?
2. Explain in your own words the parable of the vineyard. Who does each character represent, and why did the parable make the religious rulers so angry? Can you think of a time you resisted hearing something true because it was uncomfortable, the way the rulers resisted Jesus?
3. Jesus said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” What are some things in your life right now that belong to “Caesar” — school, family responsibilities, rules you have to follow — and what are some things that belong distinctly to God? How do you decide when the two overlap or conflict?
4. Jesus said the whole of God’s law comes down to loving God with everything you have, and loving your neighbour as yourself. Who is the hardest person in your life to love right now, and what would it actually look like this week to love God and love that person, rather than just feel that you should?
5. In Mark 13, Jesus tells His disciples not to be alarmed by wars, disasters, or false teachers, but to “watch and pray.” Why do you think Jesus deliberately refuses to give an exact date for these events? What is the difference between living with genuine watchfulness and living in fear or obsessing over predicting exactly when the end will come?
6. Bartimaeus kept crying out for Jesus even when the crowd told him to be quiet. When has peer pressure ever made it harder for you to speak up about your faith or ask for help? What helped Bartimaeus keep going, and what could help you do the same?
7. Bartimaeus gave up his coat — one of his few possessions — the moment Jesus called him. What is something you would find hard to let go of in order to follow Jesus more closely, and what is stopping you?

Editorial note (retained on closure): although this lesson is titled “Chapters 11, 12, and 13,” it does not narrate the cleansing of the Temple, the cursing of the fig tree, or the widow’s mite, all of which fall within that span of chapters. The Bartimaeus account (Mark 10:46-52), strictly the close of Chapter 10, was deliberately placed here by the original author as the transition into the Jerusalem narrative, and has been left in its original position. On the author’s instruction to close the Study as drafted, this gap has been left as is rather than expanded with new material, as has the italicised note above on the Olivet Discourse.

--End of Lesson 6--

Lesson 7 — Chapters 14 and 15

In this Gospel of action, Jesus is no longer the one acting; He is now the focus of others' actions—both friends and enemies. As we come into the shadow of the Cross, the reverent heart realises we are on holy ground. Some depths have not been plumbed and heights have not been scaled. The action of this moment involves the anguish and agony of His soul. His hour has come!

The time has come for Jesus to be delivered up to die. His earthly ministry is finished in the fulfilment of prophecy: "... he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter ..." (Isaiah 53:7). Through the events that follow, Jesus delivers Himself into people's hands. Mary anoints Him, Judas betrays Him, Peter denies Him, and the Sanhedrin arrests Him. He delivers Himself to His Father's will. Mark 14 and 15 record a strange agreement between heaven and hell. Light and darkness travel together in the same direction. Righteousness and sin head to the Cross, and God and Satan have decided Jesus will be crucified. People's individual decisions converge at the Cross—the same as what happens today.

THE PLOT IS SET IN MOTION

The religious rulers had already decided that Jesus would be killed; the only question left was timing. They resolved not to move during the Passover season, because Jerusalem would be packed with visitors, and the common people loved Jesus—He had gladly heard them, fed them, and healed them. The last thing the rulers wanted was an uproar or a riot in the crowded city. So they decided to wait until after Passover.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

While some plotted His death, others worshipped Jesus. At a dinner party early in the week Jesus died, a lovely thing happened right alongside the dark plot to betray Him. Both friend and foe are moving towards the Cross, but by different routes. Mary of Bethany comes the way of light and love; Judas is moved by foul and dark motives. In their coming together, we see the vivid contrast and conflict of light and darkness. Into the crowded room, Mary comes with an expensive bottle of oil. She breaks the seal, and a fragrance fills the room. She then begins anointing Jesus' body, as one would prepare a body for burial. The room quietens, all eyes on Jesus. This was an extravagant gesture, and not everyone appreciated what was happening. Judas piously suggested that the proceeds from this oil could have been used to care for the poor—but sad to say, he simply wanted the money himself (he controlled the group's money box). Jesus saw through the objection. There would always be opportunities to help the poor, He said, but He was with them only for another couple of hours. Mary was doing what she could to honour Him. That is all God ever asks of any of us. Mary showed a spiritual discernment sadly lacking in His apostles. Just think of it: this simple woman stood on the fringe of the events leading to the Cross, and she let the Lord Jesus know that she understood. None of the apostles sensed this, but she did. The fragrance of the box of ointment she broke that day has been carried across the centuries by the Holy Spirit into our own day. It still fills hearts with its sweetness even at the present hour. Here in the shadow of His suffering, there was one who understood.

Have any of us broken our alabaster box upon Jesus, so that there might be a fragrance in our lives that becomes a blessing to others? Now, right next to this lovely thing Mary did—the light of it, the love of it—Judas' plan to betray the Lord is stirred up in his mind and set in motion.

JESUS IS OUR PASSOVER LAMB

As they got ready to observe Passover, the disciples meticulously followed the Mosaic Law. In a few hours, Jesus was to fulfil the meaning of the Passover. The Lord had already made arrangements for a place to eat their meal—He had asked a faithful follower to use his guestroom. Some loved Jesus enough to offer this kind of service, and this is what that follower did. So Jesus and His men came in the evening to this borrowed room, as Passover began at sundown. He came under cover of darkness so as not to force the religious leaders' hand until He was ready. At the proper time, He would deliver Himself into their hands and they would crucify Him—but it would be according to His schedule, not theirs. And so Jesus enjoyed this important celebration in leisurely, informal fellowship with His disciples. The next meal He shared with them was breakfast on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, after His resurrection—but this one, the Passover meal, was a precious time of fellowship in its own right.

As the meal drew towards its end, Jesus revealed that one among them would betray Him. They became sorrowful and asked Him, one by one, "Is it I?" (Mark 14:19). They all knew, deep down, that they were capable of it. If you have not yet discovered that you are a sinner, thoroughly capable of turning your back on God, you do not know yourself very well. Each of us could ask that same question: Is it I?

The Lord, already aware of what Judas had planned, essentially told him to go and do what he had determined to do, and to do it quickly (compare John 13:27). The original plan had been to wait for a more convenient time, but now Judas must have rushed out to the religious leaders to tell them, in effect, that their plot had been discovered and that if they

wanted Jesus, they needed to act at once, before He could leave town. So they gathered the guards and went out to arrest Him.

Meanwhile, as the countdown continued, Jesus instituted a new feast on the dying embers of the old one. The Passover meal traditionally included four cups of wine, with the great Hallel Psalms sung between them. It was after this last cup that Jesus did not drink but instead instituted a new remembrance—the Lord’s Supper. The Passover had always looked forward to Jesus coming as the Passover Lamb; now the Lord’s Supper looks back to His death. The bread speaks of His body, broken for us; the wine speaks of His blood, shed for us. When we observe the Lord’s Supper today, we remember this night, and what He did for us on the Cross two thousand years ago. The Passover will be restored in the millennial Kingdom, where it will look both forward to His coming and back to His offering, bringing out the full meaning of the feast: “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

As the Passover feast ends, they sing a hymn and head over to the Mount of Olives, across town. As they walked, Jesus tells them about His death—and then about His plans to meet them in Galilee after His resurrection. All this information must have felt overwhelming to the disciples. Peter is still thinking about Jesus’ betrayal and pledges his allegiance to Jesus. He was sincere, of course, but he did not know his own weakness. That is our problem, too. None of us knows the depths of the human heart; only the Word of God can show us what sinners we truly are. When we recognise that, we go to the Lord. He is the Chief and the Great Physician. By the way, He is also the Great Psychologist, and He alone truly knows us. In the final analysis, He is the only One. We have a Saviour Who loves us and waits with open arms. How wonderful to have someone we can go to.

When Peter boasts that he will never betray Jesus, Jesus prepares him for what is coming. He lets Peter know that He will stand by him, even when Peter denies Him. The Lord will also stand by you in times like this. He will be there in your most desperate and difficult hour, just as He was with Peter. The Garden of Gethsemane must have been a frequent spot for Jesus and the disciples, and a place Judas had gone to often with the Lord—which is how Judas knew where to lead the enemy.

There are only eleven disciples now. Jesus leaves the eight and takes His three—Peter, James, and John—a step closer to Him in this hour. He went to pray and faced an intense ordeal in the garden, described as a heavy, distressing time. Jesus faces a soul struggle as great, if not greater, than the suffering His body would endure on the Cross. Perhaps He faced Satan again here in the garden. There are mysteries in the garden we cannot fully understand; we can only stand at the edge and watch Him pray. He asked the Father that the hour might pass from Him. It was not death He dreaded, but rather the hour of the Cross—that moment when sin was to be put on Him, when He was made sin for us. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Hebrews 5:7-8 for more on this.) When He returns to the place where He had asked the three disciples to watch and pray, He finds them sleeping. He wakes them and asks them to pray. At the very moment He needs them, and they need to pray, their flesh is weak. A little while later, Jesus returns, and again they are asleep, with no explanation for their failure. We learn here that the flesh cannot be trusted. The third time Jesus returns after agonising in prayer, He again finds them asleep. This time He tells them to take their rest, for the hour has come. “The Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mark 14:41).

JESUS IS ARRESTED

And here comes Judas, leading a huge crowd of soldiers. The religious leaders had said they would not arrest Jesus during the feast days, but here they are. Judas had conspired with them that he would kiss the one they should arrest. Jesus, in His humanity, looked no different from any other man in the crowd—what treachery, that a kiss, a badge of love and affection, should be used to betray Christ. Jesus yields Himself “into the hands of sinful men” (compare Luke 24:7), on His way now to the Cross. He observes that they did not come for Him in the temple, but here, and now, so that Scripture would be fulfilled. If these people had truly believed their own Scriptures, they might have hesitated, or even changed their minds. Peter attempts to come to His rescue. He draws a sword and swings at one of Jesus’ captors—aiming for the man’s head, it seems—but manages only to cut off his ear. Simon Peter was a pretty good fisherman but a pretty sorry swordsman. The disciples all deserted Him and ran, once again in fulfilment of prophecy.

MIDNIGHT MEETINGS AND ILLEGAL TRIALS

“And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes” (Mark 14:53). They led Jesus away through the empty streets of Jerusalem, past midnight, and brought Him before Caiaphas, the high priest Rome acknowledged. Annas, his father-in-law, was the high priest according to the Mosaic Law. Some believe Annas was the real figure behind the plot to kill Jesus. This special midnight meeting of the Sanhedrin was illegal, and so was their method of hearing only witnesses against Jesus. Many were willing to bear false witness, but no two of them could agree; a charge had to be established on the testimony of at least two witnesses. Jesus did not defend Himself, again fulfilling prophecy: “... he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). His silence surprised and irritated the high priest, who wanted Jesus to condemn Himself. Finally, under oath, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God—He could make no higher claim—and added that one day they would see it for themselves: “... ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62; He was quoting Daniel 7:13-14). The high priest understood exactly what Jesus meant. In a rage, he tore his robe—itself a breach of the Mosaic Law—and cried, “Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?” (Mark 14:64).

Now they had a charge: blasphemy. They condemned Him to die because He claimed to be the Messiah. They spat on Him, blindfolded Him, slapped and punched Him. Imagine spitting in the face of the Son of God. While this farce of a trial was under way, Simon Peter was undergoing a trial of his own, in a place of great temptation. He had stayed near the palace, wanting to be close to Jesus. But when a servant girl identified him as one of Jesus’ men, Peter denied even knowing Him. The girl would not give up, and Peter hotly denied it again.

If you have ever been in a similar position, you understand his shame. May God forgive our cowardice and weakness as He did Peter’s. Simon Peter loved Jesus and was sincere when he promised to be loyal to Him; he simply did not know his own weakness. But Peter could repent of his sin, and that is the real test of a genuine follower of Jesus. His were tears of heartbroken repentance. Years later, Peter told how the Lord Jesus had kept him.

Jesus is now in the hands of His enemies, and His own have scattered. One has betrayed Him; another has repeatedly denied Him. It is the night of sin. Jesus is now just hours away from the Cross, and about His work of saving us.

The Cross of Jesus Christ is one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith—it is both the greatest tragedy of the ages and the most glorious victory of earth and heaven. We will not approach it with feelings of defeat, or with mere sympathy for the Sufferer, but will walk softly and reverently through these scenes, our hearts full of thanksgiving to God for providing so great a salvation.

On this night, sin is the issue in two very different ways: sin is trying to destroy Jesus Christ, and Jesus is paying the price for our sins. The inescapable, tragic note of these scenes is Jesus enduring cruel injustice and bitter suffering. But He does not want our sympathy—He wants our faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Read Romans 10:9-10.) As we know, Mark is the Gospel of action, and now we come to its climactic, crowning event—the Crucifixion. All of creation, and the purposes of God from all eternity, have been moving towards this moment. Jesus Christ is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). The gospel is now translated into action. (Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.) The gospel is what Jesus did—it is His action, not anything we could do. Nothing we do could ever be acceptable to God, because our own righteousness is not enough. God must, and does, provide that righteousness in Jesus Christ.

WHEN THEY PUT JESUS ON TRIAL

Now in Mark 15, the Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to die, but only Rome could carry out an execution. The trouble was, their charge of blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law, so they invented new charges to give a legal appearance to what had been an illegal process the night before. Pilate was a politician, motivated more by expediency than by justice; he looked for a compromise. He wanted to release Jesus once he discovered He was innocent, but Jesus would not cooperate—He would not defend Himself. So Pilate thought he could get off the hook by offering to release a prisoner. Surely, he reasoned, the crowd would choose Jesus over Barabbas, a murderer and an insurrectionist. But the religious leaders had stirred up the crowd, urging them to demand Jesus’ death. Pilate faced a dilemma: he knew the charges against Jesus were false, and he knew Barabbas was a hardened criminal.

Pilate, weak and vacillating, yielded to the mob and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Roman justice went badly crooked here—an innocent man was made to die. Tradition holds that the Lord Jesus may even have been crucified on the very cross intended for Barabbas. But wait—Jesus is taking our place, too. And we are not innocent.

THE BEAUTIFUL, WRETCHED CROSS

“And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band” (Mark 15:16). Jesus was turned over to brutal soldiers who could do as they pleased with their prisoner. They humiliated and tortured Him, treating Him as a plaything for their own cruelty. Jesus was a strong, fit man—years of manual labour had seen to that—but the flogging He endured was savage. Roman scourging was designed to leave a prisoner bleeding and weakened, sometimes fatally so, even before he reached the cross. Medical researchers who have studied the physiology of crucifixion note that this kind of blood loss and shock often left condemned men too weak to carry their own crossbeam, which is very likely why the soldiers pulled a man out of the crowd to carry it for Jesus. (See William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel, and Floyd E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, volume 255, number 11, 21 March 1986, pages 1455 to 1463.) Yet even so, the soldiers kept striking Him and spitting on Him. This was no ordinary human hatred; it was brutal and cruel, revealing the sinful depths of the human heart. Their cruelty grew inventive as they mocked Jesus’ claim to be the King of the Jews,

throwing a purple robe over Him and pressing a crown of thorns onto His head.

And still the Cross stood before Jesus, in a place called Golgotha, “the place of a skull.” No Gospel writer records the physical details of the Crucifixion; we are given only snapshots. God drew a veil over the scene, as if to say, “It is too horrible.” It was nine o’clock in the morning when they hung Jesus on the cross. The charge for which they crucified Him was written above His head: “The King of the Jews.” Strange as it sounds, this was true—though not as they meant it. He led no rebellion against Rome; He simply offered Himself to Israel, and they rejected Him.

People passing by mocked Him, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Mark 15:31). And that, too, was true—He could not save others and save Himself at the same time. So He gave Himself for others; this is the great principle of redemption. Mark gives us the Crucifixion by the clock. The first three hours were from nine o’clock in the morning until twelve noon; the second three hours were from twelve noon until three o’clock in the afternoon. In the first three hours there was physical light; in the second, physical darkness. In the first three hours there was spiritual darkness; in the second, spiritual light. In those first three hours, man did his worst: they hated and crucified Him. The criminals hanging beside Him reviled Him, and His enemies marched beneath the cross, wagging their heads and ridiculing Him. In the second three hours, God was at work. Jesus suffered at man’s hands in the first three hours; He suffered for man in the last three. In the first three hours, He was dying because of sin; in the second, He was dying for the sin of the world. In the first three hours, sin did all it could to destroy Him; in the second, He made His soul an offering for sin. He paid for the sins of the world by becoming sin for us. He was forsaken of God, and yet, even then, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:19.) What a paradox!

Then, when our salvation was complete, Jesus cried out and gave up His last breath. He did not die because His bodily organs simply failed; He dismissed His spirit. This made His death different from ours, even in a physical sense. Medical researchers who have studied the physiology of crucifixion note that victims typically grew too weak from blood loss and exhaustion even to speak clearly, let alone cry out, in their final moments—which makes the loud cry Jesus gave immediately before He died (Mark 15:37) so striking. It supports exactly what Mark’s Gospel testifies here: Jesus’ life was not slowly taken from Him; He laid it down, by His own will, at the moment He chose. (See Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ.”)

At that moment the temple curtain was ripped in two, from top to bottom. The priests serving in the temple that day saw it happen; it was three o’clock in the afternoon, the hour of the evening sacrifice. Later we learn that many of these priests came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 6:7). According to the book of Leviticus, the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies represented our separation from God. That veil spoke of the life of Christ, which had shut us out from God—His sinless life shows how sinful our own lives are. The moment He died, the veil was ripped in two, opening our way to God. It is Jesus’ death, not merely His life, that brings us to God. When the Roman captain standing guard in front of Jesus saw that He had stopped breathing, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39). This centurion’s confession revealed real faith; he acknowledged that Jesus is God’s Son. He did not have all the details of theology worked out, but he knew enough to take his place beneath the Cross of Christ. That is all God has ever asked any sinner to do—to come to Him in faith. Next we learn of the women who were still with Jesus at the Cross. His disciples had scattered, but the women were faithful to the very end.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. *The lesson calls the Cross of Jesus Christ “both the greatest tragedy of the ages and the most glorious victory of earth and heaven.” In your own words, explain how it can be both at once. Which side of that paradox—the tragedy or the victory—do you find yourself thinking about more, and why?*
2. *If you keep notes in your Bible, you might want to write this outline next to Mark 15:*
 - *Nine o’clock in the morning to twelve noon: Jesus suffered at man’s hands; He was dying because of sin; sin did all it could to destroy Him.*
 - *Twelve noon to three o’clock in the afternoon: Jesus suffered for man; He was dying for the sin of the world; He made His soul an offering for sin.*

On the cross, Jesus paid for the sins of the world by becoming sin for us. He was forsaken of God, and yet, even then, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Which half of those three hours means more to you personally right now, and why?

3. *Peter promised he would never betray Jesus, and meant it—yet within hours he denied even knowing Him, three times over. Jesus already knew this would happen, and still told Peter He would stand by him. Have you ever broken a promise to God that you were sure, at the time, you could keep? What does Peter’s story tell you about what happens after we fail?*

4. *Mary gave something costly and deeply personal to honour Jesus, even while others in the room criticised her for it. What is something costly to you—not necessarily money, but perhaps your time, your pride, or your comfort—that it would mean something for you to give to Jesus this week?*
5. *The Gospel of Mark is sometimes called the Gospel of action because it moves so quickly from one thing Jesus did to the next. Before He returned to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Thinking specifically about what you have just studied in Mark 14 and 15—Jesus willingly betrayed, arrested, and put to death in your place—what is one specific, concrete way you could share that good news with someone this week, whether in words or in how you treat them?*

—End of Lesson 7—

Lesson 8 — Chapter 16

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ - What a Difference a Day Makes!

For centuries many of the world's distinguished philosophers have assaulted Christianity as irrational, superstitious, and absurd. Many have chosen simply to ignore the central issue of the resurrection. Others have tried to explain it away through various theories. I dare not think of the consequences for the entire human race, dead, alive, and yet to be born, if we were to join issue with such critics. Just as a warm-up exercise, permit me to examine a few of the consequences had Mary Magdalene found the tomb not empty!

The progression of our faith would have stopped right there. And can you imagine what that would point to? God the Father would have caused God the Son to die a horrible and needless death, and His blood would be on our hands too, just as much as on the hands of the perpetrators who crucified Him two thousand years ago. We would continue to live in sin with no hope of forgiveness and redemption. If the tomb had not been empty, Heaven would have remained empty too. God would have been busy creating additional Hell space to accommodate all of us. Or, if you prefer the teaching of other religions, be prepared instead to be reborn as a worm in a mango, a pig in the dirt, a mosquito, or something of that sort.

Above all, we would all be living in constant fear of death – a death our Lord has already conquered through His resurrection. Death stands at the end of the pathway of every human life – firm, inevitable, and final. Rich and poor, sick and healthy, all alike must face it one day. For most people, death strikes fear and terror. How many people are prepared to talk about their own death as casually as we talk about birthdays or wedding anniversaries?

But for those who believe in Jesus Christ, there is a sharp difference. They do not need to fear death, because they have put their trust in the One Who is the Resurrection and the Life. The religions of the world try to help people cope with their mortality, but they can offer virtually nothing. All of their founders lie dead and buried to this day. How completely different Christianity is! In the face of the great fact of death, it announces an even greater fact: our Lord is a living God. Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and because He lives, we too shall live.

What happened when He came back to life on Easter morning? How do we know that He did? And how did His resurrection change our lives from that day forward?

The Scientific Explanation

I was curious to know what the scientific community makes of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A discussion like this could go on endlessly, so we will keep it brief.

Scientists have been at odds with theologians and preachers throughout history. Sadly enough, quite a few liberal theologians agree with them. Many scientists insist that it is impossible to believe in the resurrection of Jesus as described in the New Testament and as the Church has traditionally understood it – forgetting, perhaps, that Paul himself already anticipated the objection: “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Well, now we get into a bind here.

The trouble is that science can only work with reproducible events: they must be observable many times, or by many people, and even then they run the risk of being rejected if they are not well preceded or explicable by existing theory. Here is a common statement scientists often make: “If I see something in an experiment, then run the same experiment ten thousand times and never see it again, I have to conclude that it was a fluke or an electrical spike in the recording equipment. Without reproducibility, science is no longer science; it is history, or even hearsay.”

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, cannot be considered scientifically, because it has never been claimed to be a reproducible event. Jesus is unique, the Man Who is also God, and His resurrection will not be reproduced until the end of history. Nor was it a mere bodily restoration like that of Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus, who were simply restored to their former, mortal lives – not raised to a new, imperishable one – and so both died again in time. The resurrection brought Jesus, and will one day bring us, into a new and larger life in a glorified body. Far from making that harder to believe, some of what modern science tells us about the universe can actually make it easier to accept. Let us see how that works, as an illustration rather than a proof.

Even if we accept the Big Bang theory for the sake of argument, we find that it supports our faith: it reminds us that God is not bound by what seems physically possible to us. Scientists tell us that the entire universe can be traced back to a single, infinitesimally dense point that suddenly expanded outward – and there, they say, is our universe. If that is how God carried out His work of creation, so be it, for the sake of illustration. Reasoning along the same lines, all God had to do was take what remained of the crucified, dead, and buried body of Jesus Christ and, by that same creative power which spoke the universe into being, cause it to become the gloriously resurrected Lord. We will leave that

thought there for today, offered simply as an illustration and not as scientific proof.

Change Is the Only Constant of Life

I have always been amazed – and I am sure you would agree – at how quickly life can change. Things are one way one day, and the next day they are different. One day someone you have known is here; the next day they are gone. One day you think you are well; the next day you discover that you are extremely ill. One day everything in your life is going well; the next day everything has fallen apart. One day it appears that there is no hope for your situation; the next day your problem has been solved. So much can change in the space of a single day, and that is the theme I want to pursue today.

What a difference a day makes! That was never truer than on the day Jesus rose from the dead. The day Jesus’s body was placed in the tomb, the day He was crucified, was a dark and terrible day. As the sun went down that night, so did the hopes and dreams of all the Lord’s disciples and followers. Mark’s is the only Gospel that speaks of that dark, lifeless Sabbath that passed between the day Jesus died and the day He rose again from the dead. I am sure it was a long, miserable Saturday for all those who had placed their hopes on Jesus. But Mark moves us beyond that tragic Saturday to a glorious Sunday, when the world changed for ever.

The Event of That Day

I would like us to look at the events of that first day. That day matters, because the events of it shaped every day that has followed since – and every day still to come. That day matters because what happened then has already shaped the lives of most people in this room, whether they realise it or not. And that day matters because what happened on it can still make a difference in your life today.

A Ministry of Love

The three women mentioned in these verses observed the long, dark Sabbath day. They rested in their homes, as they were commanded by the Law. Just the day before, they had witnessed the death of Jesus. They watched as His body was placed in a tomb and a great stone was rolled over the opening to seal His body inside (Mark 15:46-47).

When the Sabbath ended, at sunset on Saturday, they emerged from their homes, went into town, and purchased “sweet spices” to “anoint” the body of Jesus. Embalming spices were poured over a body that had already been wrapped in linen strips. The spices these women intended to use would have helped to mask the smell of decomposition.

They intended to go to the tomb early on Sunday morning to perform one final act of love and service for the Lord Jesus Christ. For them, it was a way of finding some closure concerning His death. Broken-hearted, and filled with sorrow, grief, and fear, they made the two-mile journey from Bethany, where they lived, to the tomb just outside the city of Jerusalem.

Their Doubts

As they walked, they kept talking about the stone over the door of the tomb. It must have dawned on them that they might have trouble reaching the body of the Lord: the tomb had been sealed with a large stone rolled over its entrance. By some estimates, this stone could have weighed over four hundred and fifty kilograms. These women could never have moved it by themselves, and they knew it.

They were probably unaware, too, that the Jewish leaders had persuaded Pilate that the disciples might steal the body and then claim that Jesus was alive, so they had asked Pilate to post Roman guards at the tomb and seal it with his official seal, and Pilate had agreed (Matthew 27:62-66). Had they known about that, their fear and doubt would have been even stronger as they made their way to the tomb. These women were not going there looking for a living Lord; they were expecting to find a cold, and perhaps already decomposing, body. Do you know what their problem was? Their problem was that they were still living on Saturday!

These women, along with all the followers of the Lord, had placed all their faith and confidence in Jesus. They believed that He was the Messiah. They believed that He was the One Who was going to fulfil all the ancient prophecies. They believed that He was the One Who would be the King of Israel. They believed that He would establish God’s kingdom on earth. All their hopes for life and eternity were bound up in what they believed about Jesus. But all their fondest hopes and dreams had crumbled to the ground as they stood at the cross and watched Him die. Faith turned to grief, and grief to utter hopelessness, as they saw His broken body taken down from the cross and placed in that tomb. When that stone was rolled across the door of that grave, it was a ringing statement of finality.

That stone seemed to say, “It’s all over! It’s all over! Hope is gone! There is no future! There is no salvation! There is no kingdom! Jesus is dead! It’s all over!” That would have been the case for us too, had the story of Jesus ended with Him

buried in a tomb, the stone rolled across the door, and stayed that way.

Where Are We Today?

And that is where so many of us are today. We are still living on Saturday, and we do not even realise that Sunday has come! People move through this world enslaved by their sins (Ephesians 2:1-3). They move through this world oblivious to the God Who lives to save them (Romans 1:18-21). They move through this world without joy, without peace, without hope, trapped in their sins and headed for Hell. The trouble for most people is that they are trapped on Saturday. They live in the darkness of their sin, unaware that a joy unspeakable and full of glory could be theirs – if only they knew that the tomb was empty, that Jesus was alive, and that they could be delivered from that very darkness.

A Message of Love and Power

When these women arrived at the tomb, their fear turned to amazement. They lifted their downcast eyes and saw that the massive stone had been rolled away from the door, and that the way into the tomb stood wide open. They did not yet know that before they arrived that morning there had been a “great earthquake”, and that an angel had come to the tomb and removed the stone. Nor did they know that the earthquake and the appearance of the angel had frightened the Roman guards so badly that they had fled the scene (Matthew 28:2-4).

All they could see was the tomb standing open, and they feared the worst. Surely, they thought, the Lord’s enemies must have taken His body away. So they ran the rest of the way to the tomb to investigate. And when they went into the tomb, they found “a young man sitting on the right side”, clothed in a strange garment. We know from the other Gospel accounts that this was no ordinary young man – this was an angel. He had a message for them, one designed to help them stop living on Saturday, and to help them begin to experience the power of Sunday in their lives.

He told them, “Be not affrighted.” Things are not as they appear on the surface. They never are! Nothing is ever as bad as your mind, your heart, and Satan would have you believe.

He told them he knew why they had come. He wanted them to know that our Lord’s cry, “It is finished,” on the cross did not mean that He was finished! The joyous cry on that Sunday is, “he is risen!” The angel wanted them to know that the power of death had been swallowed up by the far greater power of life. The angel wanted them to know that the empty tomb of the Lord is not a place of despair and defeat. That empty tomb is a place of glory, a place of power, and a place of hope.

Our Lord lives. Jesus is alive, just as the angel had said! That was a message those women needed to hear that Sunday morning, and it is the message you and I need to hear again today.

A Message with Proof

The angel then invited them to look at the place where the body had been. They would have seen the cloth strips that had been wrapped around the body, still lying there undisturbed, as if the body had simply passed right through them. They would also have seen the napkin that had covered His head, folded and laid aside separately (a detail preserved in John’s Gospel). They would have looked upon a scene of absolute calm and order – not at all the kind of scene they would have found had anyone taken or moved the body. The message of that empty tomb is that Jesus is alive! For two thousand years, cynics have tried to prove that the resurrection did not take place. They have invented every kind of wild theory imaginable to account for the empty tomb, and every one of those theories is dashed to pieces by the testimony of that empty grave.

If the Jewish authorities had still had the body, they would have produced it the moment the disciples began preaching the resurrection. If the disciples had taken the body themselves, they would hardly have gone on to die for what they knew to be a lie. That missing body has always been impossible for the critics to explain away. His body was missing because He was alive! Jesus walked out of that tomb in eternal victory over Satan, death, and sin.

That empty tomb is still preaching today. It still tells this world that Jesus is alive, and that He can save all who come to Him by faith (Hebrews 7:25). My friends, if you are still trapped in the deadness and darkness of your sin, you do not have to remain there. Our Lord Jesus lives today, and He can deliver you from the Saturday of your sin and carry you into the Sunday of His new life.

The message of the empty tomb rolled the stone away from the hearts of those sad, sorrowful, grief-stricken women. It brought them out of the gloom of defeat into the glory of life. It can do the same for you and me. Hear that message and heed it today. Let God roll the stone away from your heart.

A Mission of Liberation

The angel sent them away from the tomb to carry the message to the Lord’s disciples, who were filled with fear and

hiding away (John 20:19). God wanted them to know that Jesus is alive. There is no need to fear. There is joy. There is hope. Even Peter, the very man who had so recently denied the Lord, is singled out by name: the Lord wants Peter to know that he is loved too. What an amazing detail! The three women had come to that tomb that morning worried about how they would roll away a single stone. They did not know it yet, but God was about to use them to roll countless stones away from the hearts of millions. They were the first to spread the good news of that empty tomb.

They had come to that tomb with sorrow in their hearts, and they left it changed. What they had seen and heard at the empty tomb was almost more than they could take in. What they encountered there changed their lives and replaced their sorrow with an overwhelming sense of the power of God. They knew that they were now part of a great miracle, and they ran to tell others about their risen Lord.

The Consequence

Mark tells us that, at first, fear kept them silent, and they said nothing to anyone along the way. We know from the other Gospels that they did go on to find the disciples and tell them (Matthew 28:8; John 20:1).

It is worth pausing on something here. In the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts of Mark's Gospel, the book actually ends at verse eight, with the women fleeing the tomb in fear and amazement. The familiar resurrection appearances and the Great Commission recorded in verses nine to twenty were most likely added afterwards, by a later copyist filling out what must have felt like an unfinished ending. This is well established among biblical scholars, and it is nothing to be troubled by: it casts no doubt whatsoever on the resurrection itself, which Matthew, Luke, John, and the rest of the New Testament attest to fully in their own words. It simply means that, for the rest of the story, we naturally turn to the other Gospels – which is exactly what we are about to do.

This news affected the disciples too, and many of them ran to the tomb. We are told that John looked in, saw the evidence for himself, and was the first to believe. When the Lord's resurrection is embraced by faith, it brings about a change in the life of the person who receives that truth. When the death and resurrection of Jesus, which together are the Gospel, are embraced by faith, a new birth takes place. A sinner becomes a saint. A child of the devil becomes a child of God. A new creature is born (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17). A new life draws its first breath.

That new life is not perfect, but it is different. It is a life that Christ lives through. It is a life that strives to know God and the power of the resurrected Christ. It is a life that is no longer satisfied with Saturdays. It is a life that longs for the glories of Sunday to be real every day! It is a life that cannot keep the good news to itself, because it wants others to have what it enjoys. That is the power of an empty tomb. It has the power to roll stones away in lives. It has the power to deliver us from the Saturday of our death. It has the power to allow us to live in the Sunday of His victory!

We started by saying, "What a difference a day makes!" On Saturday, everything looked bleak, barren, and dead. On Sunday, some struggling believers had the stones rolled away from their hearts. They heard the good news that Jesus was alive. They believed that message, and it changed their lives. They shared that message with others who were still trapped in their sin.

That message still rings out today. I heard it one day. I believed it, and I was carried out of a dead, terrible, dark Saturday into a wonderful, glorious Sunday. I have seen others delivered, and I am sharing that message with you today. The Lord can roll away the stone from your heart. He can lead you out of your darkness into His light; out of your death into His life.

Do you not want to be saved? Do you not want to be delivered from your dead, dark Saturday, and to know the Sunday of His peace, His joy, and His salvation? If He is standing outside your tomb today, calling you, then come to Him right now. Come and be saved. Leave Saturday behind, and come and find out what Sunday is all about.

Points for Discussion

1. The three women came to the tomb expecting to anoint a dead body, and left it as the first witnesses of a living Lord. Their fear turned into action the moment they understood what had really happened. Describe a time when receiving genuinely good news changed not just how you felt, but what you actually did next.
2. The angel's message was for "his disciples and Peter" by name – the very man who had denied Jesus three days earlier. What does it tell you about Jesus that He made a point of naming Peter? Is there a "Peter moment" in your own life, something you feel disqualifies you, that this news speaks into?
3. The lesson says that many people are still "living on Saturday": stuck in fear, sin, or hopelessness, without realising that Sunday has already come. What are some of the ways someone your age can get stuck on Saturday, even after hearing the truth about Jesus? What helps you remember that Sunday has come?
4. What does the resurrection actually mean for you personally – not just as a historical fact you believe, but as

something that changes how you live this week?

5. This is the final lesson of your study of the whole Gospel of Mark, from Jesus's baptism in chapter one to the empty tomb in chapter sixteen. As you prepare for Confirmation, what is one thing about Jesus that looks different to you now from when you began? And what is one way you want people to be able to see, in how you live, that you believe He is risen?

— END OF STUDY OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK —

We are to be people of action for Jesus.

What are you doing today to get out the Word of God?