

F. Wayne MacLeod

The Gospel of Mark

Light To My Path Bible Notes



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*Light To My Path Bible
Notes*

F. Wayne MacLeod

Light To My Path Book Distribution

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INTRODUCTION

It is generally understood that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, who was closely associated with Peter and the other apostles of Jesus. It is the most concise of all the Gospels. Omitting the birth, genealogy, and childhood of Jesus, Mark begins at our Lord's baptism and takes us through the years of His Galilean and Judean ministry to his death, resurrection, and ascension. He presents Jesus as the Christ and demonstrates evidence of this by His miracles, teaching, resurrection, and ascension to sit at the right hand of God. He shares openly how despite many proofs of His divinity, the people

of His day delivered Him up to be crucified. However, Jesus' victory over the grave and ascension to the Father were evidence to Mark that He was the Christ, the son of the Blessed One.

MARK 1

Verse 1

It is generally understood that Mark or John Mark was a co-worker with Peter and Paul and cousin to Barnabas. As one closely connected to these apostles, he had intimate knowledge of the person and work of the Lord Jesus. This is his account.

This, says Mark, is the beginning of the gospel. There are two words we need to notice here. First, observe the word gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation and restoration to God through the work of the Lord Jesus. Mark tells us that this is what his book will be about. He will tell us

about the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This sets his objective for the book.

Notice second, the word, beginning. Mark is saying something like this: "This is how it all started." Now, admittedly, Mark does not begin with the birth of Jesus Christ. He chooses instead to start with John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus, which was his initiation into public ministry. For Mark's purposes, he will begin with the public ministry of Jesus.

Notice something else here in verse 1. Mark tells us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He wastes no time in revealing his position on this matter. Everything that follows will prove that Jesus is the Son of God sent to this earth for the salvation of His people.

Mark shares his purpose in writing the book here in this verse. It is to give an account of how salvation came through

Jesus Christ, whom he will show is the Son of God.

Verse 2

Mark begins with a prophetic word from both Isaiah and Malachi.

It should be noted that there is some difference in the Greek texts in this verse. The Textus Receptus from which the King James Version is translated does not include the name Isaiah but translates: "As it is written in the prophets." Other ancient manuscripts include the name Isaiah, so more modern translations read: "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet."

Why this may be of some concern is that Mark begins by quoting not from Isaiah but from Malachi 3:1:

*1 "Behold, I send my messenger,
and he will prepare the way before*

*me. And the Lord whom you seek
will suddenly come to his temple;
and the messenger of the covenant
in whom you delight, behold, he is
coming, says the LORD of hosts. –
Mal 3:1*

The matter is resolved when we come to verse 3, and he continues to quote by adding the words of Isaiah, as found in Isaiah 40.

Mark points us to the prophets and how they predicted God would send a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. People of that day would know the Messiah, in part by means of this fulfilment. John the Baptist would declare himself to be the fulfilment of the prophecies of Malachi and Isaiah. Listen to the response of John the Baptist when asked by the religious leaders to identify himself:

(22) So, they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."- John 1:22-23 ESV

Mark points to this old prophecy to show that the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger, and that messenger did come as predicted in the person of John the Baptist.

Verse 3

After quoting from Malachi, Mark now cites Isaiah's prophetic announcement. He quotes here from Isaiah 40:3.

Notice that Isaiah speaks of a voice crying in the wilderness. When asked by the religious leaders of the day to

identify himself, John the Baptist replied:

(23) He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."- John 1:23 ESV

Consider also the words of Matthew 3:1-3 concerning John the Baptist:

(1) In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, (2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (3) For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" – Matthew 3:1-3 ESV

The identity of the voice in the wilderness is very clear. It speaks of

John the Baptist. Notice next what that voice said: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Lord. When I lived in Mauritius, the prime minister of India came to visit. As he travelled to the capital city, police travelled ahead of him to prepare the way. They assured no obstacles hindered his trip to the capital city. What would you do if you had a visitor coming to your house? Would you not prepare the house for them? You would sweep the floor and tidy up before that visitor arrived. You would do this out of respect for your guest. Similarly, John was sent before the Lord Jesus to prepare the way. He challenged men and women to repent of their sins, for the Son of God would soon be manifested in their midst.

Verse 4

Mark tells us two things about John the Baptist here.

First, he baptized in the wilderness. It is uncertain where John got his mandate to baptize. The Tyndale Bible Dictionary tells us:

Converts from pagan religions were admitted to Judaism only after fulfilling certain obligations, which included the study of the Torah, circumcision, and a ritual bath to wash away the impurities of the Gentile background. – "Baptism," Tyndale Bible Dictionary, Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc, 2020 (c) 2001 Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

There may be some connection to this Jewish practice.

What is important to note is that as Jesus began His ministry, He also baptized those who chose to follow Him:

(22) After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. (23) John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized – John 3:22-23 ESV

Notice that while John was baptizing near Salim, Jesus and His disciples baptized in the Judean countryside. Both Jesus and John were baptizing at that same time. Similarly, we read in John 4:1-2:

(1) Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (2) (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples) (2) he left Judea and departed again for Galilee – John 4:1-3 ESV

John and Jesus (or His disciples) baptized those who accepted their message.

Second, speaking of John's baptism, Mark tells us that he proclaimed a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

John's baptism was first a baptism of repentance. Repentance was a requirement for all who were baptized by John. No one could be baptized if they did not turn from their sin. The other important detail about John's baptism was that it was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. We must understand what Mark is telling us here about John's baptism.

What is a baptism of repentance? It symbolizes a heart broken by God and done with sin. Those who stood before John to be baptized understood they were sinners needing cleansing. They came to recognize their guilt and

confess that they needed the forgiveness of God.

In John 3:25-26 we read:

(25) Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. (26) And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." – John 3:25-26 ESV

Notice the connection here between the discussion about purification and John's baptism. It appears that to the Jewish mind, John's baptism was somehow connected with the idea of purification. That is to say, an individual came to John, recognizing that they were unclean and needed to be cleansed. They came repenting of their

sin and were ceremonially washed in the waters of baptism.

The forgiveness of sin Mark speaks about here was not in the waters of baptism themselves. Those waters were not able to impart forgiveness. Without the repentance spoken of here, there would be no forgiveness. The water was a symbol of the willingness of God to cleanse and forgive any who would come to Him with a repentant heart. It was also a public commitment on the part of the candidate being baptized to walk in that forgiveness and cleansing.

Verse 5

We can see the importance of John's ministry here. People from all over Judea and Jerusalem went to John to be baptized. Notice particularly that they did so by confessing their sin.

Something wonderful was happening in those days. As Jesus prepared for ministry, the Spirit of God was moving ahead of him, breaking the people's hearts in Judea. They became aware of their sin and their need for forgiveness and cleansing.

God was preparing the country for the Messiah. People were being convicted of their sins in preparation for the Saviour. Before we can see our need for a Saviour, we need to understand our sins.

Verse 6

Mark takes a moment to describe John the Baptist here. He has three things to say about him in this verse.

First, John the Baptist was clothed with camel's hair. John was not the first to wear this kind of clothes. Listen to the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8:

(8) They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."- 2 Kings 1:8 ESV

Like Elijah, the prophet, John the Baptist also wore a hair garment with a leather belt. There is a clear reason for this. Consider what the last prophet of the Old Testament had to say about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ:

(5) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. – Malachi 4:5 ESV

While Malachi lived many years after Elijah, he prophesied that he would come before the return of the Messiah. This prophecy perplexed the disciples, so they asked Jesus how he could

explain it because they had not seen Elijah, yet He was with them as the prophesied Messiah. Listen to the explanation of Jesus:

(10) And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" (11) He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. (12) But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." (13) Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.- Matthew 17:10-13 ESV

According to Jesus, John the Baptist was the Elijah to come. John dressed as Elijah to show that he was the prophet who would announce the coming of the Messiah.

The camel hair garment was a coarse-haired garment often worn by those lamenting or grieving.

Second, John wore a leather belt around his waist. This also was part of Elijah's attire. Some see a reference to a priestly belt, but it was certainly not as elaborate. It served a practical purpose of not only keeping the camel-haired garment close to the body but also for carrying objects as they would often be attached to the belt.

Third, John ate locusts and wild honey. Locusts were a food acceptable to the Jewish diet, according to Leviticus 11:22. Wild honey and locusts would have been readily available in the region and could have been obtained free of charge. This may be an indication of the simplicity of John's lifestyle. Like the Saviour he announced, he did not come with

pomp and glory but with simplicity and humility.

Verse 7

Mark tells us something of the message John preached in those days in verses seven and eight. Notice what John the Baptist taught about Jesus:

"After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." – Mk 1:7

According to Luke 1:36, John's mother, Elizabeth and Jesus' mother, Mary, were relatives. Jesus and John, therefore, had a family connection. We do not know how much they connected as youngsters or how John came to understand who Jesus was. What is clear from this verse, however, is that

God had revealed this truth to John the Baptist.

John told those who heard him preach that Jesus would come after him, but he was mightier than him. John knew that although he had a very special calling, the Lord Jesus was the important one. He had no intention of drawing any attention to himself but pointed people to this Mighty One he was called to announce.

John made it clear to those who heard him that he considered himself unworthy of untying the strap of Jesus' sandals. One of the lowest tasks a servant could perform was to remove the sandals from the feet of their master. John tells his listeners that he did not even feel worthy to accomplish this task for the Lord Jesus.

Verse 8

Mark continues from verse 7 to share the message of John the Baptist. After telling his listeners that he was unworthy of untying Jesus' sandals, John compares their work. Notice what he tells us here.

John baptized with water. This baptism was a baptism of repentance. John called people to turn from their sins and be baptized as a symbol of the forgiveness and cleansing offered by God.

According to John, however, the baptism of Jesus was a baptism of the Holy Spirit. What John dealt with in symbols, Jesus addressed in power. What was water compared to the Holy Spirit of God? What water symbolized; the Spirit of God made real. The baptism of Jesus was a baptism of real life. Those baptized in the Holy Spirit were endued with power from on high. The very life of God indwelt them, and they were transformed. As John looks

at his ministry, he sees how small it is compared to the work of Jesus Christ. While he had a role to play, people needed the Lord Jesus and His work. If there was one thing John needed to do, it was to point people to the one who could transform their lives. We would do well to remember this in our ministries as well.

Verse 9

It is uncertain where John was at this time, but we know that he was located on the Jordan River, where he was baptizing those who heard, accepted his message and repented of their sin. Mark tells us that Jesus left the region of Nazareth, the town where he grew up, and travelled down to see John at the Jordan River. Notice that Jesus intended to be “baptized by John in the Jordan.”

The idea of Jesus being baptized by John has caused great debate in Christian circles. John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance." Why would the sinless Son of God submit to a baptism of repentance? Why was it important for Jesus to be baptized by John? Let me make a couple of points here.

First, notice that Jesus travelled a distance to see John the Baptist. We have already declared that John was the Elijah who was to announce the coming of the Messiah. It was important, therefore, that John baptize Jesus because he was the one called to announce Him as the Messiah. It was by means of His baptism that Jesus was introduced to the world by John.

Second, notice how Mark tells us that what occurred that day was indeed a "baptism." What we need to understand, however, is that while Jesus went through the same process,

there were some very clear differences between His baptism and the baptism of the others present that day. Mark goes on to explain this more fully in the verses that follow.

Verse 10

Verse 10 tells us two important things about what happened when Jesus “came up out of the water.” The phrase “come up” is ἀναβαίνω (anabaínō). It is derived from the words aná meaning, up, and baínō, meaning to go from a lower to a higher location. This may be a reference to the method used to baptize Jesus (submerging Him into the water and His rising out of the water) or the fact that He went up from the river to the higher riverbank. What is important is that we note what took place when He came up out of the water.

First, Mark tells us that the heavens were immediately torn open. There is a connection between the baptism of Jesus and this miraculous event. God was responding to what took place that day. This did not happen for any other baptismal candidate. Jesus' baptism was different. He went through the same rituals, but there was a meaning to His baptism that was not attached to any other person baptized by John.

Second, the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christ is significant. He was anointed here by the Spirit of God for the work for which He had come. His ministry would be empowered by the Spirit and dependent upon the Father.

The anointing of the Spirit was visible in the case of Jesus. He is described as coming like a dove. We might see some deep significance to the dove here, but

what is important is that people saw what happened. The anointing of Jesus for ministry was witnessed by those present that day. This appears to be the Father's intent in making the Spirit's anointing visible.

While Jesus went to John to be baptized and went through the same rituals as everyone there, the meaning was completely different. Jesus was not repenting of sin but demonstrating His submission to the work to which the Father had called Him. The Father demonstrated to all, through this baptism that Jesus was the Messiah to come.

Verse 11

The last detail Mark recorded at Jesus' baptism was an audible voice from heaven. People heard that voice. It testified to God's acceptance of Christ and His work.

The words spoken that day were from heaven. There was no doubt about this in the minds of those at the baptism. These were the Words of God Himself.

Notice also that the words of God from heaven were spoken directly to Jesus but were heard by those present that day. The idea is that they were intended to affirm Jesus but also to commend Him to those present.

The words from heaven declared two important facts.

First, the Father declared Jesus to be His beloved Son. There is a sense in which we are all sons and daughters of God through the work of Jesus. What God was saying that day, however, was deeper than this. Only Jesus is the Son of God. The phrase indicates that Jesus is God.

Second, the Father declared His pleasure in the Lord Jesus and the ministry to which He was committing

Himself at that time. His pleasure is in both the character of Christ and in His ministry.

The baptism of Jesus was not for repentance but to declare Him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, to whom the Father had committed the ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Verse 12

In verse 11, we saw how the Spirit of God fell on Jesus “like a dove.” Notice the first task of this heavenly dove — he immediately drove Jesus into the wilderness. The word translated as “drove” in the Greek language is ἐκβάλλω (ekbállō). It comes from the words ek, meaning out, and bállō, meaning to cast, throw or drive. There is here a sense of force being applied to Jesus. He is compelled or thrust into the desert. The heavenly dove is exerting His power and propelling Jesus

into the wilderness. The Lord Jesus submits in obedience to this prompting and leading of the Spirit.

Verse 13

Jesus would remain in the wilderness for forty days. There may be some significance to these forty days. He would spend a day for every year the Old Testament Israelites wandered in the wilderness.

Notice what took place in the wilderness. He was "being tempted by Satan." Mark specifically tells us that it was Satan who was tempting Jesus. Our enemy knew the significance of Jesus' ministry and would spare no expense to trip him up or cause Him to disqualify Himself by sinning.

Satan's temptations were not the only struggle for the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. Mark also tells us that

Jesus was with the wild animals. An isolated man in the desert with no defences was fair game for these wild animals. Jesus would have had to be constantly watchful.

Finally, note that while Jesus was being attacked both spiritually by Satan and physically by wild animals, He was also being ministered to by angels of God. What is significant here is that all these things were happening simultaneously. His soul was being bombarded with temptations. His body was under the constant stress of attack from wild animals, and angels were ministering to Him all that while. This ministration of angels took place in his temptation and not apart from it. Jesus knew pain and comfort at the same time.

In my pastoral experience, I have often discovered that people want comfort without pain. They want strength without temptation. I have found that we do not truly understand comfort

and strength until we experience it in these trials.

While Mark does not detail the temptation of the Lord Jesus, we can be sure it was quite intense. This time in the wilderness proved the character of the Lord Jesus, revealed the horrible nature of sin and evil to Him, and strengthened Him spiritually for the task ahead. The heavenly dove of verse 12 had a purpose in driving Jesus into the wilderness.

Verse 14

John the Baptist would be arrested not long after Jesus' baptism. John did not hold any punches when addressing sin in society. He spoke out against even the sin of Herod, the tetrarch when he took his brother's wife. According to Luke 3, this rebuke caused Herod to throw him in prison.

(19) But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, (20) added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison – Luke 3:19-20 ESV

The arrest of John the Baptist was a time marker in the history of that day. It was at that point that Jesus came into the region of Galilee, preaching the "gospel of God." Galilee was Jesus' home territory and where the town of Nazareth was located. Jesus begins His ministry at home.

Verse 15

Mark tells us the essence of Jesus' message in those early days. Notice three details here.

First, Jesus declared that "the time is fulfilled." He speaks here about the

words of the prophets who pointed to Him as the Messiah to come. In preaching that the time was fulfilled, Jesus was telling all who would listen that He was the fulfilment of the words of those prophets.

Second, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand. A kingdom needs a king. Jesus came as that king to establish His kingdom. The kingdom of God, in the Jewish mind, was a political one. Jesus, however, did not come to set up that kind of kingdom. Instead, He came to establish a reign in the hearts and lives of all who would submit to Him as their King and Saviour. As their king, He would set them free from sin as their greatest enemy.

Finally, Jesus called for repentance and belief in the gospel. The great enemy of the kingdom of God is sin and rebellion. This is what needed to be conquered. Hearts needed to be

restored to the Father. Jesus came to bring the good news (gospel) that this is what He had come to do. He would establish the kingdom of God on this earth through the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of hearts and lives to the Father.

Jesus calls for two responses to this message. First, people were to repent of their sins and rebellion against God. That is to say, they were to recognize their guilt, confess it and turn from it to the Father. Second, they were to believe that He was how they could obtain forgiveness, pardon and restoration. They were to place their confidence and hope in Him as their Saviour and King.

Verse 16

One of the first tasks Jesus undertook as He preached the gospel was to select a team of men to join Him. As

He travelled along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, our Lord met two fishermen, Simon and Andrew, his brother. Mark tells us they were casting a net into the sea when Jesus passed by. The Simon mentioned here is Simon Peter.

Jesus chose to work with these simple men. He instructed them from the beginning of His ministry and left the work to them when He was crucified and returned to His Father. This choice ensured the continuance of His message and work.

Verse 17

When Jesus saw Simon and Andrew casting out their net, He called out to them: "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." What is striking about this is that there was no interview of the candidates to see if they were qualified. While Jesus is in

his home province, there is no indication that He knew these men before this encounter. What is clear is that the Lord Jesus is sensitive to the Father and the leading of the Spirit, and these two men were God's choice for His disciples.

Verse 18

Notice the response of Simon and Andrew. Mark tells us that they "immediately" left their nets and followed Jesus. The idea here is that there was no long protracted consideration. These two men did not ask for time to consider this offer. They accepted His invitation without hesitation. We do not know if they had heard Jesus preach before this, but they clearly had some indication of who He was.

Notice also here the phrase: "They left their nets." The invitation to follow

Jesus had a cost. It demanded that they be willing to leave their occupation, homes and families. These men were willing to do this.

We discover in Simon and Andrew two men willing to leave everything to follow the call of Jesus. They did so without hesitation. They heard that call, left everything and obeyed. These were high qualifications for the first two disciples.

Verse 19

From this encounter with Simon and Andrew, Jesus continued traveling along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here He met another two fishermen by the names of James and John. They were sons of Zebedee. As Jesus passed by, they were mending their nets. Clearly, they had every intention of returning to the sea. They were just going about their daily routine when

Jesus showed up. While they were not looking for Jesus that day, He was looking for them. Isn't that how it was for each one of us?

Verse 20

James and John responded just as Simon and Andrew did. They left everything to follow Jesus. Notice that James and John left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired servants.

Zebedee was a man of some means. He could hire servants to assist him in his fishing business. The fact that they left Zebedee, their father, "in the boat" may be an indication of how quickly James and John made this decision to leave everything to follow Jesus.

Verse 21

Travelling with His four disciples, Jesus went to the town of Capernaum, located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. As it was the Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue. Mark tells us that our Lord took advantage of this opportunity and stood up to teach. It was common practice for visiting teachers to be given the chance to share a word.

Jesus and His disciples were Jews and still worshipped in the Jewish way. Jesus saw His ministry and teaching to be part of the Jewish tradition and in fulfilment of the prophecy of Jewish Scriptures.

Verse 22

Observe the response of the worshippers in the synagogue of Capernaum. Mark tells us that they were “astonished at his teaching.” The word “astonished” in the Greek

language is ἐκπλήσσω (ekpléssō). It could be used to describe what takes place when a person is knocked unconscious by a heavy blow. It also carries with it the sense of astonishment or terror. It is a strong word that indicates the depth of amazement and awe these people had for the teaching of Jesus.

Mark tells us what particularly astonished the worshippers in Capernaum: Jesus “taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” There was power and authority in what Jesus said. The scribes taught what was required by the law, but Jesus’ teaching brought the people into the very presence of God. Jesus’ teaching struck home and spoke to the very essence of their being. They would leave that synagogue having heard from God Himself. These worshippers had never before experienced such an event.

Verse 23

It is striking that among those gathered in the synagogue to worship was a man with an unclean spirit. Mark does not go into detail about this or tell us how that uncleanness was manifested in the man. It may be that no one was aware of his condition until Jesus came.

We are not told why this man with the unclean spirit was in the worship service. It may be that the man in whom this unclean spirit dwelt was looking for hope. It might also be that this unclean spirit was present as a hindrance to the advancement of worship in the synagogue. Unclean spirits do not hesitate to go to worship services.

Notice that as Jesus taught with the authority and power of God, this unclean spirit cried out. It was not only the people who gathered to worship

that responded to the power of Jesus' teaching that day. The unclean spirit also felt that authority and responded by crying out loud.

Verse 24

Notice the words of the unclean spirit that cried out in the synagogue.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God."

Observe first the question: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" The unclean spirit knew who Jesus was and identified Him as the one who came from Nazareth. Understand here that Nazareth did not have a good reputation at that time.

Listen to the words of Nathanael when Philip invited him to meet Jesus of Nazareth:

(46) Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." – John 1:46 ESV

It is possible that by identifying His city of residence, the unclean spirit is attempting to diminish Jesus in the sight of those who had come to worship.

There is some confusion over how to translate the Greek in this question asked by the unclean spirit. The Greek words read: "Which of us and to you. "

The King James Version interprets this to mean: "What have we to do with thee." The New International version reads: "What do you want with us?" The English Standard says: "What have you to do with us?"

However we translate this Greek phrase: the unclean spirit is seeking to put a distance between Jesus and the worshippers in that synagogue. He is declaring Jesus irrelevant to the needs of those present that day.

Isn't this still the tactic of the enemy today? Satan wants to take our attention away from Christ and the significance of His work, for He knows that it is this person and His work that will ultimately defeat him and his worldly agenda.

Notice the second question asked by the unclean spirit that day: "Have you come to destroy us?" This takes the suggestion of the first question to a whole new level. The first question asked whether Jesus had any relevance to the synagogue worshippers. This question suggests that He might be their great enemy.

The unclean spirit infers that Jesus had come to destroy years of Jewish tradition. These worshippers in Capernaum had been doing fine until Jesus came and preached in their synagogue. His preaching now stirred up its members and challenged their lifestyles and beliefs.

The words of the unclean spirit are still heard today wherever the Spirit of God is at work. Have you come to destroy what we have believed to be true? We were doing fine until this man Jesus came. He changes everything we have known to this point. Nothing will be the same again. The idea here is to present Jesus as an enemy of the status quo. The reality of the matter is that unless we allow Jesus to destroy the old man and his ways, we will never experience true victory.

Notice finally that having posed these two questions, the unclean spirit declares that he knew Jesus as the

Holy One of God. These final words are striking in their defiance. You are the Holy One; what have we to do with you? You are the Holy One, our enemy coming to destroy us.

We see the bitterness of this unclean spirit toward Jesus and his hostility toward Jesus, the Holy One of God.

Verse 25

Jesus responds to the unclean spirit questioning him in the synagogue in Capernaum. Remember that this unclean spirit came to the synagogue in a man present among the worshippers that day.

The unclean spirit would not have been noticed as it entered the synagogue. The only way it was known that this worshipper had an unclean spirit was when it began to react to the presence and teaching of Jesus.

While the unclean spirit was speaking through this man, it was not to the man that Jesus addressed these words. Jesus discerns that the words are from an unclean spirit and speaks directly to it. Jesus says two things to this spirit.

First, Jesus rebuked the spirit by telling him to be silent. Jesus does not debate with this spirit. There was no purpose in this, nor was there any benefit to a conversation with a demonic spirit. Jesus silences the evil and strips the spirit of any right to communicate his lies.

Second, Jesus, out of compassion for the man present, demands that the unclean spirit come out of him. Jesus has no conversation with the worshipper here. This man had been overcome by evil and could not free himself. The conversation was one-sided. Neither the man nor the spirit had anything to say. Jesus demands

silence and release. There would be no debate over this issue.

Verse 26

In verse 25, Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to be silent and to come out of the man. Notice its response.

First, in response to Jesus' command to be silent, the unclean spirit cried out loudly. Admittedly, the unclean spirit does not seem to have anything particular to say and, in that sense, was obedient to the command of the Lord Jesus. Nonetheless, the unclean spirit responds to the command to be silent with a loud voice. We are not told the reason for this response, but it appears to be one of agony, anger and frustration.

Second, in response to the command of Jesus to come out of the man, the unclean spirit does so by convulsing

him. The Greek word translated, convulsing is σπαράσσω (sparássō), which means to tear or cause spasms of epilepsy. The departure of the unclean spirit was with a measure of violence. We see here a measure of anger, frustration and resistance to Jesus.

Verse 27

Note the response of the worshippers in the synagogue of Capernaum to Jesus casting out the unclean spirit. Mark tells us that they “were all amazed.” Their amazement appears to be in the authority of Jesus. We see this in the question they ask each other that day.

“What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

In verse 22, the worshippers were struck by the authority of Jesus in teaching. Here now, they see that Jesus also had authority over unclean spirits. They were shocked that He could speak to the unclean spirit, and it would respond in submission to His voice.

Those present in Capernaum were fully aware of the authority of Jesus. Powerful signs accompanied His teaching. This was a man to be heard.

Verse 28

The result of this encounter with the unclean spirit is seen in the way Jesus' fame spread
"everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee."

The word fame is translated from the Greek word ἀκοή *akoē*, which means to hear. The idea is that word about the

authority of Jesus to teach and cast out demons spread throughout the region, and people heard about Him and His ability.

What is most striking about this incident is how this unclean spirit became the instrument to spread the news about the Lord Jesus and His authority from God.

Verse 29

After leaving the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus and His four disciples went to the home of Simon and Andrew. Luke seems to leave out Andrew as the owner of the home when he says:

38 And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they

*appealed to him on her behalf. – Lk
4:38*

The home may have been a family home passed down to Simon Peter.

Verse 30

When Jesus and His four disciples arrived at Simon's home, they found his mother-in-law sick with a fever. Notice the phrase, "and immediately they told him about her." The phrase seems to indicate that it was only when they arrived that they discovered her with this fever. Simon had likely not had much contact with his family over the past days as he ministered with Jesus.

Notice what the disciples did when they discovered Simon's mother-in-law with a fever — "immediately they told him about her." Understand that these four disciples were still learning about Jesus. They had heard Him preach and

saw Him cast out the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue in Capernaum. The fact that they “immediately told him” about Simon’s mother-in-law shows that they deeply respected Jesus as a man of God and came to Him for support in this crisis. It is uncertain what they expected Jesus to do, but they certainly looked to Him for support.

We learn here that Simon (also known as Peter or Cephas) was a married man with a mother-in-law at home. Listen to what Paul says about him and his wife in his letter to the Corinthians:

5 Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? – 1Co 9:5

We understand from this that Simon’s wife sometimes travelled with him on his missionary journeys.

Verse 31

Jesus responds to the news about Simon's mother-in-law's illness. Mark tells us that

He "took her by the hand and lifted her up."

We have no record of Jesus saying anything to her. He lifted her, and the fever left. No words were necessary. Jesus' touch was sufficient. He chose to lift her out of her bed, and the disease left her. Sickness had no power against the will of Christ.

Mark tells us that "her fever left her, and she began to serve them." This service was not only proof of her healing but also a demonstration of her gratitude.

We can be sure that this private incident also had a powerful impact on the lives of those present in that house. Jesus demonstrated to them

that He had authority over the effects of sin in this world.

Verse 32

It is uncertain if the news of Simon's mother-in-law's healing was broadcast in the community. We know that Jesus' fame spread after He cast out the unclean spirit in the synagogue (see Mark 1:28).

Mark tells us here that when evening came, Simon's house was thronged with people who were sick and oppressed by demons. Jesus had demonstrated His authority to heal these issues, so people suffering from these afflictions came to Him for healing.

The curse of sin on this world has brought sickness, death, brokenness and separation from God. Evidence of that curse is demonstrated here as the

crowd gathered before Jesus. They were sick and afflicted with demonic spirits and separated from God. In just this short time, desperate people gathered before Jesus in search of hope and healing.

Verse 33

Jesus' presence made quite an impact. The news of His authority in teaching and over sickness and unclean spirits spread, and the city came on mass to the place where He was staying. We have already seen from verse 32 that many present were sick or oppressed by demons. This was a needy crowd in desperate healing and hope. They saw in Jesus the potential for both.

Verse 34

Notice the response of Jesus to this crowd that gathered at the door.

First, He healed many who were sick with various diseases. People came with a variety of illnesses. Jesus demonstrated the authority to heal each of these. Mark does not tell us how many people were healed. He does tell us, however, that it was many.

Second, Jesus also cast out “many” demons. It is quite shocking to see that demonic forces were oppressing such a number of those present. Satan and his demons were present in that community. It leaves us to wonder how much influence they have in our communities today.

Note Jesus would not let these demons speak when He cast them out. Mark tells us that this was because “they knew him.” Let’s consider this briefly.

Why was it so important to silence these demons? There may be any number of reasons for this. In this

case, however, let's consider the context. In verses 23-24, we have an example of an unclean spirit that Jesus cast out of the man in the synagogue in Capernaum.

23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God." — Mk 1:23-24

We see here from verse 24 that the unclean spirit knew Jesus to be "the Holy One of God." Notice, however, what this spirit said about Jesus. He questions the relevance of Jesus by the words: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" The spirit also insinuates that Jesus was an enemy in the words: "Have you come to destroy us?"

Would you take seriously what an evil spirit told you about Jesus? Would you allow a false prophet to stand before your church and proclaim their falsehood? Understand here that Satan is the father of lies and deceit. His objective is to undermine Jesus and His purpose. These demons were sworn enemies of Christ and His kingdom. They knew Jesus and would not hesitate to turn people from Him.

Listen to the words the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. – 1Co 12:3

The apostle tells us that only those speaking in the Holy Spirit can declare Jesus as Lord. These unclean spirits

would not speak in the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, their words would lead to confusion and division over the person of Christ and his purpose. Jesus silenced them as enemies of His kingdom.

Verse 35

Mark 1:32 tells us that it was at sundown when the crowd gathered at the home where Jesus stayed. Jesus healed many of their sickness and cast out a number of demons. We are not told how long that crowd stayed. We can be sure, however, that it was a long evening, and Jesus would have been quite tired from that night's activities.

Notice, however, that Jesus rose "very early in the morning, while it was still dark." The sun had not risen that day, but Jesus was already up. He did not get much rest that night.

Mark tells us why Jesus rose so early. He “went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Understand that this next day would also bring its share of responsibility. The crowds of the last evening would return, and Jesus needed strength and wisdom from the Father to deal with these needs. Physical strength was only part of Jesus’ need for that day. He also needed the encouragement and support of the Father and the Spirit. It would be in this “desolate place” where Jesus would find what was most needed: fellowship with the Father and the strength of the Spirit.

It is all too easy for us to depend on our human strength to pull through. Jesus did get some physical rest that evening, but He was also fully aware that physical strength and mental clarity were not all that was required. He ministered in the Spirit and the power of the Father, and He

understood His need to replenish that strength as well.

Verse 36

By the time Simon and the other disciples woke in the morning, Jesus was already up and in His place of prayer. We understand from verse 37 that the people were already coming to the home looking for Jesus. Simon, Andrew, James and John took it upon themselves to look for Him.

There is an interesting picture here in this verse. Facing the crowd, the disciples are helpless without Jesus. They needed Him if anything was going to happen that day. They went out searching for Him.

At the same time, Jesus is out seeking the Father and the Spirit. He also knew the work to be done that day required

their wisdom and strength. He would not minister without them.

The question we must ask ourselves here is whether we see ourselves in this same need. Do we push ahead in our wisdom and strength, or are we aware of our need of Christ, the Father and the Spirit for what is before us each day?

Verse 37

When the disciples found Jesus, they told Him everyone was looking for Him. Each of these individuals had an “urgent” need. Those who came were sick and oppressed by demons. They were all demanding Jesus’ time and energy. As they gathered, Jesus was with the Father in prayer.

There is a time for ministry, but there is also a need to be built up in our faith through communion with the Father.

The crowd and their needs would have stripped Jesus of all His time with the Father if He allowed them to do so. Jesus does not permit this to happen. He takes time away from ministry to be built up and refreshed in His communion with the Father and the Spirit.

Verse 38

When the disciples found Jesus and told him everyone was looking for Him, Jesus responded: "Let us go on to the next towns."

There was a need in the region of Capernaum. Crowds were still gathering to hear Him speak and to be healed, but Jesus determined to walk away from them. Understand that this decision likely had been the fruit of His time in prayer with the Father. Jesus' decision was not based on need or opportunity but on the leading of the

Father and the Spirit. He would walk away from ministry opportunities to do the will of the Father.

Jesus told His disciples that day that He had been called to preach in other towns and not just in Capernaum. Note the phrase: "For that is why I came out." Is it possible that what Jesus is saying here is that He came out of the town of Capernaum early in the morning to be with the Father because He was sensing that His time in the town had come to an end, and He needed to go elsewhere?

Verse 39

Jesus and His disciples left Capernaum, sensing the leading of the Father to do so. Mark tells us that they travelled throughout the region of Galilee. According to Mark, their ministry was two-fold.

First, Jesus preached in the synagogues. He would have been given permission, as a visiting teacher, to speak to those gathered for worship. This seems to be where Jesus primarily taught at this point in His ministry.

Second, Jesus also cast out demons. The fact that Mark mentions this as a primary ministry of Jesus shows us how much Satan and his demonic forces entrapped the people of that day in darkness. Jesus is engaged deeply in spiritual warfare. He communicated the truth of the kingdom and set people free from the bondage of demonic oppression.

Verse 40

Jesus' fame spread more and more in the region of Galilee as He preached, cast out demons and healed the sick. Evidence of His fame is seen here when

a leper approached, asking to be cured. Notice that Mark recounts the words of the leper here. Kneeling before Jesus, the leper spoke:

"If you will, you can make me clean."

These words express the truth the leper believed.

First, the leper believed Jesus could make him clean. That is to say, he did not doubt that Jesus had the authority to command his leprosy to leave and he would be healed. This man did not doubt Jesus' ability.

Second, the leper believed that Jesus could make him well, but he prefaced this statement with the words: "If you will." He did not question Jesus' ability but was uncertain about His will.

This leper believed that two things were necessary for his healing –the ability and the will. Jesus Himself

would express a similar sentiment in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed to His Father, saying:

42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." – Lk 22:42

Jesus knew the Father could take the cup of suffering from Him. He does not question the ability of the Father here but submits to His will. In the case of Jesus, it was not the will of the Father to take His suffering from Him, so Jesus would face it head-on and die on our behalf.

The leper kneeling before Jesus understood that the ability and will of Jesus needed to agree for His healing to take place.

Verse 41

Notice Jesus' response to the leper here.

First, He was moved with pity. There were likely many who came to Jesus demanding healing. Here in this man, Jesus finds a unique humility. The words, "If you will, you can heal," are not an expression of doubt but of submission to God and His purpose. This humble submission moves Jesus. It is contrasted with the bold requests of those who demanded their healing without any consideration of the purpose of God for their suffering.

Second, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him. We do not know the last time this man experienced human touch. His disease was such that he had to live in isolation. No one dared to touch a leper for fear of contracting their disease. Jesus reaches out to him and touches him physically. That touch was an affirmation of the man and his request.

Finally, Jesus spoke the words: "I will." He showed the leper that it was indeed His purpose that he be cleansed of his disease. The ability and will of Jesus come together here, and Jesus issues the command: "Be clean."

Verse 42

Mark tells us that the leprosy left at the command of Jesus. Mark uses the word "immediately" here to describe this healing. This indicates that the leper's healing was instantaneous. The man was cleansed of his disease as soon as Jesus spoke. Leprosy was no match for the authority and will of Jesus.

Verse 43

Mark tells us that Jesus did two things after the leper's healing. First, he

sternly charged him, and second, He sent him away at once.

First, Mark tells us that Jesus sternly charged the leper. The phrase translated sternly comes from the Greek word ἐμβριμάομαι (embrimáomai). The word ἐμβριμάομαι is derived from the word en, meaning on account of, and the word brimáomai, meaning to roar or storm with anger. It is a strong word that indicates that Jesus spoke very strongly to the leper. Jesus in essence, is commanding the leper and warning him of consequences should he not listen to what He told him. Verse 44 indicates what that command was.

Second, Jesus also sent the leper away at once. Understand that he had likely been known in the community as a leper, and while he had been cleansed, he needed to go through the procedure prescribed by the law to be officially declared clean. Jesus would send him

to the priest for this declaration. It may also be that it was not the purpose of Jesus to attract other lepers seeking healing and creating a stir in the community.

Verse 44

In the last verse, Jesus “sternly charged” the leper He had healed. Jesus told him two things here in this verse.

First, Jesus commanded the leper not to say anything to anyone. The implication was that he was not to broadcast his healing and tell everyone that Jesus healed him. We see the reason for this in verse 45.

Second, Jesus tells the man to show himself to the priest and offer the necessary sacrifices for his cleansing. Leviticus 14 details the procedure a leper would go through

and the sacrifices needed for his cleansing. Only after going through this procedure could the leper be officially declared clean and be able to live a normal life in the community again.

Jesus expected the leper to follow the Law of Moses. Many things would change after the death of Jesus, but at this point, God's people were still under the Law of Moses and its obligations.

Verse 45

While the leper had been sternly charged not to tell anyone about his healing, he left the presence of Jesus and began to "talk freely about it." When is sharing with people what Jesus has done a sin? When Jesus tells us not to do so. The leper disregarded the command of Jesus here and sinned against the Lord, who had

healed him by sharing openly what He had done for him.

Notice the result of the leper freely talking about what Jesus had done for him — “Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Because the leper freely talked about his healing, Jesus could no longer enter the town without people crowding Him and asking for healing. He had to go into hiding, but even then, people found Him and came to Him demanding His services.

What we need to understand here is that there is a great difference between being led by the Spirit to minister and what is happening here. People began to tell Jesus what He needed to do for them. They thronged Him with needs and burdened Him with requests, not from God. The leper unleashed on

Jesus a flood of fleshly requests from the crowd. He burdened the Lord with people's ideas of what He should do. This is not how the kingdom of God is built. It is built by the will and purpose of God and not human ideas. This crowd only distracted from the purpose of God, as each person came seeking their benefit and not the glory of His name.

MARK 2

Verse 1

Jesus and His disciples had been travelling throughout the region of Galilee. The time came, however, for them to return to Capernaum, the city where Peter had a home with his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29,30). Jesus left the crowd standing at the door the last time He had been in Capernaum (see Mark 1:21-35). Word of Jesus' presence began to spread throughout the city.

Verse 2

When word spread that Jesus had returned to Capernaum, Mark tells us that people began to gather at the home where they were staying (likely Peter's house, where his mother-in-law lived). According to Mark, there were so many people on that property that nobody could get in or out of the house through the door.

Jesus took advantage of the situation to speak to the crowd. Notice that Mark describes Jesus' speaking as "preaching the word." The idea here is that Jesus communicated the truth of the Scriptures to them.

Verse 3

Among the people present that day to hear Jesus were four men with a paralytic friend. The reference to four men is unique to Mark. They carried the paralytic in a portable bed of some

sort, with each of his friends taking a corner.

The word used to describe the condition of the paralytic is παραλυτικός (paralutikós), which comes from paralúō, meaning paralyze. The idea is that the individual was paralyzed. We are not told how extensive this paralysis was, but it is clear from the context that he could not walk.

Verse 4

The four friends of the paralytic were intent on getting him to Jesus. With the crowd so tightly pressed, however, they could not get him near.

The houses of that day had flat roofs. The Law of Moses required that the owner build a fence of some sort around it to prevent people from falling off, as the roof was often used for

entertaining or relaxing (see Deuteronomy 22:8; Judges 16:27; 2 Samuel 11:2). The roof was easily accessible using stairs. In this case, the stairs appeared to be outside the house.

The paralytic's friends likely used the outside stairs to get him to the roof of the house. They then removed a roof section and lowered him to where Jesus spoke. There are a couple of details we need to see here.

The paralytic was lowered from the roof to where Jesus was speaking. This means that Jesus was very likely speaking to the people from inside the house.

Notice that Mark tells us that the men "removed the roof." Luke explains this more fully when he us that the men let the paralytic down "through the tiles."

19 but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. – Lk 5:19

There was not likely any damage caused to the roof here. Enough roof tiles were removed to be able to lower the paralytic through. Those tiles would likely be replaced when the incident was over without damage to the roof.

Verse 5

Notice the two-fold response of Jesus to the men who lowered their friend through the roof.

First, Jesus saw their faith. Note the words “their faith.” The implication here is that all five individuals demonstrated faith.

How was that faith demonstrated? It was revealed in the struggle they went through to get to Jesus. They saw the obstacles in their path but refused to give up. When they couldn't get through the crowd, they went around it. They carried their friend up the side of a house and opened the roof to gain access to Jesus. This determination and perseverance were proof of their faith. Faith perseveres through the obstacles without giving up.

The second response of Jesus is found in His words: "Son, your sins are forgiven." Notice the connection between the paralytic's sin and his sickness. Jesus does not address the paralysis but the sin. Not all illness results from sin in an individual's life, but in this case, the paralysis was. What this man needed was forgiveness. With the forgiveness came healing.

The man demonstrated faith in Jesus even though he was guilty of sin and under God's judgement. That faith, given to him as a gift of grace, was the means by which he would be healed.

Verse 6

Among those gathered that day to hear Jesus were some scribes. These scribes were teachers and interpreters of the Scriptures. While they could not deny the miracle of healing that had taken place that day, these scribes, upon hearing Jesus declare forgiveness to the paralytic, began to question in their hearts.

To be fair, these scribes were doing their job. As interpreters of the Jewish law, it was their responsibility to evaluate everything according to the revealed and inspired word of God. As religious leaders, they were obligated

to keep the people from wandering into falsehood and error.

Verse 7

Observe here the response of the scribes. They objected to Jesus' words in verse 5, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes do not question the idea that the man's sickness may have resulted from sin. The objection is to the fact that Jesus seemed to forgive him.

The scribes believed that only God could forgive sin. The way Jesus spoke, however, seemed to imply that He was forgiving the man and setting him free from his sickness. They were uncomfortable with the attention being taken from God and placed on Jesus and went as far as to say that Jesus was blaspheming God. If this were true, then according to the Law of

Moses, Jesus was guilty of a sin worthy of death. The accusation was a serious one.

Verse 8

Mark tells us that Jesus perceived “in his spirit” that the scribes were questioning what had occurred that day. The implication here is that these men had not publicly voiced their objection but may have been talking among themselves about the words of Jesus.

Jesus, perceiving their questions “in His spirit,” spoke directly to the scribes. The fact that Jesus addressed the matter they were questioning among themselves would have surprised these leaders. Jesus knew what they were saying in secret. How could He have known what their questions were if they were not revealed to Him by God? In

addressing this matter with the scribes, Jesus was showing them that He and the Father were one and that He spoke from the Father.

Verse 9

Without waiting to hear from the scribes, Jesus spoke to their objections.

The assumption both Jesus and the scribes could agree upon was that the paralysis of the man before them was the result of sin. For the healing of that paralytic to take place, his sin needed to be addressed and forgiven.

The objection the scribes had to the way Jesus performed this miracle was in His words, "Your sins are forgiven." Jesus could have avoided this objection by telling the man to take up his bed and walk.

The reality of the matter, however, was that if the man's illness resulted from sin, and he rose from his bed and walked, the assumption must be that he had been forgiven. The words, "Rise, take up your bed and walk," therefore, were equally as much a declaration of forgiveness as "Your sins are forgiven." Ultimately, no matter how the matter was phrased, the result was the same — the paralytic's sins were forgiven.

Verse 10

While the statement, "Rise, take your bed and walk," would not have roused the anger of the scribes, Jesus chose to say, "Your sins are forgiven," for a reason. He is very bold in giving this reason to the scribes here. He tells them that He wanted them to know that the "Son of Man" had authority on earth to forgive sin.

In Matthew 8:20, Jesus uses the phrase "Son of Man" to speak of Himself:

(19) And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." (20) And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." – Matthew 8:19-20 ESV

The prophet Daniel describes this Son of Man when he says:"

(13) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his

dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14 ESV

According to Daniel, the Son of Man was given an eternal kingdom from the Ancient of Days, and all nations and languages would serve Him. The general understanding was that this Son of Man was the Messiah.

In calling Himself the Son of Man, Jesus boldly declares Himself the promised Messiah. We can only imagine how that statement would have been received by the scribes who felt he was blasphemous to declare the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus declares here that as the Messiah, he had the authority to forgive sins on this earth. That is why He came, and in this declaration, we have great hope.

Verse 11

Having declared Himself to be the Messiah, with the power to forgive sin on the earth, Jesus demonstrated this by telling the paralytic to pick up his bed and go home.

Remember that the assumption was that the man was paralyzed because of sin. Jesus has already declared his sins forgiven in verse 5. He now moves to demonstrate that God had heard this declaration and had indeed forgiven him. Proof of this forgiveness would be seen in the paralytic, rising to his feet, picking up his bed and going home in full health.

Verse 12

To the amazement of those present, the paralytic “immediately” rose, picked up his bed, and walked out of the

house. This demonstrated to all present that not only did Jesus have the power to heal but to forgive sins.

The crowd was amazed and glorified God. They attributed what took place that day to God. While Jesus had commanded the man to walk, they saw Him as an instrument of the Almighty. They had never seen such a powerful miracle.

While it is uncertain whether the crowd saw Jesus clearly as the Messiah, they at least saw Him as a man through whom the power of God was at work.

Verse 13

The setting is beside the Sea of Galilee in the region of Capernaum. Jesus has come out of the town to be beside the sea. We are not told why Jesus chose this location, but we do need to

remember that the house where they were staying was not big enough for the crowds that were coming to hear Jesus preach. We see this from Mark 2:1-2.

1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. – Mk 2:1-2

This verse reveals that “all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.” We can assume from this that a large crowd gathered at the seaside to hear Jesus.

Verse 14

Mark tells us that as he passed by the seaside preaching, Jesus encountered a man by the name of Levi, the son of Alphaeus.

Mark tells us that Levi was sitting at the tax booth. This means that Levi was a tax collector. It is quite likely that he was a customs officer collecting taxes from goods coming by ship into the region of Galilee from other ports.

The gospel writer, Matthew, recounts this same incident in Matthew 9:9. Notice, however, that in Matthew's account, the person's name at the tax booth is not Levi but Matthew. It is generally agreed that Levi and Matthew are the same person. We are not sure why he changed his name to Matthew, but from then on, he would be identified as Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples.

As a tax collector, Levi (or Matthew) would have been generally despised by

the Jews. He collected taxes imposed by the Romans. These tax collectors made their money from these taxes, and so they charged whatever they could to make money for themselves. They were seen as profiteers, charging unfair rates and enriching themselves off the people they taxed.

As Jesus approached the tax booth, He called out to Levi, saying, "Follow me." Notice the response of Levi that day. "He rose and followed Him." We have no record of Levi questioning that call. He walked away from that booth and never returned. That day, he became the fifth disciple of Jesus and followed Him wherever He went.

There was no job interview here. Levi was not questioned about his qualifications or theology. All he had was the call of Christ. He heard that call, left everything and followed Him. That was all that Christ required of him that day.

Verse 15

After calling Levi (Matthew) to join Him, Mark describes Jesus reclining at his table. It appears that Jesus and His disciples went to Matthew's house for a meal.

Mark notes that many tax collectors and sinners gathered around that table with Jesus and His disciples. Observe that these tax collectors and sinners were among those who "followed Him." The individuals reclining with Jesus at the table were interested in what He said and curious about Him and His message.

Verse 16

While the tax collectors and sinners reclined at table with Jesus, the scribes and

Pharisees observed from a distance. While they were not among those dining with the Lord, they, too, were forming their opinions about Him. Remember that the scribes had already questioned whether Jesus was committing blasphemy by declaring the forgiveness of sin to the paralytic (see Mark 2:7).

What upset these religious leaders was to see Jesus so comfortable with tax collectors and sinners. As spiritual leaders of Israel, the scribes and Pharisees were uncomfortable with any such association. Holiness demanded a separation from sin and the sinner.

They openly express their distaste for Jesus by asking the question: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" In their mind, if Jesus were from God, He would have nothing to do with these people. They believed that by dining with sinners, Jesus demonstrated He was one with them.

In the minds of the religious leaders, there was a clear distinction between the godly and the ungodly. You were either one or the other. What they failed to understand is that not one of us is perfect. We all fall short of the standard of God. The scribes and Pharisees declared themselves holy, but in reality, these religious leaders were also sinners in need of a Saviour. The difference between the sinners reclining with Jesus and the religious leaders was that the sinners and tax collectors were among those who followed after Jesus (verse 15), while the scribes and Pharisees stood at a distance accusing him of blasphemy (verse 7) and ungodly behaviour. We are left to ask who was closest to Jesus that day. Religion can be a great barrier to genuine faith.

Verse 17

Jesus heard the religious leaders question why He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He responds to their objection with a practical illustration: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

Imagine a doctor who will have nothing to do with the sick for fear that contact with them will make him ill. We would ask ourselves why this individual chose this profession. A doctor must reach out to the sick. If he doesn't, he is not doing his job.

Jesus explains this illustration more fully in the final words of the verse when He adds: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Jesus came as a Saviour. A saviour's purpose is to rescue those who need salvation. These tax collectors and sinners needed the salvation of God. Jesus came to offer that to them. He sat with

them that day, communicating the message of redemption and hope.

Verse 18

In verse 17, we saw how Jesus willingly reclined at table with sinners, in stark contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who would have nothing to do with such people. Jesus' understanding of faith was very different from that of the religious leaders of the day. Mark shares another example of this contrast here in this verse.

The faith of Israel in those days was one of separation from sinners and questionable practices. Religious people were those who distanced themselves from both. The image of Jesus eating with sinners caused great conflict for the "religious" people of that day.

Mark goes on to describe another aspect of the religion of Israel in the

day. It was one that strictly observed certain traditions and practices. In this case, John's disciples and the Pharisees observed a religious tradition on that occasion. While we are not told what the occasion for this particular fast was, it appears that while both John's disciples and the Pharisees observed the tradition, Jesus and His disciples did not.

The failure of Jesus and His disciples to practice this traditional fast did not go unnoticed. Mark tells us that people came to our Lord and asked Him why He and His disciples were not fasting. The individuals who asked this question struggled to understand a faith that did not rigorously keep certain traditions. Those traditions defined their relationship with God and gave them a sense of being in a right standing with Him. Jesus seemed to present a faith not based on observing traditions and rituals—this perplexed

both religious leaders and the people alike.

Verse 19

Jesus responds to the question of why He and His disciples did not fast on that occasion. He answers by using the illustration of a wedding: "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"

A wedding was a joyous occasion. It was not a time to grieve, lament or humble oneself. This was a day of festive celebration and rejoicing. The presence of the bridegroom was a joyful sight for His friends. Notice the words of Jesus here: "As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast."

It appears that Jesus is comparing Himself to the bridegroom on his wedding day and the days they were

living to a wedding celebration. Why did Jesus come to this earth? Was it not to reconcile God and His people? The church is described in Scripture as the bride of Christ. Jesus came to bring forgiveness and to establish a covenant relationship with His church. These were days when the good news of the gospel was being declared. Jesus preached a message of reconciliation with God the Father. The promised Messiah of Israel had come. God was moving in the flesh among them. The hope of Israel walked in their midst. The answer to their greatest need spoke with them and healed their sick.

While all of this was taking place, the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting and afflicting themselves. While the Messiah stood in their very midst, they continued to hope and trust in their traditions and rituals. They had not yet understood that their hope was in Christ alone.

Verse 20

Jesus does not diminish the importance of fasting. While fasting was not appropriate while the bridegroom was present, the time for fasting would come for the church.

Jesus declares that the Bridegroom would be taken away. He would be crucified and return to the Father. The days that followed these events would be days of great spiritual warfare. The kingdom of God would challenge the kingdom of Satan and his reign. There would be casualties and great struggle. God's people would become the target of Satan's attack. These would be days of fasting and crying out to God for support and strength.

Verse 21

The scribes and Pharisees questioned Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners. The people asked Him why He and His disciples did not fast as the disciples of John and the Pharisees did. The faith Jesus practised did not seem to align with what the people of that day expected. It is in this context that Jesus speaks the words here in this verse.

As He often did, Jesus illustrates His teaching in practical examples from everyday life. He speaks here about an old garment that has developed holes and needs repair.

Imagine patching a hole in an old garment with an unshrunk cloth. What happens when you wash it? The unshrunk patch begins to shrink, pulling at the fragile old material and ripping it more.

Jesus compares the faith of the scribes and Pharisees with its legalism and

rituals to an old garment. The faith He was presenting to the people was vastly different. It was so different that it was incompatible with the faith practiced and taught by the religious leaders of the day. Their faith was one of seeking a right standing with God through traditions and laws. Jesus came to offer forgiveness and acceptance apart from the law.

Verse 22

Jesus uses a second illustration to show the incompatibility between the faith He taught and the legalistic faith of the day. Once again, the illustration comes from everyday life. Jesus speaks about putting new wine in an old wineskin.

Wineskins were made from animal hide that would age and become brittle. New wine tended to expand as it fermented. The pressure of the

expanding new wine was often too much for these brittle old wineskins, and they would burst, and the wine would be lost.

Jesus told His listeners that “New wine is for fresh wineskins.” The idea here is that you could not fit the teaching of Jesus into the old religion of works, traditions and rituals. Once again, what Jesus presented was incompatible with the faith practiced by the scribes and Pharisees of that day. The new wine Jesus offered needed to be placed in a new wineskin. That is to say, those who followed Him needed to be created anew. They needed to become new creatures. Paul expressed this to the Corinthians when he said:

(17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. – 2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV

Jesus does not hesitate to tell His listeners that He came to offer them something different.

Verse 23

The nature of the religion practiced that day is seen in Mark's account of Jesus and His disciples going through a grainfield on the Sabbath day. Mark tells us that as they walked through the grainfield, they plucked heads of grain.

The law of Moses permitted individuals to eat their fill from a neighbour's vineyard or grainfield if they were hungry so long as they did not put the fruit in a bag or harvest the grain with a sickle:

(24) "If you go into your neighbour's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in

your bag. (25) If you go into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbour's standing grain. – Deuteronomy 23:24-25 ESV

By plucking the grain as they walked through, Jesus and His disciples were doing no wrong. Notice, however, that Mark tells us that it was the Sabbath day that they were plucking this grain.

The law of Moses forbids harvesting on the Sabbath:

(21) "Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In ploughing time and in harvest you shall rest. – Exodus 34:21 ESV

Some might interpret what Jesus and His disciples did that day as harvesting and violating the law of Moses.

Verse 24

The Pharisees were present that day as Jesus and His disciples walked through the grainfield and plucked grain. Seeing them do this, the Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the law of the Sabbath. Their interpretation of this law is very strict and does not allow compassion for the hungry disciples who had plucked the grain for food.

I often compare this interpretation of the law to a man taking his dying friend to the hospital in his car. As he travels, he notices the speed limit sign and slows down to observe the rules of the road. All the while, his friend, for whom every second counts, is dying in that car. He is unwilling to break the law to save a life. Uncompromising legalism prioritizes law over everything else. It elevates rules over compassion. It will watch a friend die rather than

disobey a regulation. Such was the faith of the Pharisees.

Verse 25

Jesus points the Pharisees to a time in the life of David in response to their accusation in verse 24. The illustration comes from 1 Samuel 21:1-6 when David fled with his men from Saul, who wanted to kill him. Notice that Jesus says two things about David and his men here.

First, “he was in need.” David had just discovered that Saul was seeking his life. He was forced to flee at a moment’s notice and could take nothing with him.

Second, he and those with him were hungry. They had no food to strengthen them in their escape for their lives. If

there were ever a time for compassion, it would have been that time.

Verse 26

Understanding his need, David went to see the priest Abiathar. Remember that the lives of David and his men are at stake here. David had nowhere else to turn but to the priest for support.

All that was available that day in the house of the Lord was holy bread. The Law of Moses required that this bread be set on a table before the Lord. Only ordained priests were permitted to eat it:

(5) "You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. (6) And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. (7)

And you shall put pure frankincense on each pile, that it may go with the bread as a memorial portion as a food offering to the LORD. (8) Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. (9) And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due." – Leviticus 24:5-9 ESV

The high priest, Abiathar, had a decision to make. Would he disregard the law to give this holy bread to David and his men?

Observe the phrase "he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence." The high priest chose to show compassion for David and his

men by surrendering the holy bread to them. While the law forbade this, the priest willingly broke the law to minister to David and his men in a time of need. Like a man breaking the speed limit to get his dying friend to the hospital, Abiathar chose compassion over legalism.

Remember the context here. The Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath regulation by allowing His disciples to pluck heads of grain to satisfy their hunger. Surely, the disciples could have found food elsewhere or waited a few hours until the Sabbath was over. Jesus does not back down, however, but demonstrates to the Pharisees that there were times when compassion outweighed the legalistic application of the law.

Verse 27

Jesus goes on here to describe His understanding of the Sabbath. He tells the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. There are a couple of points we need to see here.

First, when Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, He is expressing a truth about the priority of God in this law.

The religious leaders of the day were placing the priority on the Sabbath law. They would allow the disciples to go hungry on the Sabbath. They would rather see a person die than disobey the Sabbath. For them, the priority was the law. The highest good was observing that law, regardless of its repercussions. In this view, man was made to observe the Sabbath. The Sabbath regulation took priority over the needs of humankind.

Jesus, however, taught that the Sabbath was made for man. His view was that man took priority over the Sabbath. Consider the law of the Sabbath as written by Moses in Exodus 23:12:

(12) "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed. – Exodus 23:12 ESV

Notice the purpose of the Sabbath. God's people were to do no work on the seventh day so that they "may be refreshed." God was seeking the good of His people here. The day was intended to bless them and enable them to rest and be refreshed. Under this view, people are what is important. The law of the Sabbath was not intended to restrict and harm

God's people but to build them up. People took priority over the legalistic observation of the law of the Sabbath.

Second, when Jesus told the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, He was teaching the importance of compassion. As we said, the Pharisees elevated the law over compassion. They allowed a person to suffer rather than break the Sabbath. In doing so, they disregarded the whole premise upon which the Sabbath law was built—compassion for people. God knew that people needed a rest. He instituted the law of the Sabbath to minister to that basic human need. When the Pharisees disregarded compassion, they demonstrated that they did not understand the purpose of the law.

Verse 28

Jesus concludes this discourse with a somewhat perplexing statement to the Pharisees. After telling them that the Sabbath was made for man, He goes on to say that the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.

This is the second time Jesus has used the phrase "Son of Man" in the chapter. In Mark 2:10, He told the religious leaders:

10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"— he said to the paralytic— – Mk 2:10

The title, "Son of Man," was one that Jesus applied to Himself in Matthew 8:19-29. It was also a title the prophet Daniel gave to the Messiah (see Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus is declaring that He not only had the power to forgive sin but was the lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was a time of rest and refreshing for God's people. It certainly ministered to their physical needs, but it symbolized a great rest to come. Consider the words of the writer of Hebrews in this regard:

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. 9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, 10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. – Heb. 4:8-10

Hebrews 4 speaks of a rest that God would give His people. This was a rest from the burden of sin. Jesus came as the Lord of Sabbath rest. He came to free us from the burden and suffering of the curse of sin. As Lord of this Sabbath rest, He would conquer sin and every enemy to that rest and procure peace with God.

MARK 3

Verse 1

Jesus and His disciples had been walking through a grainfield on the Sabbath. Mark begins the chapter now with them entering the synagogue.

In chapter 2, Mark recounts the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees about the Sabbath. He continues with this theme here in chapter 3. This time, the scene is not in a grainfield but in the synagogue on the Sabbath in the presence of a man with a withered hand.

The exact nature of this hand is unknown. The word withered in the

Greek language means dried up. The hand was useless to him and hung limp on his arm. It was not likely a fatal condition but would have caused him great inconvenience.

Verse 2

Mark tells us that all eyes were on Jesus in the synagogue. Those present that day wanted to see if He would heal the man with the withered hand. There was no compassion for the man, however. Mark tells us that they wanted to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus had just told the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The people in the synagogue that day demonstrated that they did not agree with Him in this matter. For them, the Sabbath took

precedence over people and their needs.

They preferred to see the man with the withered hand suffer rather than be healed on the Sabbath.

Legalism and compassion are not compatible. The law will always be more important than people to the legalist.

Verse 3

Jesus noticed the man with the withered hand and asked him to come to Him.

Some years ago, I was leading a church service when I noticed a man seated in the back. I was unsure of what was happening with him, but I sensed he was in despair. "Allan," I said, interrupting the service, "what is wrong?" Allan answered, "It's my wife. She's depressed, and when she gets

like that, she becomes suicidal.” Feeling his pain, I responded, “Allan, come here.” Allan came to the front of the church, and I invited people to gather around him. Someone quoted a passage of Scripture. Another prayed a prayer for him. Still, someone else began to sing a hymn. As we prayed and sought to encourage Allan, I noticed one of the ladies leaving the church. I could see her, through the window, getting into her car and realized that while we were praying for Allan, his wife was at home, depressed. This lady was leaving the church to spend time with Allan’s wife. When it came time to speak that day, my prepared message didn’t seem appropriate. God gave me a new message.

Why do I share this illustration in this context? I had a church service planned out that day. God placed Allan and his needs before me. I had a

choice to make. Will I follow that order of service, or will I minister to the man God had put before me? Was the church service more important than Allan, or would I lay aside my tradition to minister to his need?

I have been in church services where the order of service and tradition are more important than people. People come to church with great need and leave with the same need. Nobody noticed them. Nobody said, "Come here." I want to know your pain. I want to encourage you and pray for God's blessing.

The words "Come here" are powerful. They showed the man with the withered hand that Jesus noticed his pain and cared. I wish everyone coming into the modern church could know this. Now, it might be possible to say that a withered hand was not a serious condition and certainly not life-threatening. The fact that Jesus

noticed and cared, however, makes this passage all the more powerful.

Verse 4

As the man with the withered hand stood before them, Jesus turned His attention to the people who had gathered for worship. He asked them a question: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Consider the context of the question for a moment.

Jesus was in the synagogue that day and saw a man who was suffering with a withered hand. His heart went out to him, and having the power to make him well, He called him to His side to bring healing.

Also in the synagogue were the religious leaders with a bitter heart toward Jesus. They watched with eyes peeled to see if He would heal that

man with the withered hand. They intended to find Him guilty of breaking the Sabbath to discredit and kill him for blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking.

When Jesus asked, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill, He was pointing out these differences? He wanted to do good and save this man's life from undue hardship and suffering. The Pharisees wanted to harm Jesus and kill Him. Which of these practices would be more acceptable on a Sabbath day?

Notice that the question went unanswered. There was nothing the religious leaders could say that would not accuse themselves of seeking to harm and kill Jesus on the Sabbath, a sin worse than healing a sick man.

Verse 5

Jesus saw the hypocrisy and hardness of heart that day. He watched the religious leaders as they stood silently, waiting to accuse Him if He dared to show compassion to a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath.

Mark tells us that Jesus was angry and grieved at the hardness of their heart. There before Him were the spiritual leaders of Israel who cared nothing for human suffering. All they cared about was their laws and traditions. This angered Jesus and grieved His heart.

In response, Jesus asked the man with the withered hand to stretch it out before them. Mark tells us that as he stretched out his hand, it was healed. How this miracle was accomplished left no doubt that God had healed the man. Jesus asked him to stretch out his hand. He doesn't seem to touch him or say anything further. He left the matter to His Father. Would the Father relieve the suffering of this man that

day? The debate about whether it was right to heal on the Sabbath was left with God to decide. God revealed His decision to all present by restoring the man's hand.

Verse 6

Notice the response of the Pharisees to the miracle that occurred that day. Mark tells us that they immediately held counsel with the Herodians against Jesus. They intended to find a way of killing our Lord.

The Herodians were a political party that seemed to sympathize with Rome and its cultural views. This alliance between the strict Jewish Pharisees and the liberal Herodians promoting pagan Roman culture and rule was a strange alliance. It does show, however, the bitterness and desperation of the Pharisees, who, although they despised Jesus for eating

with sinners, were quite willing to associate with the Herodians in an attempt to murder our Lord.

Verse 7

After His encounter with the Pharisees, who now plotted to kill Him, Jesus and His disciples withdrew from the city to the seaside. Notice that while the religious leaders were intent on His death, the people were not convinced. Mark tells us that a great crowd followed them. We are told here that this crowd was not just from the region of Galilee, where they were ministering, but also from Judea to the south. The region of Samaria separated Galilee and Judea. Galilee was to the north, and Judea to the south of Samaria.

Verse 8

Mark told us in verse 7 that the crowd that followed Jesus was not just from Galilee but also from Judea to the south. He expands on this here by telling us that the people who followed Jesus came from even farther away than this. He mentions Tyre and Sidon to the north of Galilee and Idumea to the south of Judea.

Mark tells us that these individuals travelled these long distances to see Jesus when they "heard all that he was doing." News of Jesus' ministry was spreading rapidly from Galilee to the surrounding regions, and people were coming, particularly to be healed of their sickness and to hear Him speak.

Verse 9

On this occasion, when Jesus saw the crowd that had gathered, He asked His disciples to prepare a boat. The reason

for this boat was so that the crowd did not “crush Him.”

The desperate crowd was pressing in on Jesus. There was a risk of being trampled. To remedy this, Jesus decided to get in a boat and cast out a bit from the shore. This would give Him an opportunity to speak to the people without the risk of physical harm.

Verse 10

Mark explains the need for the boat more fully here. Jesus had been healing people on the shore. Those who were sick believed that if they could touch Jesus, their diseases and sickness would be cured. As a result, they began to press forward to touch Him. The situation quickly evolved into a dangerous situation where Jesus and the disciples could have themselves been easily harmed.

There is a desperation here in the crowd. Selfishly concerned for their own needs, they push others aside to get to Jesus.

Verse 11

There were evil spirits in those who presented themselves to Jesus for healing. Notice how they responded to the Lord's presence and power. Mark tells us they fell before Him and cried out: "You are the Son of God."

The ministry of Jesus is confirmed here in several ways. First, the preaching of Jesus pointed the people to the fulfilment of the promises of the prophets of old. Second, the healing of diseases and sickness demonstrated the power of Jesus over the kingdom of darkness. Finally, the words of the evil spirits also declared Him to be the son of God.

These evil spirits who had held people in chains of sickness and despair stood now before One whose authority was such that they could not stand against Him. They were forced to fall before Him and declare Him as the Son of God over whom they had no power.

Verse 12

Mark tells us that when the evil spirits declared Him to be the Son of God, Jesus ordered them not to make Him known. There may be several reasons for this command.

The first and most obvious reason for silencing the evil spirits was because of the crowds. Already, the people were threatening physical harm to Jesus as they pressed in on Him from all sides. A declaration of His being the Messiah would only have created even greater confusion.

Second, Jesus' enemies were even now plotting to kill Him because He claimed to be the Son of Man with the power to forgive sin. This declaration of the evil spirits that Jesus was the Son of God would only have encouraged His enemies in their attempt to take His life more urgently.

Finally, Jesus does not want the tools of Satan to declare the gospel. Satan is the father of lies and deceit. This declaration of the evil spirits was not from a heart that freely accepted His divinity. These evil spirits opposed Jesus and would do all they could to diminish Him in the eyes of the crowd. Would you allow a wicked person who had no love for the Lord to declare the good news of salvation, knowing that they had no intention of walking in that salvation themselves? Those who proclaim the truth of Jesus must do so from a heart of devotion to Him. This was not the case for these evil spirits.

Verse 13

From the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum, Jesus travelled to a mountainous region. Mark tells us that Jesus “called to him those whom he desired” and went up on the mountain with them. The idea seems to be that this was a select group of individuals. The crowd was not permitted to come up into the mountains with them. Jesus particularly chose those who would be with Him on that mountain.

While Jesus loved the crowd, He also had special times with a select group. These individuals were called to a deeper relationship with Him and tasked with a special role in the advancement of the kingdom.

Verse 14

Mark tells us that when Jesus was on the mountain, He appointed twelve to

be with Him and to preach. The word appointed in the Greek language is ποιέω (poiéō), which means to make. Mark's words, "whom he also named apostles," indicate Jesus was commissioning these ordinary men and making them His apostles. Notice the two-fold task Jesus gives to these apostles.

First, they were appointed to be with Him. That is to say, they were to be in a special relationship with Christ, follow Him wherever He went and learn from Him. No one could be an apostle who did not fulfil this responsibility. The apostle had to know Jesus and have walked and learned from Him personally.

Second, the apostle was then to preach. To preach is to proclaim or to share publicly. These men were to learn from Jesus and share what they learned with the world. The inspiration and content for preaching would come

from their relationship with Jesus and their walk with Him.

Verse 15

Notice that along with the calling came an authority. This authority, Mark tells us, was to “cast out demons.” We have seen in the context of Mark that the region of Galilee was filled with demons. These demons were afflicting the people with sickness and disease. They would even manifest their presence by crying out in a loud voice, declaring Jesus to be the Son of God.

It is also important to understand that the crowds were pressing in on Jesus in an attempt to touch Him. They believed that simply by touching Him, they could be free from their afflictions. By ordaining twelve men and giving them authority over demons, Jesus is intensifying His effort against the kingdom of Satan. He is also spreading

out the responsibilities among His disciples and easing the burden that, to this point, He bore alone.

Notice that those whom Jesus called He also equipped with His authority. The question I ask myself as I write is this: What is the nature of the authority God has given me personally? Have I demonstrated that authority in my ministry? Have I used that God-given authority to push back the kingdom of evil?

Verse 16

Mark takes the time here to list the names of those Jesus chose to be his apostles or disciples. He begins with Simon. He was among the first to be chosen by Jesus as He walked on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that Jesus gave Simon a new name. He called him Peter. The name

Simon means, to hear. Peter, on the other hand, refers to a stone.

Verse 17

The next two disciples on Mark's list are James and John. They were brothers whose father was Zebedee. Jesus met them while they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that Jesus called these brothers Boanerges. The word Boanerges comes from the Aramaic language and means sons of thunder.

It is unclear why Jesus would call James and John the sons of thunder. Some commentators see a reference to their personality. Others see a prophetic word about the powerful nature of the ministry to which the Lord was calling them.

Verse 18

The names of eight more disciples are listed here in this verse.

Andrew was the brother of Peter and called alongside of Peter while they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 2:16,17).

Philip is the next on Mark's list. John 1:43-44 tells us that he was from Bethsaida.

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. – Jn 1:43-44

Bartholomew is only mentioned about four times in the New Testament. Nothing is said about him. He is merely a name in the New Testament.

Matthew was also known as Levi and was a customs officer or tax collector by occupation. Mark 2:14 recounts how

Jesus met him at his booth and asked him to follow Him.

Thomas is likely best known as the doubter. He refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he could put his fingers in the holes created by the nails and spear (see John 20:24-25).

James, the son of Alphaeus, appears to be a relative of the Lord Jesus according to Paul in Galatians 1:

*(18) Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days.
(19) But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. – Galatians 1:18-19 ESV*

Thaddaeus appears to be also known as Judas or Jude. He is not to be confused with Judas Iscariot, who would become a traitor. Luke lists him

alongside of Judas Iscariot in Luke 6:16:

16 and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. – Luke 6:16 ESV

Simon the Zealot was likely part of an anti-Roman revolutionary group of that day.

Verse 19

Judas Iscariot is listed last as a disciple of Jesus. Little is known about his surname Iscariot. He would be forever known as the one who betrayed Jesus. This betrayal, as treacherous as it was, was necessary. Judas would hand Jesus over to be killed, but that death, in the purpose of God, would be for the salvation of many.

Verse 20

Having completed his work on the mountain, Jesus and His twelve disciples returned home. Home for Jesus and His disciples at this time appears to be Simon's house in Capernaum.

Note here that the crowds began to gather when they discovered that Jesus had returned from the mountains with His disciples. We are not told how long the Lord and His disciples had been on the mountain. Nor are we told the distance from the mountain to the home. The fact that Mark mentions that they could not eat because of the crowd leaves

us to wonder when they had last eaten. The crowd's demands, however, seem to interfere with the physical needs of Jesus and His disciples for food. There were sacrifices to be made here for the sake of the kingdom.

Verse 21

The context of verse 21 is the crowd pressing in on Jesus and His disciples. Mark tells us that they had just returned from their trip to the mountains when this crowd began to gather. They were not even able to eat or refresh themselves because of the demands of this crowd.

Mark tells us that the family sprang into action on behalf of Jesus and His disciples. They did this by “seizing him.” The idea seems to be that they were attempting to protect Jesus from the crowd.

We are given a sense in the verse as to why the family felt it necessary to protect Jesus. Mark tells us that there were people in the crowd saying, “He is out of his mind.” In the next verse (Mark 3:22), Mark tells us that the scribes were telling people that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul. It may be

that these religious leaders were poisoning the minds of the people against Jesus. Their intent, of course, was to kill Him. It would be natural, therefore, that the family would do everything they could to protect Jesus from such an angry crowd.

Other commentators see the words, "He is out of his mind," as the words the family speaks about Jesus. If this is the case, they are likely speaking about Jesus' ministry to the crowds and the constant demand for His time and energy. To them, it was unthinkable that anyone could continue in such a ministry without being overcome by it and its demands. Seizing Jesus, in this sense, had the purpose of stopping Him from ministering to the crowds lest He be overwhelmed and overcome by them. There are, of course, some problems with an interpretation that presents Jesus in this light.

Verse 22

Mark reveals the opposition to Jesus here in this verse. Notice how scribes came from Jerusalem. It is uncertain if they had come to see Jesus and hear Him preach. Mark does tell us in Mark 3:7-8 that people were coming from Jerusalem and beyond to hear Jesus:

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea 8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. – Mk 3:7-8

What is clear is that these scribes had made up their mind about Jesus and His claims. They refused to believe He was the Son of God. Instead, they saw Him as a blasphemer possessed by

demons. They did not hesitate to declare this to the people.

Notice here that these scribes from Jerusalem declared that Beelzebul possessed Jesus. We discover the identity of Beelzebul in Matthew 12:24:

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." – Mt 12:24

In Matthew 12:24, the Pharisees identify Beelzebul as the prince of demons. The prince of demons is Satan. Mark shows this same understanding in the mind of the scribes here in this verse. The scribes declare Jesus to be possessed by Satan. This was likely the worst thing they could have said about Him. In saying this, they declare Him to be evil.

Verse 23

When Jesus heard what they were saying about Him, he called His accusers to Him and asked them a question: "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

One of the great ministries of the Lord Jesus in that region was to set people free from demonic oppression. These demons were causing physical afflictions and diseases. Jesus cast them out, and people were healed.

The question Jesus asked His accusers is this: Why would Satan turn on his forces? Why would he release his captives? What would motivate him to advance the Kingdom of God rather than his own kingdom?

Verse 24

Jesus goes on to explain His question. His ministry was to set people free from sin and demonic affliction. He

stood in opposition to the demons and their work in the lives of the people of that day. If what Jesus was doing was motivated by Satan, how could Satan's kingdom stand. Was Satan shooting his own soldiers? If he was, how could he expect to advance his evil purpose? No army can fight against itself and hope to survive.

Verse 25

Jesus uses a second illustration to show the religious leaders how foolish their statement about Him being possessed by Beelzebul was. He speaks here about a house divided against itself. Imagine a family so divided that they stand in opposition to each other all the time. The relationship between the husband and wife is no longer harmonious. Children are constantly fighting. They are unwilling to settle their differences and instead belittle

and see each other as enemies. How can this family continue? Will it not break up just to find peace? As evil as Satan is, he has to understand that he cannot advance his cause if he cannot maintain harmony of some sort among his ranks. He cannot maintain that harmony by turning against his own forces.

Verse 26

Jesus concludes His thought here by telling the religious leaders that if Satan had determined to destroy his own kingdom, then he had no chance of survival. If he cast out his demons and set his captives free, he had no chance of advancing his evil agenda. His kingdom depends on holding onto the territory he has taken.

What Jesus is trying to convey here is that Satan will not give up his territory. He will do everything possible to

capture more hearts and lives. He will not stop his opposition to the kingdom of God. It was clear that Jesus, who opposed the kingdom of Satan and cast out his demons, could not be in league with him.

Verse 27

Jesus demonstrates the foolishness of His accuser's statement by using plain common sense. Imagine that you wanted to rob a strong man's house. Would you walk into his house and take what you wanted with him watching? Everyone knows that if you're going to steal that strong man's possessions, you would first have to deal with the strong man. If there is one certain thing, it is that he will not allow you to steal what belongs to him without a fight. If you want to take what belongs to this strong man, you

will first have to tie him up so he can't oppose you.

Jesus had been plundering Satan's kingdom. He had been breaking chains and setting his captives free. How could He do this if He did not first bind Satan? What Jesus is saying is that the only way He could release people from demonic oppression was to take authority over Satan and bind him. Like a strong man defending his home from thieves, so Satan would protect his kingdom from the advances of the Kingdom of God. Unless someone bound him, there would be no way to plunder his kingdom. Jesus shows his accusers that He had bound Satan and, in doing so, revealed that He was in opposition to Satan and his efforts. How could He be possessed by Satan if He had bound him and was releasing his captives?

Verse 28

It is in response to the accusations of the religious leaders that Jesus makes a bold statement here in these next two verses. The statement comes in two parts. Notice first that Jesus tells His accusers that, generally, all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven. The cross of Jesus Christ covers every sin. The grace of God will pardon whatever we have done. There is wonderful hope in this statement. Whatever horrible sin you have committed can be forgiven. You may have lived a blasphemous life cursing the name of Christ and resisting His purpose and still be forgiven. The apostle Paul is an example of this. He could not accept that Jesus was the Son of God and persecuted all who proclaimed Him as such. Despite his opposition to the Lord and His purpose, Paul was forgiven and became a true child and servant of God.

Verse 29

While there is forgiveness for every kind of sin, Jesus declares here that there is a sin that will not be forgiven — “whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin,” He tells the religious leaders.

In John 16, Jesus explains to His disciples that He had to leave but would send the Holy Spirit to be with them.

(7) Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

(8) And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

(9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; (10) concerning

righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; (11) concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (12) "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (13) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
– John 16:7-14 *ESV*

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (verse 8) and guide them into truth for the glory of His name (verses 13,14). This, according to Jesus, is the role and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

To blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to resist His work in convincing of sin, righteousness and judgement and to reject the truth He comes to reveal. In the case of the religious leaders present that day, they had seen the work of God, heard the message of truth and chose to attribute it to Satan, rejecting it completely and sealing their eternal damnation.

Verse 30

Mark explains what Jesus meant by an unpardonable sin by underlining that the religious leaders said He had an unclean spirit. These religious leaders saw indisputable evidence of Jesus' divinity. They heard the wisdom and authority of His preaching. Jesus had even shown them how illogical their statement that He was possessed by Satan was. They were unmoved by signs, authoritative and spirit-filled

preaching and even logic. Their hearts were hard. Their minds were made up. They would resist every attempt of the Spirit to reveal Christ to them. In doing so, they sealed their fate.

The only hope of eternal life is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The only way that work can be made known to us and applied to our lives is through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. To resist the convicting and regenerating work of God's Spirit is to perish. This was the state of the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

Verse 31

Jesus appears to be in the home where He and His disciples stayed when His mother and brothers arrived. We are not told where Mary and Jesus' brothers lived or what brought them to where Jesus stayed.

Here, in this verse, they are standing outside the home calling to Jesus.

The assumption here is that there is a large crowd around the home. Jesus had been speaking to the religious leaders. In verse 23, we are told that when the scribes accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, he called them to himself:

(22) And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." (23) And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? – Mark 3:22-23 ESV

It is possible that Jesus called them into the home, apart from the crowd, to speak privately with them. If that is the case, He would have been home with the religious leaders when the

family arrived. The yard would have been filled with people, so to get to Jesus, they would have had to call out for Him from outside.

Verse 32

Notice that Jesus was surrounded by a crowd in the home where He stayed. They were seated around Him, likely listening to Jesus speak. It was while He sat with them that news came that His mother and brothers were outside looking for Him.

Verse 33

Jesus takes advantage of the news that His mother and brothers were looking for Him to ask a question: "Who are my mother and my brothers?" – Mk 3:33

The question is not asked out of ignorance. Jesus knew His mother and brothers. Jesus is attempting to use

this situation to communicate a spiritual lesson.

Notice that Jesus does not jump up immediately and run to His mother and brothers. While His family was important to Him, He had His Father's business to attend to, and this appears to be His priority at this moment (see also Luke 2:49).

Verse 34

Jesus answers His own question from verse 33. Mark tells us that He looked around at those who sat with Him and said: "Here are my mother and my brothers!" We should not assume that Jesus spoke here about everyone in that house. He was pointing out, however, individuals He considered to be in a very special relationship with Him. Likely, His disciples and other believers were in the house that day.

There is a special connection of brotherhood and sisterhood between those who have a common Saviour. Notice, however, that Jesus calls us His brothers and sisters as well. He has stooped down to our level, shared our sufferings and walked in our sandals. He understands us and our weaknesses. He experienced our temptations and trials. We have His support and comfort. We know fellowship with Him.

Verse 35

Jesus told His listeners that whoever did the will of God was his brother, sister and mother. What is it that unites us as brothers and sisters? The answer is the will of God. What is that will? It was certainly more than just obeying the law of Moses. The Pharisees and scribes present that day were not Christ's brothers and sisters, but they

observed the law more carefully than anyone else in Israel. The will of God cannot be separated from His purpose in Christ Jesus. God's will was the salvation of a people through Christ. It was those who accepted that will who were brothers and sisters.

MARK 4

Verse 1

Jesus returned to the Sea of Galilee, where He again began teaching those who followed Him. Undeterred by the accusations of the religious leaders about Jesus being possessed by Satan, a large crowd had gathered to hear Him speak. Mark tells us that Jesus got into a boat, cast out into the sea, and spoke to the crowd gathered on the shore.

Verse 2

Mark tells us that Jesus spoke to the people in parables. The word “parable”

in the Greek language is παραβολή (parabolé). It comes from parabállō, which means to compare. A parable is a comparison. In the case of Jesus' teaching, He compares heavenly concepts with earthly experiences people could identify with in that day. The purpose was to help them understand heavenly realities by comparing them to things they experienced regularly.

Verse 3

As Jesus sat in the boat, He began to tell a story about a sower going out to sow His seed. This was something the people of that day had seen or experienced often.

Verse 4

Seeds were sown by hand in those days. The sower would likely take a

handful of seed and scatter it on the ground as he walked across the plot of land he was seeding. Not all seeds fell in a place conducive to germination and fruit-bearing. Jesus tells the crowd that as the sower scattered the seed, some fell along a path where the ground had not been cultivated. That seed lay exposed to the birds who came by and ate it.

The seed sown is compared here to the Word of God. Understand that as Jesus sat in the boat, He was sowing the seed of the Word. That Word would go out to the crowd, but not every heart would be ready to receive it. Among the crowd were individuals whose hearts were hardened like the pathway. The seed of God's Word would not take root in their lives. The scribes and Pharisees, for example, had such hearts. The birds of pride, jealousy and tradition would devour that seed before it could impact their lives.

Verse 5

As the sower continued to sow, other seeds fell on rocky ground. This ground, according to Mark, did not have enough depth of soil. These seeds fell on a very thin patch of dirt on a rock. Because the seeds did not go deeply into the ground, they germinated and quickly emerged from the soil.

Among those present at the Sea of Galilee were those caught up in the excitement of the moment. They heard Jesus was doing miracles and teaching with authority. They wanted to see the show and were excited and entertained by what they saw, but that was as far as it would go for these individuals. Their relationship with the Lord Jesus was very shallow.

Verse 6

Jesus goes on to say that the sun rose on the seeds that fell on rocky ground. Because there was no soil depth, the roots had nowhere to go and could not sustain the seedlings that emerged. As a result, these seedlings withered away and died.

Many in that excited crowd gathered that day would turn their back on Jesus. Influenced by the religious leaders, they would eventually demand His crucifixion. Their excitement would dwindle, and they would fall away. The scorching sun of temptation and trials would shrivel up any connection these individuals had with Christ.

Verse 7

Jesus describes a third location where the sower's seeds fell. This ground was filled with thorns. It was conducive to growth, and the seeds would germinate and grow. Unlike the seeds

sown on rocky ground, the roots could go deeply into the soil. The problem was not so much with the soil but with the plants growing alongside the seedlings. They got tangled up with thorns. These thorns hindered their growth and took needed nourishment from the soil, diminishing their capacity for growth and fruit-bearing.

Jesus shows us here that the influences around us can diminish our spiritual relationship with God. Notice what He says about the seed sown among thorns — “it yielded no grain.” The reason it bore no fruit was because “the thorns grew up and choked it.” You might be very sincere but find yourself in an environment not conducive to spiritual growth and fruit-bearing. The influences in our lives can diminish our spiritual impact and keep us from reaching our potential in Christ.

Verse 8

The final ground described by Jesus here had good soil. This soil had depth for the roots to spread out. It was also free from thorns and weeds that could hinder growth. As a result, these seeds germinated and grew healthy plants that produced a harvest of thirty, sixty and even one hundredfold.

Notice that the focus here is on the production of fruit. You plant a seed expecting a harvest. God is no different. He wants to see fruit in our lives. Among those present at the Sea of Galilee, listening to Jesus speak from the boat, were those who would receive the Word of God, mature in it, and produce an abundant harvest for the kingdom of God. I can only hope that this would describe my life.

Verse 9

Jesus concludes the parable with the words: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." The idea is that not everyone would be able to understand what Jesus was saying. This story of the sower sowing his seeds would entertain many, but they would not understand the spiritual significance of what Jesus taught that day.

Among those present, however, were some who would grasp what Jesus was saying. They had ears that were tuned in to the truth He was conveying. To these individuals, Jesus says: "let him hear."

The words "let him hear" demand a response. The hearing Jesus demands here is not just to receive and understand words but to act on what we know. If this parable reveals that there are thorny influences in your life that keep you from maturing and being fruitful, then do something about it. If

you perceive from this parable that the Word of God has taken root in good soil in your heart, then jealously guard that soil to produce an abundant harvest for the Kingdom of God. If you have ears to hear what Jesus is saying here, then do something about it.

Verse 10

Eventually, the crowd dispersed, and Jesus was alone with a much smaller group. Notice the phrase: “Those around him with the twelve.” This seems to indicate that there were more than twelve disciples present that day. Certain people stayed behind after the class dismissed to ask the professor for clarity. In particular, they wanted to ask Him about “the parables.”

Notice that they speak about parables in the plural here. This would indicate that while Mark only speaks of one

parable, Jesus likely taught other parables that day as well.

Verse 11

Those who stayed behind after the crowd dispersed asked Jesus about His parables. By the answer given here, the question seems to relate not only to the meaning of the parables but also to the teaching method.

Jesus begins by addressing why He used this method to teach spiritual concepts. He tells those gathered around Him that they had been given the ability to understand the secret of the kingdom of God, but many in the crowd did not have this ability. Remember here that Jesus was speaking to a very select group of people. The twelve disciples were present, as were a few other believers.

There were many types of people in the crowd that had gathered around Jesus. The Pharisees and Scribes hated Jesus and saw Him as a blasphemer. The idea of Jesus coming to set up His kingdom made no sense to them. Their traditions and rituals blinded them. Others in the crowd came only to be healed. The idea that this was a demonstration of the kingdom of God pushing back the kingdom of Satan did not enter their minds. All they cared about was their healing and ease of life.

The disciples and sincere believers who gathered around Jesus that day were not like the crowd. They sincerely believed in Jesus. They believed Him to be the Messiah and saw evidence through His miracles and teaching.

Jesus tells His followers here that the concepts and principles of the kingdom of God were difficult enough

for those who believed in Him to understand but impossible for those trapped in a worldly way of thinking. Jesus used earthly illustrations to help these people wrap their minds around these spiritual principles of the kingdom.

Verse 12

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 here in this verse. The context of Isaiah 6 is the call of Isaiah to preach. God told him to go and preach to a people who would hear what he said but would not understand. He told him to go to those who saw with their eyes but had no concept of what they were seeing. These individuals would never experience the forgiveness of God because they did not hear the message or see the solution.

Jesus is telling that small crowd gathered around Him that day that he

was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He was preaching to spiritually blind and deaf people who would never know the forgiveness He came to offer. Though He preached to them, they would never accept Him as their Saviour. Though He demonstrated the power of the kingdom in healing and casting out demons, they would never bow down to Him as Lord of the Kingdom of God.

Verse 13

After explaining why He preached in parables, Jesus moved on to interpret the parable of the Sower for His disciples and those gathered around Him that day.

Notice first that these disciples and followers of Jesus did not understand the parable. While it would be easy to condemn them for their lack of understanding, we must realize that

these individuals had remained after everyone else had left to seek clarification. They were among the very few desirous of understanding what Jesus was saying through that parable.

Second, Jesus emphasizes the importance of this parable by telling those who questioned Him that if they did not grasp its teaching, they would not be able to comprehend the other parables He taught.

The parable of the sower is about the kingdom of God and how the truth of that kingdom is received. It explained Isaiah 6:9-10 quoted in the previous verse, by revealing that the preached word would often fall on deaf ears and not take root. It shows that unless God prepares the heart to receive that word, it will have no effect on those who hear it.

Verse 14

Jesus explains the first element of the parable here. He told those present that the "sower sows the word." The seed, therefore, is the word. The word was the teaching of the kingdom of God and, in particular, the fulfilment of the prophetic word in the person of Messiah and the work He had come to do.

Verse 15

Jesus next explains the seed that fell along the path. The truth of the kingdom of God is proclaimed to these individuals, but when they hear that truth, Satan takes it away. Understand here that the hearts of these individuals are hardened, and the word makes no sense, nor does it take root in their lives. This makes it very easy for Satan to sweep these seeds away.

Verse 16

Jesus explains here about the seed that fell on rocky ground. This, according to Jesus, represents the person who immediately hears the word and receives it with joy. Notice particularly the word “immediately.”

Remember that there was soil on the rocky ground, but its depth was very shallow. The seed fell on that shallow soil and immediately showed signs of life. While that soil was conducive to germination, it was not for long life and fruit-bearing. Jesus compares this seed to individuals who get excited by a new teaching. They get caught up in the crowd’s excitement and the evidence of the kingdom of God. According to the next verse, however, that excitement is short-lived and temporary.

Verse 17

The seed sown on rocky soil did not have enough depth for its roots. As a result, the root system could not sustain life. In this case, tribulation and persecution arose for those individuals, and they fell away. This tribulation and persecution arose "on account of the word." In other words, these individuals were persecuted because of the word of truth. They discovered that their faith would require sacrifice and suffering. Their commitment to Jesus was not that strong. Their love for the world and their reputation was stronger than their love for God, so they returned to the world and its ways. The fruit of the Spirit would never truly be produced in them.

Verse 18

Our Lord addresses the third type of ground here. He speaks next about the seed sown among thorns. He tells us

that this ground represents those who heard the word. The idea is that the truth of the kingdom was preached to them, and they responded to that truth.

Verse 19

Unlike the seed that fell on rocky soil, where persecution caused the listeners to abandon their faith, the seed sown among thorns was choked out by worldly cares and desires. Jesus speaks here of the deceitfulness of riches and the worldly desire for things. While persecution is brutal and harsh, the deceitfulness of riches is very pleasant and alluring. We are promised pleasures, possessions, ease and comfort. These things strip our attention from God, and we abandon our faith for the pleasures of this world.

Notice how Jesus tells His listeners that those deceived by the riches and

things of this world will prove unfruitful. We cannot bear spiritual fruit if the riches of this world nourish us. These pleasures and pursuits will not sustain our spiritual walk. If anything, they will take away from our faith and leave us empty. Jesus describes people who like the idea of God and His kingdom but who feast on the deceitful riches and pleasures of this world. For these individuals, there will be no spiritual fruit in their lives. They who feast with the world will look, think and act like the world.

Verse 20

The final ground Jesus explains is the good soil. Jesus compares the good soil to individuals who hear the word, accept it and bear fruit. Notice the three details Jesus brings up here.

First, the people Jesus compared to good soil “hear” the word. Understand

that they are not the only ones to hear the word. Verse 15 tells us that those compared to the seed sown on the path heard the word. In verse 16, those compared to the rocky ground also heard the word. Even those compared to thorny ground heard the word in verse 18. Everyone in this parable of Jesus heard the word.

Notice, second, however, that Jesus went on to say that the people, compared to the good soil, accepted the word. The word accept in the Greek language is παραδέχομαι (paradéchomai). It speaks of receiving, embracing, assenting to or obeying. There is a sense in which the other soils received that word, but not to this extent. You can hear and not obey or embrace what you hear. The good soil not only heard but embraced and obeyed what it heard.

Finally, the seed sown on good soil bore fruit. Bearing fruit resulted from

accepting the word they heard and persevering in it. Note that seeds planted in good soil produced different amounts of fruit. Jesus tells us that some produced thirtyfold, others sixtyfold and still others a hundredfold. All the seeds that fell in good soil, however, produced fruit. Understand that the power to produce fruit is in the seed and not the soil. The soil provides the environment whereby that seed can reach its full potential. It is God's care to produce fruit. Ours is to maintain our heart in readiness for Him to do His work.

Verse 21

We must keep the context of this verse in mind. Jesus has been explaining why He used parables to teach. He told His disciples that it was not given to everyone to understand the kingdom principles He revealed, so He needed

to use parables about everyday matters to explain these principles to them. He compares His teaching here to a lamp.

The lamp's purpose was to bring light, just as the purpose of teaching was to bring understanding. What good would a lamp be if its light was hidden under a basket or bed? What good would a teacher be if his teaching was so complicated it could not be understood? It was the purpose of Jesus to make the light of His teaching clear so that the average person could grasp the spiritual concepts He was revealing.

Verse 22

For generations, the truth about the Messiah and His purpose had been hidden under prophetic words and symbols. Kingdom truths were veiled to those whose minds could not

conceive God's purpose. Those things were now going to be revealed. The secret things of God would be exposed. Hidden truths would be revealed. The great purpose of God would come to light. In the person of Jesus Christ, through the illumination of His Spirit, what had been kept from human understanding would now become a reality.

Verse 23

There is an obligation placed on all who receive this illumination from God. If the light of truth has been exposed to you, then you must take heed. If the Spirit of God has given you understanding, you are accountable to God for what you have received.

Verse 24

Continuing from verse 23, the Lord Jesus tells His listeners to pay attention to what they heard. The truth revealed to them placed them under deep accountability.

Jesus then says: "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you." The word measure in the original language can refer to capacity, length or portion size. The challenge of this verse is to understand what Jesus is measuring.

The context of the verse speaks about responding to the truth of the kingdom as revealed by Jesus. We are to take heed to what we hear. The question we must ask ourselves is this: What will be the measure of my response to the truth God reveals to my soul?

Will I respond to this truth by saying, "I will obey when it is convenient?"
Will I take that a step further and say:

"I will walk in this truth until I start being persecuted for it, but you can't expect me to sacrifice my life and ambitions for it?" Or will you devote yourself, mind, heart and body to walk in obedience, even if it means deep sacrifice and death? What will be the measure of your response to the truth revealed by Christ?

Notice the promise of Christ here: "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you." You will receive back what you invest into this truth. Listen to what Jesus told His disciples in Mark 10: 29-30:

(29) Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, (30) who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and

children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. – Mark 10:29-30 ESV

What you invest into the truth will be paid back in full. No sacrifice will be made on this earth for the sake of the kingdom that will not be rewarded many times over in the kingdom to come.

Verse 25

Jesus concludes His thought here by telling His listeners that the one who has will be given more, but the one who does not have, even what he has, will be taken away. Consider this for a moment.

The word “has” in the Greek is ἐ ἔχω (échō). It has a wide variety of meanings. It can speak of possessing something, having charge or control

over an object, or having a special connection with someone. It also carries the sense of having a special obligation or responsibility toward something.

Jesus has been speaking in the context about the truth and our obligation to that truth. Those who have received this truth, made it theirs, and taken responsibility for it, will be entrusted with more. Those who have not been faithful with what has been given will lose what they have been given.

If you were an employer, would you entrust someone who has not proven faithful in small things with something more important? Neither will the Lord Jesus entrust those who have been unfaithful with greater insight and responsibility.

Verse 26

Jesus teaches another parable here. He begins by explaining that the parable is about the kingdom of God. He illustrates the truth about this kingdom by telling a story about a sower who scatters his seed on the ground. In His explanation of the parable of the sower, Jesus told His listeners that the seed was the word of God (see Mark 4:14). We may safely assume that this is again the case here. The kingdom of God is advanced through teaching and preaching the Word of God.

Verse 27

Notice that when the sower plants the seeds, he rises daily to check what is happening in his fields. He watches that seed sprout and rise from the ground to produce fruit. All of this is amazing to him, and he finds himself unable to explain the life in that seed. There is a power at work that he

cannot understand. He handles and touches the miraculous. So it is with the Word of God. God has called us to sow His Word in the lives and hearts of all who will hear. By His grace, that seed takes root and grows in the hearts of all who will listen, producing fruit in abundance.

As preachers and teachers of that Word, we must understand that the power is not in us but in that Word of God. Like the sower in Jesus' parable, we, too, need to be amazed at how God's word has its impact.

Verse 28

Notice what occurs when the sower sows his seed: The earth produces by itself, the blade, the ear, and then the grain. When the sower sows his seed, his task is over. There is nothing more he can do. He cannot make that seed

grow. All he can do is scatter it. The earth must do the rest.

We think more highly of ourselves than we ought if we believe that we can preach or teach in such a way that will convert a soul or bring it to life. If it were not for the fact that the Word has life in itself, we would have no hope of ever seeing results of any lasting spiritual value. We are mere sowers of seed, but the power of God works when that seed is sown. When it falls on the right soil, it will germinate and produce an abundant harvest. All of this is a miracle and evidence of the presence of God's Kingdom on earth to push back the forces of darkness.

Verse 29

While the sower has no power over the seed's germination and growth, in due time, he returns to his field to find it full of ripe grain. He takes his

sickle and harvests what has grown on its own.

The parable is about the miraculous life-giving power of the kingdom of God. It is not about the power and skill of the sower. The sower's role is to plant and to harvest, but the power to produce life is kingdom power and a demonstration of God's presence on this earth.

Verse 30

Jesus shares another parable about the kingdom of God here. Notice how He does so by comparing it to earthly realities we see around us regularly. The nature of a parable is to compare what we know to something we are trying to grasp to bring greater understanding.

Verse 31

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. Notice that He focuses on the fact that the mustard seed is quite small. In what way could the kingdom of God be considered small, like a mustard seed?

To answer this, let's consider the Lord Jesus as the king of this kingdom. He came to this earth as a baby born to a poor family. He lived His life as one who had no home of His own. He was not worldly wealthy, nor did He live in comfort and ease. He was often rejected by those who heard Him speak. He was crucified on a cross and publicly shamed by being lifted for all to see.

His disciples lived like their Master. They, too, were rejected and despised. They were stoned and ridiculed for the message they preached. They were poor men who depended on the generosity of people from town to town to continue their ministry. In the eyes

of the world, these men were small and insignificant.

That mustard seed might not seem like much in the eyes of the world, but there is life in it.

Verse 32

While the mustard seed is small, when it is planted in the ground, it will grow up to be among the larger of the garden plants.

Jesus and His disciples may have been despised and rejected by the people of that day, but they began a movement that would spread from nation to nation and show no sign of slowing down even in our day. The kingdom they planted continues to expand and transform people's lives worldwide.

Verse 33

Mark tells us that Jesus spoke many similar parables to those who would listen to Him.

Notice, however, that he taught these parables “as they were able to hear it.”

The phrase “as they were able to hear it” may refer to the fact that the people could not understand the truth in any other way, so He was forced to speak to them this way.

The phrase may also imply that Jesus only spoke to those He discerned were ready to hear and receive what He had to tell them.

Verse 34

According to Mark, Jesus made it a policy to speak to the crowds in parables about the kingdom of God and its principles. Jesus did not preach expository messages to those who gathered to hear Him preach at the

seashore. He did not delve deeply into theology when He spoke to the masses. If you came to listen to Him preach, you would likely hear a simple illustration from life.

With His disciples, however, Mark tells us that He explained everything. That is to say, He went into detail about the meaning of His parables and taught them at a much deeper level.

Jesus was sensitive to the crowd and what it could understand. He preached at the level those who listened could handle.

Verse 35

Jesus had been preaching on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds had dispersed, and Jesus had spent some time with His disciples and a smaller group. By this time, it was

getting dark, and Jesus decided to cross over the lake to the other side.

The evening was not necessarily the best time to start on such a journey. Crossing the lake in the dark would take a certain amount of skill.

Verse 36

Mark tells us that the disciples took Jesus in the boat “just as he was.” The idea is that they did not make any provision for the journey. They packed no lunch, nor did they bring any spare clothes.

According to Mark, there were other boats in the harbour that day that appeared to accompany them on their crossing.

Verse 37

The crossing was filled with difficulty. As Jesus and His disciples sailed, a great windstorm arose. Mark uses the word “great” to describe the magnitude of the storm.

The waves caused by that storm were such that they began to break into the boat, filling it with water. Understand that it was evening. The storm would have clouded any light remaining so that it was now dark. The disciples are in the middle of the sea, bailing out water from their boat in a losing battle against the storm. There was cause for great concern here.

Verse 38

Notice where Jesus was at this time. He was in the back of the boat, asleep on a cushion.

The fact that Jesus was fast asleep at this time shows us just how tired He

was. His physical body and mind were exhausted from the day of preaching and meeting with the crowd. There was a cost to pay for this effort.

Understand also from the sleep of Jesus that His soul was at peace with the Father. He did not fear death or loss here. He had work to do, and this storm would not hinder that work. He was in the hands of the Father and rested peacefully despite the winds and waves surrounding Him.

As for the disciples, however, they were not at rest. They were frantically trying to save their lives from the assault of the waves. They wake Jesus with an accusation: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

The disciples did not understand the inactivity of Jesus. They interpreted this to mean that he did not care. I suppose we can all identify with their interpretation of events. How often

have we also wondered why Jesus did not intervene in our trials?

Verse 39

When the disciples cried out to Jesus, He awoke from His sleep. While the howling winds and waves did not disturb His rest, the sound of His disciple's frantic voices did. His ears were tuned to the cry of His disciples.

Mark tells us that when he awoke, he rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea, saying: "Peace! Be still!" In response, the wind ceased, and a great calm came over the sea. Notice again that Mark used the word "great" to describe the resulting calmness that evening. It was a calmness that could not go unnoticed –the kind you just had to sit in silence and experience.

Verse 40

As the disciples sat quietly, catching their breath and experiencing the great calm of the sea, Jesus spoke into the silence and asked an important question: "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" Jesus speaks to two issues here.

First, Jesus addresses the disciples' fear. This fear was the result of the wind and waves. These elements were certainly bigger than the disciples, and they had no control over them. If left to themselves, these waves could have taken their lives and left them at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Do we have cause to fear what is bigger and stronger than us? The disciples felt they did.

Second, Jesus addresses the disciples' lack of faith. What is the object of that faith? It was certainly not in their ability, for the wind and waves were bigger than them and had the power to take their lives. The object of their faith

then had to be in Jesus. What Jesus appears to be asking His disciples is this: Do you still not trust me? Do you still not believe that when I call you to do something, I will enable and protect you until you accomplish that task?

Who was it that took them out on the lake in the evening? Mark 4:35 tells us that it was Jesus who suggested that they cross over. The fact that they did so immediately, taking Jesus "just as he was" (verse 36), shows us that this was not only the Lord's idea but also His timing. They crossed that lake at the leading of the Lord and at the time the Lord required. They were in the centre of His will and purpose when things erupted on the sea. What took place that day was not by chance. That storm was in the purpose of God. It would test the disciples and strengthen their understanding of God's leading. We should not expect that just because we are where God wants us to be when

He wants us to be there, there will be no struggle. Be assured, however, that the God who called you there for that time will stand with you and keep you.

Verse 41

Notice the result of this storm at sea. Mark tells us that the disciples were filled with great fear.

In verse 40, the Lord asked the disciples why they were afraid. The word He used there was δειλός (deilós), which means to be timid or fearful. When Mark tells us that the disciples were filled with great fear after Jesus calmed the storm, the word he uses is φοβέω (phobéō), which is a much stronger word which speaks of terror. It is the type of fear that makes us run with all our might in the other direction.

The fear the disciples experienced seeing Jesus calm the storm was many times greater than their fear of the storm itself. What was it that caused this fear? Mark tells us that it was in the fact that there in the boat with them was one that even the wind and the sea obeyed. They were in the presence of God, and it terrified them more than the storm and what it could do to them. What would it take today for us to experience the Lord Jesus in this way?

MARK 5

Verse 1

After a rough crossing and some very powerful truths learned, Jesus and His disciples arrived safely on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that they docked in the country of the Gerasenes. It appears that the region was predominantly Gentile. Jesus is taking His disciples outside of their comfort zone.

Verse 2

Mark tells us that as they stepped out of the boat, they were greeted by a man out of the tombs with an unclean

spirit. Verse 3 tells us that this man lived among these tombs.

Verse 3

The man with the unclean spirit was well-known to the people of the region. We are not told why he lived among the tombs. It may be that there was some unclean fascination with death or possibly the fact that there was nowhere else he could live with his condition.

Mark tells us that no one could bind him. Even chains could not hold him. The fact that the community had attempted to bind him shows that the man was quite disturbed and possibly violent. The evil spirit in him likely drove him to violence, and so he needed to be bound and live in isolation from the rest of society. We can only imagine what the disciples must have felt to have such a man

coming to greet them as they got off the boat that day.

Verse 4

Mark goes on to describe the various attempts made by the community to subdue the violence of this demon-possessed man. According to Mark, he had “often been bound with shackles and chains.” This indicates that He was a menace to society and needed to be restrained.

While often bound with shackles and chains, this man would always break free. He had an extraordinary strength, and no one could restrain him. He lived in that region, feared by a community that could do nothing to stop him.

Verse 5

The man with the unclean spirit was agitated. He wandered both night and

day among the tombs and in the mountains, crying out loudly and cutting himself with stones. The demonic spirit in him left him in deep agony.

Verse 6

Notice the man's response when he saw Jesus. Mark tells us that he saw him "from afar." While it may not be strange that the man saw Jesus from a distance, Mark goes on to say that upon seeing Jesus, he ran to meet Him and fell down before Him.

This is not the normal response of a violent man. Remember, also, however, that he was a tormented man desperate for help and release.

Verse 7

We see why the man came running to Jesus and bowed down to Him here.

The unclean spirit saw what the man could not see. This demonic spirit was very sensitive to the presence of Jesus.

Notice the words of the unclean spirit that day: "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." Notice several details here in this incident.

First, the unclean spirit recognized Jesus. It knew the name of Jesus. It also knew that Jesus was the Son of the Most High God. Some of the most powerful affirmations of the divinity of Jesus Christ in the Bible come from His greatest enemies. Here, the demonic forces of hell declare Him to be the Son of the Most High God. Satan and his demons do not doubt the deity of Christ.

Second, the demon bows down in submission to Jesus, the Son of the

Most High. We see this in verse 6, where the man falls before the Lord Jesus. This falling before Jesus was a recognition of the superiority of Christ over the forces of hell.

Third, note how the demon pleads with Christ for mercy: "I adjure you by God, do not torment me." This unclean spirit was uncomfortable in the presence of Christ. The presence of Christ tormented this evil spirit, and it feared what Jesus could do to it.

Verse 8

When Jesus saw the man bowed down before Him, he recognized his condition and demanded that the unclean spirit come out of him. According to Mark, this command caused the demon to speak to Jesus and call out for mercy.

Remember that this unclean spirit had thwarted every attempt of the community to contain it. The man it possessed broke every chain they put on him. However, before Jesus, this same spirit is reduced to begging and pleading for mercy. This was a clear demonstration to the disciples that not only did the wind, and waves obey His voice, but He was feared by the most powerful forces of hell itself.

Verse 9

Notice how Jesus asked the demon its name. The word used for “name” is ὄνομα (ónoma). It refers to a name, character or reputation of the individual who bears it. There may be a couple of reasons why Jesus asks the demon to identify itself.

First, by asking for a name, Jesus reveals that this man was possessed by a real demon. It was this demon that

was behind his actions. He clearly distinguishes between the man and the demonic force that possessed him.

Second, by requesting the demon's name, Jesus also identifies something of its purpose and character.

The demon responded by telling Jesus its name was Legion. He also explains why it was named thus: "For we are many."

The demon likely understood the reason for Jesus asking its name when it identified itself and described why it bore that name. A legion was the largest division in the Roman army. The number of soldiers in a legion varied over history.

The demon indicates that he was not alone in the man. He was part of a troop of demons who worked together through this man not only to torment him but also to bring fear to the entire

community that could not contain or control him.

Verse 10

The demon that identified itself in verse 9 was a powerful force. The demonic voice that spoke to Jesus told Him that there were multiple demons in the man who lived among the tombs.

Notice how this powerful force of multiple demons responds to Jesus. We have already seen in verse 6 that the man fell before Jesus. Notice here that this legion of demons begged Jesus. The fact that they were reduced to begging Jesus demonstrates His authority and power over them. Though they terrorized the countryside through a single man, they fell down before Jesus, begging for mercy.

Observe that they pleaded for Jesus not to send them out of the country.

The reason for this request is not given in the passage. What would cause this legion of demons to beg Jesus for the privilege of staying in the region of the Gerasenes?

We can only guess why they desired to stay in that region. Understand, however, that the area was predominantly Gentile and likely steeped in paganism and falsehood. This would have been a very comfortable place for these demonic forces of hell.

Verse 11

Mark tells us that there was a herd of pigs feeding on the hillside. Notice how Mark qualifies this by telling his readers that there was a “great herd” on the hillside. The Greek word translated as “great” is μέγας (mégas), which refers either to a large number or much value.

Understand here that the pig was an unclean animal to the Jew:

(7) And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. – Leviticus 11:7 ESV

(8) And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch. – Deuteronomy 14:8 ESV

No devoted Jew would raise or even touch a pig. This herd of pigs, however, was very valuable to those who raised them in this region.

Verse 12

The demons in the man who walked among the tombs begged Jesus to

send them into the herd of pigs on the hillside. Observe a couple of details here.

First, the demons begged Jesus to send them into the herd. The demons were held in submission to the Lord Jesus and His purpose. What He commanded; they were forced to obey. He could have commanded them to go anywhere, and they would have been obliged to do so. This demonstrates the power of Christ over these demonic forces.

Second, why would these demons ask to be sent into a herd of pigs? There may be several reasons for this, but the primary one will soon be discovered when we see what took place when Jesus permitted them to possess these unclean animals.

Verse 13

Jesus permitted the evil spirits to go to the herd of pigs. Mark tells us that they entered this herd. We understand from this that evil spirits are not limited to human beings but can also afflict animals.

Notice the size of the herd on the hillside. Mark tells us that there were about two thousand pigs. This represented a huge amount of money for the owners.

Notice also what happened when the herd entered the pigs. They rushed down a steep bank and were drowned in the sea. These demons were up to no good. They stripped a huge fortune from the owners of the herd that day. This would have been financially and emotionally devastating for the whole community.

Verse 14

News of what took place that day spread throughout the region. When the herdsmen saw what happened, they “fled” to the city. The word translated “fled” is φεύγω (pheúgō) and means to escape or to run away from danger. It seems to carry with it a sense of fear.

We can only imagine the impact and devastation in the image of a whole herd plunging to their death in the sea. The owners fled from the hillside in fear of what they saw. Powerful demonic forces were at work that day.

Arriving in the city, they shared what they experienced, and the fear and devastation spread throughout the city.

Verse 15

Hearing what had happened to the pigs, the community “came to Jesus.” Understand that news of Jesus coming

to the region had not spread. It is hard to know if the people had heard about Jesus and His miracles. What brought the community to Him?

While Mark does not give us the answer to this question, understand that this was a community that had been plagued by the demonic man for a long time. They had attempted to restrain and bind him to no avail. They understood that he was demon possessed and may have attributed what happened to the demonic forces at work in him.

Coming to the tombs where this demoniac lived, they found him sitting quietly, clothed and in his right mind. They responded to this sight with even more fear. Before them was a force they could not control, nor did they understand. What kind of power could free this man from such a powerful oppression? They were afraid of such power and authority.

Verse 16

As the crowd stood in fear before the man freed from the legion of demons, people who had seen what took place spoke out. They explained not only what happened on the hillside to the pigs but also shared how Jesus had set Him free.

Verse 17

Notice the people's response to Jesus once they had heard how he had set this man free from his demons. Mark tells us they begged Him to "depart from their region."

The community was not ready to accept Jesus. Here was a community that lived in darkness and demonic oppression. The light of Jesus Christ shone on their shore, and like bugs under a rock, they ran for the comfort of darkness.

This community valued their pig industry more than the light of life. They feared Jesus and the light He brought to their community. They were comfortable with their situation and didn't want to change. They had been so long under the kingdom of Satan that they feared the kingdom of God and its light.

Looking at the picture before us, we see the demoniac sitting comfortably and at peace. The crowd, however, is now exposed for who they were. They, too, had been held in darkness by the powers of hell. They plead with Jesus to leave their presence. They were uncomfortable and wanted nothing to do with Him.

Verse 18

We have no record of Jesus debating the Gerasenes. Mark tells us that when they pleaded with Him to leave, He

returned to the boat to leave. This would be all Jesus did in the region. He came to reach that one man.

Remember the struggle the disciples experienced on the sea as it raged against them as they travelled to meet this demoniac. Was their mission a success? Was that one person worth such a difficult crossing? Clearly, he was.

Notice that as they were getting into the boat to return home, the man who had been possessed by demons begged to go with Jesus. He likely wondered what was in store for him now that he had been freed from his demons. Who would accept him? Would he be forever blamed for the loss of their pig industry and its devastation to the local economy? Driven by the evil spirits in him, this man had been the source of much struggle and pain for his region. How could he face this now that he was in

his right mind? There is little wonder that he wanted to leave the area and give his life to following Jesus.

Verse 19

Jesus would not permit the demoniac to come with Him. Mark tells us that instead, He told him to go home to his friends.

It is interesting to note the reference to the demoniac's friends. When he met Jesus, he was living alone among the tombs. This was not likely always the case. He may have lived a normal life before the demons possessed him. Jesus is calling him to return to that normal life again and rekindle his relationship with those who were once dear to him.

This, of course, would mean a confession of sin and a rebuilding of trust, something that is not always

easy to do. Notice also that Jesus asked the man to do two things when he returned home.

First, he was to tell how much the Lord had done for him. This required being open with the people about his experience as a demon-possessed man. It meant sharing his story and telling them what he had been freed from.

Second, he was also to declare the mercy of Christ on him. The word translated as "mercy" is ἐλεέω (eleéō) and refers to compassion or help. It is more than a feeling; but an act of support to remove pain and suffering.

The demoniac is commissioned to share his story and declare the healing and merciful support of Jesus when he was without hope.

Verse 20

The demoniac heard the call of God and ministered faithfully in the region of Decapolis, telling people how much the Lord had done for him. Notice that people who listened to his story marvelled. The idea here is that his story impacted the people of that region.

Jesus and His disciples appear only to have touched one man on this trip across the Sea of Galilee. That one man, however, became a missionary who shared throughout the region the story of Jesus and His healing power. As a result, pagan Gentiles came to hear about the Lord Jesus. Here was a man who had no training. He only met Jesus one time. He would serve, however, as His servant, commissioned by Jesus to reach the Gentile region of Decapolis.

Verse 21

Getting in the boat, Jesus and His disciples returned to the region of Galilee on the other side of the sea. It was not long before a large crowd gathered around Him. In the region of the Gerasenes, Jesus touched only one man and was pushed away by the crowd. Here in Galilee, however, large crowds surrounded him, demanding He heal their many diseases. Verse 22

Among the crowd that gathered that day was a ruler of the synagogue in that region by the name of Jairus. As a synagogue ruler, he likely had an important administrative responsibility. As such, he was a valued member of society and was looked up to because of his role.

Notice what Mark tells us about Jairus when he saw Jesus – “seeing him, he fell at his feet.” People would have known Jairus for his role in the synagogue. They would also have known the position of the scribes and

Pharisees who wanted to kill Jesus. Jairus was in a difficult position as a leader of the synagogue. Bowing down to Jesus in this way was an acknowledgement of Jesus' position and power. It was also a posture of respect for Jesus. Jairus, however, is willing to bow and bring his request to Jesus, despite what people might think.

Verse 23

Jairus earnestly implored Jesus that day as he bowed at His feet. The phrase "implored him earnestly" shows that he was a desperate man.

His desperation was a result of his little daughter, who was, according to him, "at the point of death." He came to Jesus as a last resort.

Notice Jairus' request. He asked Jesus to lay his hands on his daughter so that she could be "made well and live." He

seems to believe that Jesus could bring this healing to his daughter.

Verse 24

Jesus responds to Jairus' request and goes with him to see his daughter. There were many other requests among the crowd, but Jesus put them aside to address the concern of a desperate father.

Some might see the fact that Jairus was a leader to be why Jesus gave him priority. Jesus was unmoved by his position in society, however. The fact that he chose to address Jairus' concern over the others had nothing to do with his service to the synagogue or societal reputation.

Notice that the crowd did not give Jairus privacy in this matter. They followed behind him as he led Jesus to his home.

Verse 25

Jairus' daughter was "at the point of death." It was urgent for him that Jesus get to her as soon as possible.

Mark tells us that as the crowd followed Jairus and Jesus, among them was a woman who had "a discharge of blood for twelve years." Mark does not give any medical explanation of her condition. Suffice it to say that it was a condition that would have not only been seriously inconvenient but also made her ceremonially unclean.

Verse 26

Mark goes on to tell us that the woman with the discharge of blood had suffered greatly under many physicians. The idea is that she had seen many physicians about her issue, was disappointed repeatedly by their treatments, and had spent all her

money on her treatments, only to get worse in the end. Like Jairus, she, too, was desperate.

Verse 27

In her desperation, the woman with the discharge of blood heard reports about Jesus. She had heard how people had been miraculously healed of various diseases. This likely gave her hope that He could do what no physician could and make her whole.

Notice that the woman was in the crowd. She would have been unclean, and as such, she should have kept her distance, but she was desperate.

Notice also that she came up behind Jesus in this crowd and touched His garment. She did not want to draw attention to herself, and so she sought her healing in secret. She believed that

just by touching His garment, she could be healed.

Verse 28

Mark confirms the woman's belief. She believed that if she touched Jesus' garment, she could be made well. She did not seek attention. She did not feel worthy of any special focus. She did not want to take His time. The context tells us that she came up behind Jesus. She does not even feel worthy of His eyes looking upon her. She does want to be well again, however, and so she came with great boldness and faith.

Verse 29

When she touched Jesus' garment, the woman with the discharge of blood was immediately healed. She felt this healing in her body when she touched

Him. What doctors could not do, a simple touch of Jesus' garment did.

Verse 30

While the woman who touched Jesus' garment did so secretly, not wanting any attention, Jesus felt power had gone out of Him. Mark tells us that He immediately turned and asked: "Who touched my garments?"

The fact that "power had gone out from Him" was evidence to Jesus that something had happened. This was not an accidental brushing up against Him. Something miraculous had taken place, and Jesus was aware of it.

We can only imagine how this woman must have felt at this time. She had stolen a miracle from Jesus and now had one of two options: she could seek to hide it from everyone, or she could confess that as an unclean person, she

had been circulating in their midst and touched Jesus in flagrant disobedience to the law of Moses.

Verse 31

When Jesus asked who touched Him, the disciples wondered why He would ask such a question. The crowd was pressing in to such a point that it was inevitable that people would touch each other. They did not understand the nature of Jesus' question. The touch Jesus spoke about was not an accidental touch of someone brushing up against another but the touch of healing. These disciples had no way of knowing what had just transpired in the life of the woman who had took hold of His garment.

Verse 32

Notice here that the question Jesus asked was one He wanted to be answered. It was important for Him to find the person who had experienced the healing. He demonstrates here just how important that was by stopping and looking around for that person.

Remember that Jesus is urgently following a synagogue leader to see his daughter, who was at the point of death. This would not have naturally been the time to stop and look for someone who touched Him.

Verse 33

Mark tells us that the woman healed of her discharge of blood came in "fear and trembling and fell down before him." The word used here for "fear" is the same word used to describe the fear the disciples experienced when Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of

Galilee. The word φοβέω (phobéō) refers to terror or the type of fear that would cause you to run away as fast as your legs would carry you. This fear is manifested in the woman by the use of the word “trembling.” Her body shook in response to the demand of Christ that she reveal herself to Him.

Falling before Jesus that day, the woman confessed what she had done and, according to Mark, “told Him the whole truth.” Her story became public, and she was forced into sharing her testimony with all those present. She publicly declared that day, forced as it may have been, that Jesus had healed her of her sickness.

Verse 34

Notice the four-fold response of Jesus to the woman healed of her discharge of blood.

First, Jesus calls her “daughter.” The word is a term of endearment. Jesus speaks tenderly to her and connects her to Himself by calling her daughter. We can only imagine how that word must have touched her heart and eased her anxiety in this time of fear and trembling.

Second, Jesus tells her that her faith made her well. Jesus recognized her faith here. She had not asked Jesus to touch her. She had not asked Him to stop what He was doing to pay attention to her. She did not ask him even to notice her. Yet she believed that she could be healed.

Understand that this took place when Jesus was going to be physically present with the synagogue leader’s daughter. He had asked Jesus to lay hands on her to restore her to health (see verse 23). The contrast between the faith of these two individuals is striking. The faith of the synagogue

leader was such that it demanded Jesus' physical presence with his daughter and that he place his hands on her. The woman, healed of her discharge, believed that Jesus didn't even have to notice, speak or even touch her to be healed.

Third, Jesus tells the woman to go in peace. The word peace in the Greek language is εἰρήνη (eirēnē). It refers to an absence of conflict but also wholeness, health and prosperity. By telling her to go in peace, Jesus is blessing her with a calm mind and wholeness in her body.

Finally, Jesus declares the woman to be healed of her disease. In doing so, Jesus takes responsibility for her healing and offers it personally to her. Understand that this woman had secretly snuck up to Jesus and stole the healing. She did not ask Him to heal her, nor did she receive it from Him. This all changes now. Jesus

stopped, sought her out, demanded a confession from her, and then signed that healing over to her personally. She would leave that crowd, having personally encountered Jesus and not as one who had stolen a blessing.

Verse 35

Jesus was on His way to heal the synagogue leader's daughter, who was at the point of death. He was delayed by the woman who was healed of her discharge of blood. As Jesus took the time to look for this woman and speak to her, a group came from the synagogue leader's home. Notice that Mark tells us that it was while Jesus was "still speaking" to the woman that this group arrived. They told the synagogue leader that his daughter had died and that there was no need to trouble Jesus about coming to heal her.

This interruption by the woman with the discharge may have kept Jesus from arriving on time. We can only imagine what the father was feeling at that point. Had Jesus ignored this unclean woman, his daughter may still have been alive.

The words, “Why trouble the Teacher any further,” seem to show the finality of death in the mind of those who came from the synagogue leader’s home. For them, there was no more hope. There was nothing more Jesus could do for her.

Verse 36

Jesus overheard the conversation that took place between the synagogue leader and the group that had arrived from his home. He understood that they had given up hope.

Speaking to the synagogue ruler, however, Jesus says, "Do not fear, only believe." Death was not final for Jesus. He offers hope to the ruler that day. He asks him to trust Him with what seemed impossible and so final.

Verse 37

Mark tells us that only Peter, James and John were allowed to go to the synagogue leader's home. The phrase "he allowed no one to follow him" can be confusing. The assumption is that the word "he" refers to Jesus. There is, however, also the possibility that it could refer to the synagogue leader. If this is the case, he responded to Jesus' call to have faith by inviting Him and His closest disciple to his home but telling the crowd to stay away and give them privacy in this grief.

Verse 38

Arriving at the synagogue leader's home, Jesus and His disciples found a "commotion." Mark describes what he meant by commotion when he tells us about people weeping and wailing loudly. Already, people were gathering at the home to grieve the loss of this young girl's life. The scene is one of despair and grief.

Verse 39

The words of Jesus to the mourners are striking: "Why are you making a commotion and weeping?" Jesus understood what had taken place that day. He understood the response of the people present as the legitimate response to the death of a small child. His words to the mourners are not out of a lack of empathy for those who truly grieved but because He knew something they did not. He explains

this to them when He went on to say:
“The child is not dead but sleeping.”

These words of Jesus should not be misunderstood. We have already established the fact that the young girl was dead. This was established by the announcement made to her father, calling him to return home. It is also established by the fact that mourners had already gathered at the home to grieve. The funeral service was already underway.

When Jesus tells the mourners that the young girl was not dead but sleeping, He is telling them that her death was not permanent. She would rise again.

Verse 40

The response of the mourners to Jesus' words was to laugh at Him. The word used for

“laugh” is καταγελᾶω (katageláō). It is derived from katá, meaning against, and geláō, meaning to laugh. Together, they carry the sense of laughing at someone, scorning or mocking. The King James Version of the Bible catches this when it translates, “They laughed him to scorn.” The crowd ridiculed and mocked Jesus for His words.

Jesus had all those who mocked Him leave the house so that He was alone with the girl’s mother, father and His disciples. Together, they went into the room where the child’s body lay.

Verse 41

Jesus took the girl’s lifeless hand and said, “Talitha cumi.” These words were in the Aramaic language Jesus and His disciples likely spoke. Mark does not translate them but records them exactly as they were spoken. The

words were likely seen as so powerful and holy that they needed to be kept as they were and not watered down through translation.

Mark does, however, tell us the meaning of the words in the verse. They mean: "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

Verse 42

Notice the response of the little girl to the words of Jesus. She immediately got up and began walking. We are not told the nature of the affliction that had taken her life. The fact that this twelve-year-old girl not only got up out of her bed but also began to walk about showed those present that she had not only risen from the dead but was also healed of the disease that had taken her life.

The response of those present that day was to be “overcome with amazement.” The word “amazement” is ἐξίστημι (exístēmi). It comes from the word ek, meaning out, and hístēmi, meaning to stand. The idea is that they were standing outside of themselves. They were taken into a new realm, where the reality before them was such that they could not identify with or comprehend it.

Verse 43

Jesus “strictly charged” those who saw this miracle not to speak about it to others. It is interesting to note that when He was coming to see this young girl, He was interrupted by a woman with a discharge of blood. He sought her out and required her to share what He had done for her. When Jesus delivered the demoniac of his demons, He told him to share what He had done

for him. In this case, however, Jesus “strictly charged” the family not to speak about what He had done. The life of the girl would likely speak for itself.

We are not told why Jesus did not want her parents or disciples to speak about this matter then. It may have had something to do with the response of the crowd. What is important is that we understand that there is a time to share what Jesus has done, and there is a time to refrain from sharing. We must be sensitive to His leading in this matter.

While Jesus had raised the young girl from the dead and healed her sickness, notice that He asked the parents to give her something to eat. Jesus wanted her to be strengthened by natural means. Not all healing and strengthening comes by means of a miracle. Sometimes common sense,

some rest, and a good meal are all that is required.

MARK 6

Verse 1

Jesus has been ministering in the region of Capernaum. Mark tells us that he determined, however, to travel to "his hometown." Mark does not tell us the name of that town, as it was likely assumed that everyone knew.

We understand from Matthew 5:23 that Jesus' family lived in the city of Nazareth. Listen to the words of the demon that Jesus cast out of a man he met in the synagogue in Capernaum:

(24) "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are

— *the Holy One of God.*” – Mark 1:24 *ESV*

Jesus is identified as being from Nazareth here in Mark 1:24.

As the crowds gathered to welcome Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, notice what they said about Him:

(11) And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." – Matthew 21:11 *ESV*

Luke recounts the words of Jesus when he spoke to the citizens of Nazareth in Luke 4:

(23) And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "'Physician, heal yourself.'" What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." (24) *And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no*

prophet is acceptable in his hometown. – Luke 4:23-24 ESV

Jesus speaks of Nazareth here as his hometown.

There is little doubt that Jesus' "hometown" was Nazareth, which is today about 50 kilometres or 30 miles southwest of Capernaum, where Jesus had been ministering. Mark tells us that Jesus went to Nazareth with His disciples.

Verse 2

On the Sabbath, Jesus went to the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. The service in the synagogue was less structured than in most churches of our day. Jesus, as a guest, was given the freedom to teach that day.

The people who heard Jesus teach were astonished and asked three questions out of their astonishment.

First, they asked, "Where did this man get these things?" The "things" spoken of pertained to His teaching. The truths and applications in Jesus' teaching were new to those who heard Him. Many present that day had likely been in the temple of Nazareth all their life but had never heard what Jesus taught. They questioned where that teaching came from and wondered if they should believe what He taught.

The second question asked that day was: "What is the wisdom given to him?" Notice two details here. First, they recognized the wisdom of Jesus in His teaching. Second, they knew that it was a wisdom given to Him. They felt the power and authority of the words of Jesus and stood helpless before them. They sensed this was wisdom

from a powerful source but were unwilling to attribute it to God.

The final question pertained to the demonstration of “mighty works,” which accompanied what Jesus preached: “How are such mighty works done by his hands?” Jesus not only demonstrated the wisdom of God but also the power of God in His daily life. Those mighty works were further evidence of the presence of God and His kingdom in the person of His Son.

The inhabitants of Nazareth were perplexed by Jesus. They saw evidence of the wisdom of God in His teaching and the power of God to do mighty works in their midst, but still, they had many questions.

Verse 3

In verse 2, the people of Nazareth posed three questions about Jesus and

His ministry. Here, they ask a final question. This question pertains to Jesus' family. This was likely the most difficult question they had to ask. The people of Nazareth knew Jesus and His family. Any idea that He was anything beyond an ordinary child who grew up in their midst was an offence to them.

The word translated; "offence" is σκανδαλίζω (skandalízō). It means to scandalize, to be a stumbling block, or to offend someone. In this case, the fact that they knew Jesus' family was the stumbling block for them. It was scandalous for them to think that the little boy who grew up among them could be a great prophet or, more importantly, the prophesied Messiah. For Him to suggest or act as if He were a great man of God was pretentious, arrogant and upsetting to them.

The people of Nazareth tell us something about Jesus' family here in this verse.

First, note the phrase: "Is not this the carpenter." Matthew expressed this differently when he quotes:

*55 Is not this the carpenter's son?
Is not his mother called Mary? And
are not his brothers James and
Joseph and Simon and Judas? – Mt
13:55*

While Matthew tells us that Jesus was a carpenter's son, Mark tells us that Jesus was a carpenter. Understand here that according to Luke, Jesus began his ministry at the age of thirty:

*23 Jesus, when he began his
ministry, was about thirty years of
age, being the son (as was
supposed) of Joseph, the son of
Heli, – Lk 3:23*

If Jesus was thirty years of age when He began His earthly ministry, He likely did work for many years in a

trade of some sort. According to Mark, that trade was carpentry. Jesus followed Joseph's footsteps, learned carpentry and likely worked as a carpenter until the age of thirty.

Note also here that the people of Nazareth understood that Jesus' mother was Mary, who had another four boys. Their names were James, Joses, Judas and Simon. Joses is called Joseph in Matthew 13:55. The people also tell us that Jesus had some sisters. The fact that the word sisters is in the plural tells us that there were at least two girls, if not more. The names of Jesus' sisters are not mentioned. According to this verse, Mary had at least five boys and two girls.

Verse 4

Jesus tells His disciples that the role of a prophet is generally honoured. People understand that they speak

the words of God. They may not always like what prophets say, but they typically respect them for their gifting and office.

Jesus goes on, however, to say that there is one notable exception to this rule. A prophet is often disrespected or rejected in his hometown, among his relatives, and the members of his own family.

While it is difficult enough for a prophet to speak to strangers, when he speaks the word of God to his own family, they often reject what he has to say. They resent correction from a son, brother or one who grew up among them. They will accept the word of a stranger more readily than that of one who grew up with them.

Jesus shows us, by these words, that the people of Nazareth were not open to listening to Him. Beyond this, however, He shows us that His

relatives, as well as His brothers and sisters, did not, at this point, accept Him or His ministry.

Verse 5

Mark tells us that Jesus “could do no mighty works” in Nazareth but then goes on to speak of how He placed His hands on the sick and healed them. Verse 2 of this chapter tells us that the people of Nazareth wondered about the “mighty works” of Jesus. This leaves us to wonder what Mark is telling us here.

In saying that Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth, Mark is not telling us that Jesus did not have the power to do so. He demonstrated that He still could do mighty works by healing “a few sick people.”

The reason Jesus “could do no mighty works there” was not from a lack of

power but rather because the conditions were not right for such a display of power. Just because we have the power to do something does not make it right to do so. Remember that in verse 4, Jesus tells us that the people of Nazareth did not honour Him.

Matthew 9:34 recounts the reaction of the unbelieving Pharisees to the mighty works of Jesus when it says:

34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." – Mt 9:34

Why did Jesus perform His mighty works? Listen to His words in John 14:11:

11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. – Jn 14:11

The mighty works of God were not only acts of compassion but also a demonstration of the kingdom of God and the presence of the Father and Spirit in the Lord Jesus. They proved the genuineness of His message. The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus as the Son of God. No miracle performed among them would change their mind about Him. This hardness of heart and unwillingness to accept Jesus created an environment where He was no longer accepted. Nothing would change the minds of the people of Nazareth about Jesus. All further demonstrations of His divinity and power would fall on hard ground. No seed of the gospel would penetrate that soil. To remain would make no difference.

Verse 6

Notice the response of Jesus to the people of His hometown. Mark tells us that He marvelled because of their unbelief. He was astonished at the hardness of their heart and how they rejected Him and His message. They heard Him preach and wondered at the wisdom of His preaching. They heard of His mighty works and wondered at the source of His power. Despite what Jesus taught and demonstrated in their midst, the inhabitants of Nazareth refused to believe that He could be from God. Jesus finds himself astonished at such hardness of heart.

Mark tells us that from Nazareth, they went throughout the region preaching in the villages. Jesus does not appear to remain in Nazareth, where He no longer found Himself welcome.

Verse 7

The twelve disciples had been with Jesus for some time now. Jesus taught them and demonstrated the power of the kingdom of God. The moment had now come for His disciples to put what Jesus taught them into practice and to gain some practical experience in the work of the kingdom. For that to take place, Jesus determined that He would send the disciples out on a short ministry trip where they could put what they had learned into practice. Notice two details here about how Jesus sent these men out.

First, Jesus sent His twelve disciples out “two by two.” That is to say, He sent out six teams of two each. These men were not alone but had a partner to support them in their ministry. Jesus demonstrates the importance of having support in our service to the kingdom.

Second, Jesus gave these teams authority over unclean spirits. Understand that these men were going out as servants of the kingdom of God. There would be opposition as they sought to advance that kingdom. That opposition would come from Satan and his unclean spirits. Jesus gave these men authority over these forces of evil. They would go in His name with the power and authority to drive out unclean spirits and overcome their temptations.

The disciples had two qualifications as they left Jesus and went out on their own. First, they had the call of Christ to go. Second, they had His authority to stand against all opposition. Both qualifications were necessary.

Verse 8

Notice that Jesus told His disciples that as they went on this short

mission trip, they were to take nothing for their journey except a staff. Jesus does not explain the use of the staff here or why it was permitted. Traditionally, the staff was used for support, defence and carrying belongings tied to the end.

Jesus specifically told these six teams that they were not to take food with them. Nor were they to take any money to buy food. They were not even permitted to carry a bag to store money or food they might receive along the way. Like the children of Israel who gathered fresh manna every day, these disciples were to depend on God for their daily needs.

This was an exercise in faith and confidence in God. If they could not trust God for the necessities of life, how could they preach about His kingdom and its power? They needed to experience what they preached personally.

Verse 9

Jesus tells His disciples that He permitted them to wear sandals, but they were not to take a spare tunic. The sandals would be generally worn all the time on their feet. A spare tunic would have been an extra burden to bear. They were not to carry anything beyond what was necessary.

It is quite easy for us to be weighted down with more than is required. The task the Lord was giving His disciples was not to be burdened by the care of unnecessary things. They were to be focused on what He had called them to do and let God take care of the rest. We are left to wonder how much the cares of the world and its possessions have hindered our service of the kingdom and walk with God. It might do us good to unburden ourselves of some of the excesses that only distract us.

Verse 10

The disciples were free to accept the hospitality of those offering it. Jesus told them that when they were offered a place to stay, they were to remain in that house until they departed the region for another place. Jesus does not explain the reason behind this obligation.

Understand that these disciples, as with any travelling teacher of the day, depended on the hospitality of the local people where they taught. That hospitality involved a place to stay and meals.

The fact that the disciples were offered such hospitality was a sign that they were welcome in that community and that God had something for them to do. Remember that in Nazareth, the people refused to listen, so Jesus moved on. If they were welcome, the disciples were to remain and teach in

that community. The Spirit of God would show them when it was time to move on. Until that was revealed, they were to be happy with the provision of God in that hospitality and remain.

Why might a disciple move from home to home? This might be because they were looking for something more comfortable. Jesus' command to remain may also have to do with being content with what they had and not seeking greater comfort for themselves.

Verse 11

The disciples would not be well received in every community. There would be people and places they were not welcome. Jesus tells them that they were not to remain anywhere people did not want them. There is an important principle we need to learn here.

Have you ever tried to share the gospel with someone not ready to hear it? What happens when you keep poking them with that message? Will they not become angry with you, do everything that they can to avoid you, and possibly even become bitter and hardened to the message you bring? It does no good to force the gospel on someone not ready to receive it. The Spirit of God must first soften their heart. Until He does, our nagging will accomplish nothing but harden their hearts.

Jesus tells the disciples that when they came to a place that refused their message, they were to move on. They were not to pick unripe fruit. Instead, they were to shake off the dust of that city from their feet and go elsewhere.

Notice the symbolism of shaking the dust from their feet. It was, according to Mark, a testimony against that city. This was an expression of contempt for

the city that rejected the Lord Jesus. The dust of the disciples' feet shook off in that city would one day rise to testify against them. They had heard the message but turned it down. They would one day answer to God for this.

The King James Version of the Bible adds the phrase:

"Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day of judgment, than for that city."

Other versions omit this phrase. The New King James version keeps the words but adds a note saying that many ancient manuscripts from which the verse is translated do not contain these words.

While it is uncertain if these words were in the original copy of Mark's account, it is quite clear that Jesus did say this. The phrase is found in the

ancient manuscripts of Matthew's account:

(15) Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town. – Matthew 10:15 ESV

Verse 12

As the disciples went out, Mark tells us that they proclaimed a message of repentance.

That is to say, they preached that people needed to turn from their sin to the Lord Jesus. The disciples did not hesitate to proclaim that sin was an obstacle to a right relationship with God. In an age when preaching about sin is not popular, we would do well to take note of this message of repentance.

Verse 13

Mark tells us that the disciples not only preached a message of repentance, but they also cast out demons and anointed the sick with oil. This resulted in many being healed. The message of repentance is accompanied by prayer and concern for the physical wellbeing of those who heard that message. Jesus ministered to the whole person, body, soul and spirit. If we are to follow His example and that of the disciples here, we will do well to not only preach a message of repentance, but also to care for the body and soul of those He has placed under our care.

Verse 14

News about the ministry of Jesus and His disciples came to Herod, the Roman leader in Galilee at the time. When Herod heard of the “miraculous

powers” at work in Jesus, he concluded that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead. The explanation for this belief follows.

Verse 15

While Herod believed that Jesus was John the Baptist, raised from the dead, he was not the only one who had an opinion on the identity of Jesus. Other people in the region believed He was Elijah, raised from the dead. Still, others held the opinion that He was a prophet, “like one of the prophets of old.” At this point in Jewish history, the miraculous works performed by prophets like Elijah were relatively uncommon. What the people were seeing, they had only heard about in their history.

What is clear from the verse is that Jesus’ presence and miraculous powers were causing quite a stir. News of His

work spread, but people were uncertain who Jesus was. Miracles in and of themselves do not provide the answers we need. The truth must accompany the power of God if people are to understand and believe.

Verse 16

Mark repeats what he said in verse 14 by telling us the opinion of Herod. He believed that Jesus was John the Baptist, raised from the dead. Herod had a very particular connection to John the Baptist. Mark reminds us here that he had beheaded him. The fact that Herod believed Jesus to be John the Baptist risen from the dead may show us that this was not a normal beheading for Herod. He was disturbed by the death of John the Baptist and how he had killed him. He may have lived with a guilty conscience in this matter.

Verse 17

Mark explains the connection between Herod and John the Baptist here. He tells us that Herod had seized John and bound him in prison. The reason for John's imprisonment had to do with a woman by the name of Herodias. Herodias was Herod's sister-in-law and wife to his brother Philip.

The Roman historian Josephus tells us that Herod had been married to the daughter of Aretas for some time. During this marriage, he fell in love with Herodias, his brother's wife. Josephus goes on to describe what took place as a result:

This man ventured to talk to her about a marriage between them, which address, when she admitted, an agreement was made for her to change her habitation and come to him as soon as he should return

from Rome: one article of this marriage also was this, that he should divorce Aretas's daughter. - (Josephus, Flavius, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, chapter 5, section 1)

Herodias left her husband to live with Herod. The arrangement was that Herod would divorce his wife to marry her.

Verse 18

John the Baptist knew about this arrangement between Herod and Herodias and spoke out against it, saying: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." John's boldness is obvious here. He preached a message of repentance, and it did not matter to John who you were. People of all ranks in society needed to repent. He brought that message to Herod. The

Roman leader's response was to have John imprisoned.

Verse 19

While Herod imprisoned John the Baptist, Herodias held a grudge against him and wanted him dead. Notice that while she wanted him to be put to death, she could not. The reason for this is found in verse 20. John's real enemy was not Herod but Herodias. Herod appears to protect John's life despite what John said about him and his actions. The grudge Herodias held in her heart, however, would eat away at her until it was satisfied.

Verse 20

Herod protected John the Baptist in prison despite the desire of Herodias to kill him. Mark tells us that Herod feared

John because he knew him to be a righteous and holy man.

Notice also here how Mark tells us how when Herod heard John, he was “greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.” There appears to be a softness in Herod’s heart. What John preached and told him about his sin with Herodias “perplexed” him. The word translated as “perplexed” is ἀπορέω (aporéō), meaning without resources or not knowing what to do. Herod heard what John the Baptist had told him about his sinful relationship, but he did not know what to do about it. On the one hand, he respected the word of a holy man, but on the other, he loved Herodias and found himself in a relationship with her he wasn’t sure he could end.

Mark tells us that Herod was always glad to hear John the Baptist. There was something in his plain, “in your face” message Herod appreciated,

even though he did not have the strength to make any changes in his life as a result.

Verse 21

Mark describes an “opportunity” that arose for Herodias to bypass the protection of Herod and terminate John’s life. That opportunity came on Herod’s birthday. He gave a great banquet for his nobles, military men, and commanders. Among those present were “the leading men of Galilee.”

Verse 22

On his birthday, Herod entertained the leading men of Galilee at a great banquet. Part of the entertainment came in the form of a dance performed by Herodias’ daughter. That dance was so well received that Herod told the girl

she could ask whatever she wanted,
and he would give it to her.

The phrases “Herodias’ daughter” and “the girl” indicate that this young lady was not Herod’s daughter. She was likely Herodias’ daughter through her former marriage. Herod’s offer to her was very bold and reckless. He was possibly in a very good mood and under the influence of some wine at that time.

Verse 23

Before all the leading men of Galilee, Herod promised to give up to half of his kingdom to Herodias’ daughter. The offer was generous but also very reckless. It was, however, a bold offer made in the presence of many witnesses, and Herod would be forced to keep his word.

Verse 24

Herodias' daughter was uncertain about what her response to Herod's offer should be. She took it seriously, however, and, leaving the banquet hall, consulted her mother about how to answer. There seems to be no hesitation on the part of Herodias. She told her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist.

Possibly, Herodias feared that Herod's fascination and protection of John could risk her status and that of her daughter. Should Herod listen to John and no longer recognize their unlawful relationship, perhaps she and her daughter would be left with nothing. If John and his influence over Herod was terminated, these women's futures may have been secured.

Verse 25

Mark tells us that Herodias' daughter went "immediately" to Herod with her mother's request. She told him that she wanted the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

By going immediately to Herod, Herodias' daughter would have found him with his guests before whom he had promised up to half his kingdom. Herodias was likely forcing Herod's hand here.

Verse 26

Note the response of Herod to the request of his wife's daughter. Mark tells us that he was exceedingly sorry. It was not Herod's wish to kill John the Baptist. Mark 6:20 tells us that while John's message disturbed Herod, he "kept him safe" and "heard him gladly."

The Roman leader, however, found himself in a difficult situation. He had

made an oath to his wife's daughter. That oath had been witnessed by the nobles, military commanders and leading men of Galilee (verse 21), so he could not go back on his word.

Verse 27

With his hand being forced, Herod had no choice but to order the execution of John the Baptist. An executioner went immediately to the prison where John was being held and executed him.

While this seems so unfair in our eyes, God has a time and role for each of us. John had accomplished his role. It was now time for him to be with his God. John was promoted to glory that day. Herod, his wife, and his daughter would have to live with the consequences of their actions. We see part of the consequences here in the life of Herod, who believed Jesus to be John the Baptist, returned from the

dead. Herod continued to be haunted by his actions and the order of execution he issued for a “righteous and holy man” (verse 20).

Verse 28

John’s head was brought on a platter and given to Herodias’ daughter. We can only imagine the gruesome nature of what took place that day. The young girl, who had so delicately danced before Herod, is now presented by the executioner with the severed head of a holy and righteous man. This was her reward for the beautiful dance that had won the admiration of her mother’s husband. Seeing it, she had no use for it, so she gave it to her mother, who had suggested it to be the proper gift for her.

Verse 29

When John's disciples heard of his death, they claimed his body and laid it in a proper burial tomb. John the Baptist appears to be one of the first martyrs of the Christian faith. He died because he stood up for truth and a holy life.

Verse 30

The context of this verse is found in Mark 6:7, which tells us how Jesus sent His disciples out on their own. They have returned from their ministry trip and reported to Jesus what "they had done and taught."

Verse 31

When all the disciples returned from their ministry trip and reported to Jesus what had happened, Jesus suggested they go to a "desolate place" to rest.

According to Mark, the disciples couldn't rest where they were because people were "coming and going," and they had no leisure even to eat.

Jesus suggests a "desolate" place for the disciples. The word used here is ἐ ῥημος (érēmos), which speaks of a barren desert. This is not a place filled with entertainment and fancy hotels. It is the opposite. It is a place where there are no people or comforts. It was in this place of no noise and no distractions that the disciples would rest for a while.

Note also how Mark emphasizes that these men had "no leisure even to eat" because of the constant "coming and going" around them.

The word leisure in the English language refers to a time when we are not working or occupied. We generally see it to refer to relaxation and resting. The word translated

“leisure” here in this verse, however, is εὐκαιρέω (eukairéō) and means occasion or opportunity. Mark tells us that Jesus and the disciples were so busy they didn’t even have time to eat.

Jesus teaches His disciples an important lesson. He had sent them on a mission trip to work to advance the kingdom of God. Here, He teaches them that if they were to continue in this work, they would also need time to get away from the “coming and going” to rest. In that rest, they would be refreshed and renewed.

Verse 32

Taking Jesus’ advice, the disciples boarded a boat in search of a desolate place by themselves. Taking a boat would mean that the people who constantly followed them would be unable to do so.

Verse 33

The plan to rest in a desolate place did not work out as expected. While the crowd could not pursue them on water, they saw Jesus and His disciples leaving and following the shoreline, ran and arrived ahead of them.

We are not told how long the disciples were in that boat. It was not a quick trip because the crowd that followed had time to get to their destination ahead of them. The “desolate place” the disciples needed was likely in a boat in the middle of the sea!

Verse 34

By the time Jesus and His disciples went ashore, Mark tells us that there was already a

“great” crowd gathered to meet them. After their rest in the boat, it was now

time to get back to work.

Mark tells us that Jesus had compassion on the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd. This crowd needed a shepherd. Without a true shepherd, they were defenceless against the wolves of falsehood and error. They needed someone to guide them and show them the way, the truth and the life.

Jesus' solution to the problem of sheep without a shepherd was to "teach them many things." Jesus' teaching would show these sheep the way. It would give them an understanding of the purpose of God and the direction He had for their lives.

Some time ago, I was in Haiti. As I looked around me, I saw a tremendous physical need. People were without food, shelter and life comforts. I asked, "What am I doing in light of these

overwhelming needs?" The answer was that I was teaching the Bible. This led to a second question: "What good is teaching the Bible when there are such overwhelming physical needs all around me?" The Lord answered that question by speaking to my heart and saying: "Wayne, these people need more than just having their physical needs met. They also need a reason to live. Write and teach to give them that reason to live." From that moment on, I have never questioned the value of teaching the Word. Jesus taught these sheep, giving them a reason to live and revealing the heart of the Father for them.

Verse 35

The day wore on, and it grew late as Jesus and His disciples ministered to the crowd. The disciples remind Him of the hour and that the place was

“desolate.” The idea here seems to be that there was nowhere to buy food or to lodge.

Verse 36

Understanding that it was growing late and that the crowd was getting hungry, the disciples suggested that Jesus send them away to the countryside and nearby villages to buy food. In saying this, the disciples demonstrate compassion for the people gathered. Remember that many of these individuals had walked a long distance to be with Jesus that day. They would have been hungry and tired.

Verse 37

When the disciples suggested that Jesus send the crowd to the countryside and nearby towns for food, He responded by telling them to give

them something to eat instead. This perplexed the disciples, and they immediately began to calculate how much it would cost for them to do so. The disciples estimated that purchasing food for this crowd would cost about two hundred denarii. The denarii was equivalent to one day's wages for a labourer. A labourer would have to work seven months to pay for such a meal.

Verse 38

When the disciples told Jesus how impossible it was to feed the crowd themselves, Jesus took action. He began by asking them to find out what was available to Him.

The words "Go and see" indicate that the disciples were to go out among the crowd to find out what food was available. They returned and told

Jesus they had obtained five loaves of bread and two fish.

This amount of food was insignificant before such a crowd, but it was available to Jesus, and He would use what was available to Him to do the miraculous. It is easy for us to feel that what we have is nothing compared to the need. The question we should be asking, however, is whether it is available to the Lord Jesus.

Verse 39

With the five loaves and two fish available to Him, Jesus commanded the crowd to gather in groups and sit down on the grass. Mark does not explain why Jesus had the crowd sit down in groups. From a practical point of view, it would be easier to serve people seated and not wandering around. By ordering them in groups, it would have

been easier for the disciples to move among them.

Verse 40

Mark tells us here that the crowd listened to Jesus and sat down in groups of one hundred and groups of fifty. We see from this that there were many people present that day. Notice the use of the plural form here in the phrase “by hundreds and by fifties.” This indicates that there were multiple groups of one hundred as well as groups of fifty.

Verse 41

When some order had been established among the crowd, Jesus took what was available and blessed it by looking to heaven. While God is everywhere present, there is a sense here that His presence is manifested in the heavens.

Jesus looked up to His Father as He prayed that day.

Having blessed the food, Jesus broke the bread and divided the fish, giving these small portions to the disciples to distribute to the people. Mark does not tell us the reaction of the disciples to this request. The disciples needed to trust the Lord as they distributed the bread and fish to the people. A wonderful miracle would occur as the disciples obeyed and distributed what had been made available to the Lord.

Verse 42

Mark informs us that the people gathered that day all ate and were satisfied. Not only did everyone have something to eat, but according to these words, everyone had sufficient to satisfy their appetite.

I have often wondered how this wonderful miracle took place. When did this food multiply? Did Jesus give the disciples a small portion to take to the people, which multiplied as they received it? Was the disciples' faith being stretched as they brought one small seed portion after another to the people?

The sower sows a very small seed. It looks like nothing compared to the need. In that seed, however, is life. God blesses the seed He gives us. He places life in that seed, and it sprouts in the hearts and lives of those in whom it is planted, producing an abundant harvest. What is important is that we sow what Jesus gives us.

Verse 43

Mark informs us that when everyone had eaten and were satisfied, the disciples gathered up what remained.

They counted twelve baskets full of broken bread pieces and fish.

We do not know what happened to these leftovers. Why did Jesus permit there to be so many leftovers? It is not without significance that there were twelve baskets full left. This was one for every disciple who distributed that day. As each disciple came forward with his basket full, he would have been amazed at what the Lord had done through his obedience.

Verse 44

The significance of the miracle becomes evident here when Mark tells us that those five loaves and two fish fed five thousand men. As was the custom of the day, only the men were counted. Matthew tells us, however, that there were also women and children present in that crowd:

(21) And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children. – Matthew 14:21 ESV

It isn't easy to know just how many women and children were in the crowd of five thousand men. If there was one woman and one child for every man, the true number of people present that day could have been more like fifteen thousand people. While we do not know the number of people in that crowd, the miracle performed that day was significant.

Verse 45

After feeding the multitude, Jesus told His disciples to get into the boat and cross the lake to the region of Bethsaida. He remained behind to dismiss the crowd. Bethsaida was located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Having the disciples go

ahead of Him would give Jesus time alone.

Verse 46

While His disciples crossed the lake to Bethsaida, Jesus went up on a mountain to pray. This mountain would be an isolated place with no disruption. Here, He could have uninterrupted time to converse with His Father. This would have also been a time for Him to be refreshed in His spirit as He spoke with the Father.

Verse 47

Jesus' time on the mountain extended into the evening. The disciples were, at this time, crossing the sea toward Bethsaida. Mark reminds us that Jesus was alone on the land when the disciples crossed the sea. It was important for Mark to convey that

Jesus did not leave with the disciples when they got into the boat.

Verse 48

Mark tells us that Jesus saw the disciples were “making headway painfully, for the wind was against them.” The question we must address here is how Jesus saw the disciples when He was on land, and they were on the sea. The answer may come from Jesus being on a mountain at this point. It is possible that He could look out over the lake from His position on the mountain.

The problem with this answer is that Mark tells us that the evening had come (see verse 47). The darkness of the evening would have made it difficult to see from any distance. The second problem is in the timing that Mark gives us. He tells us that it was about the fourth watch of the night

that Jesus came to these disciples. The fourth watch of the night was from 3 am to 6 am. This would have been a very dark time and made seeing anything at that distance with the natural eye impossible.

It is possible, therefore, that what Jesus saw was not with His natural eyes but His spiritual eyes. He may have perceived what was taking place in His Spirit, or the Father may have given Him a picture of what was taking place on the sea.

What is clear is that seeing His disciples making painful headway in the wind, Jesus determined to do something about it. He came to them in the middle of the sea, walking on the water.

Verse 49

Notice the disciples' response to the appearance of Jesus on the sea on that windy early morning. They thought Jesus was a ghost and cried out.

Note that the disciples of Jesus believed in ghosts at this time. The verse is not intended to teach such a doctrine but rather to explain what the disciples were thinking at that moment. They had no other logical way of describing what they saw that morning.

Mark tells us that the disciples "cried out." The idea is that they were afraid and expressed their fears out loud.

Verse 50

When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they were terrified. Their fear was in the fact that they had not yet recognized Him.

Mark tells us that Jesus immediately spoke to the disciples, identified Himself and told them not to be afraid. Have you ever found yourself in a situation like the disciples? You are in the middle of the sea with a great storm surrounding you. Your spirit is agitated and deeply troubled. Then Jesus comes to you in a very perplexing way. Your mind cannot understand what is happening. Then He identifies Himself to you. You hear His voice over the howling wind and recognize it. "It is me," He tells you. When you recognize that voice, your spirit calms. You understand that as long as He is near, you will be safe.

Verse 51

Having reassured the disciples that He was not a ghost, Jesus got into the boat with them. Mark tells us that when Jesus got into the boat,

the wind that was prevailing against them ceased.

Notice the disciples' response to this incident of Jesus walking on that water and the wind ceasing — they were utterly astounded. The Greek word used here is ἐξίστημι (exístēmi), derived from ek, meaning out, and hístēmi, meaning to stand. The idea is to stand outside of oneself. We use the expression "to be beside oneself" in the English language. The word ἐξίστημι carries something of the same meaning. The idea is that they were overwhelmed. What they were experiencing that day was so out of the ordinary that they could not take it in. It was as if they were looking at a whole new reality that they were somehow part of but unable to understand.

Mark does not tell us why the disciples had such a difficult time with the winds on the sea. What we do see, however,

is the result. In their struggle, they experienced Jesus in a whole new way. They saw His power in the storm that raged around them. They experienced the miracle of Him overcoming the forces of nature to meet them in their struggle. Those waves gave them a new appreciation of Jesus, His divinity and profound care for them as His disciples.

Verse 52

Mark told us in verse 51 that the disciples were astounded by Jesus walking on the water and calming the wind. Notice how he connected this response to the events that had happened earlier.

The verse begins with the word “for.” This connects it to verse 51 and the disciples’ amazement that Jesus could walk on water and calm the storm. Mark tells us that the disciples were

amazed at what Jesus did that morning because they had not understood about the loaves and their hearts were hardened.

First, note how Mark tells us that the disciples did not understand the loaves. These men had seen Jesus feed 5,000 men plus women and children with five loaves of bread and two fish. They had gathered up twelve baskets full of leftovers after everyone had sufficient to eat. The disciples had not yet grasped the impact of that miracle and its implications.

We catch a glimpse of the reason for the wind on the sea that day. The disciples had experienced the miracle of the feeding of five thousand men. What was the implication of that miracle in their lives? Jesus sent them out on the sea and allowed the wind to blow strongly on them to answer that question. How did what the men had

just experienced impact how they faced the howling sea winds?

Before judging these disciples too severely, we should ask ourselves the same question. How does reading the story of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the five thousand affect how I address the needs I have in life? Do I worry and fret? Am I tempted to give up hope? Can I trust the one who fed the multitude to meet my current needs? Mark tells us that the disciples failed the test. They did not truly understand that miracle, nor did they truly grasp its implication for their lives. The one who fed five thousand will certainly meet our needs as well. When everything seems impossible, He will come walking on the water to us and get in our boat, calming the prevailing wind. The work of Jesus, recorded in Scripture, is not just for our entertainment. These records introduce us to the Saviour and

show us who He is and what He still wants to do in us.

Observe, finally, the phrase, “their hearts were hardened.” The picture here is of a stone. It is hard to the touch and insensitive to the elements. The disciples’ hearts were like this. They saw what happened and were amazed, but that was as far as it went. They could not take in what they saw and apply it to their lives. They saw Jesus do the impossible, but when the wind rose on the sea, they acted like those who had no Saviour. They struggled to believe. They reasoned and thought like those who had no God. They needed a new heart and mind.

Verse 53

Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and arrived in the region of

Gennesaret. Tyndale Bible Dictionary tells us something about this city:

Gennesaret (more accurately termed Gennesar) was also the later name of the town Chinneroth (Jos 11:2), an ancient city that had long since fallen into ruin by Jesus' day. - (Comfort, Philip W, Elwell, Walter A. "Gennesaret," Tyndale Bible Dictionary: Tyndale House Publishing, Wheaton, Illinois, 2001)

Gennesaret, as it was then known, was located on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. It was an ancient region that had a full history.

Verse 54

Mark tells us that when the Lord and His disciples got out of the boat in the region of Gennesaret, people immediately recognized them. Jesus'

fame had been spreading across the region. People heard what He was doing and spoke with others about His powers and message. There may also have been people in the area who had heard Him preach in the other regions He had visited.

Verse 55

Note what happened when Jesus arrived in Gennesaret. Verse 54 tells us that people recognized Him. Seeing that Jesus had come to their region, the people “ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was.”

Jesus did not have to advertise His meetings. There was a hunger for what He had to offer. People were sick and infirm throughout the region and came to Him because of their needs. They saw Him as the answer to those needs.

Mark tells us that those who came brought sick people on beds. If you were to look at the crowds that gathered around Jesus in those days, a great part of them came for physical healing. That is not to say that Jesus only healed in those meetings. He also preached that these healings demonstrated that the Kingdom of God had come to push back the curse of sin. He revealed to those present through His miracles that He was the Messiah. He came to break the power of sin and oppression and give them peace with God.

Verse 56

The power of Jesus to heal the sick was evident wherever He went. He travelled throughout the region in the villages, cities, countryside and marketplaces. Everywhere He went, people brought sick people to Jesus.

Some begged to touch the fringe of His garment, believing that this was sufficient for healing. Mark informs us that "as many as touched it were made well."

We see from this that the power to heal was upon Jesus. That power was such that it drove away the curse of sin. Mark is trying to convey something of the glory and holiness of Christ here. It would be easy to see Him as "one of the guys." Jesus, however, was much more than this. The presence and power of God were so powerfully upon Him that just touching the hem of His garment would drive away sickness and disease.

MARK 7

Verse 1

A report came to the Pharisees that Jesus was in the region of Gennesaret. As leaders responsible for the spiritual welfare of their people, they came to see what was going on. Among them was also a group of Scribes from Jerusalem.

Verse 2

The context of this verse is the powerful work of Jesus in the region of Gennesaret. People came and touched the fringe of His garment and were healed. Evidence of the power of God

was abundant. More than this, however, was the message Jesus preached. His message was about the kingdom of God and the fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures predicting a Messiah. This presentation of prophetic truth with demonstrations of God's miraculous work was very powerful.

As the Pharisees and scribes evaluate what was taking place that day, notice their observations. They saw that some of His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. This proved to be a big stumbling block for these leaders. It was their custom to wash their hands before they ate. This was not based on any particular law of Moses but their tradition.

They elevate their tradition of hand washing above the prophetic truth Jesus proclaimed. They were blind to the miracles demonstrating the power

of God on Christ. All they could see was their tradition.

Verse 3

Mark explains why it was so important for the Pharisees that the disciples wash their hands before they ate. It was the tradition of the elders not to eat unless they washed their hands properly. By telling us that this was the “tradition of the elders,” Mark implies that there was no such command in the Law of Moses.

It is all too common for us to add to the inspired teaching of Scripture. Understand that there was nothing wrong with washing the hands before one ate. The problem was that the Pharisees began to see the breaking of this tradition as equal to the breaking of the Law of God. They began to place their traditions on the same level as the Word of God. We

would do well to distinguish between human traditions and the inspired teaching of God's Word.

Verse 4

Mark gives the background to the Pharisee's accusation in verse 2. He told us in verse 3 that they followed the tradition of the elders in washing their hands before they ate. He adds to this by showing his readers that when the Pharisees returned from the market, they would not eat anything unless they "immersed their hands in water."

In verse 3, Mark tells us that the Pharisees would not eat without washing their hands. The word used there for wash is *νίπτω* (*níptō*), which speaks of washing a part of the body. Here, in verse 4, the word translated immerse is *βαπτίζω* (*baptízō*), which means to submerge, overwhelm or

saturate. It is a stronger word than used in verse 3 and shows that when they returned from the market, where they were in contact with many people and objects, they took extra special care in washing their hands by submerging them in water to be sure they washed off all defilement. Mark expresses it this way to show the extent to which the Pharisees went to keep themselves ceremonially clean.

What these Jewish leaders did with their hands, they also did with their cups, pitchers, and kettles. All of these were meticulously cleaned so as not to bring any defilement.

Verse 5

The Pharisees brought their concern to Jesus and asked Him why His disciples did not follow the “age-old customs.” In particular, they wanted to know why

they did not perform the “hand-washing ceremony.”

The expression “age-old custom” is translated differently in various versions of the Bible. The King James Version uses the words “tradition of the elders.” What is important to note here is that even the Pharisees recognize that this hand-washing ceremony was not a command of Scripture, but a tradition or custom held by Jewish people for years. The fact that it had been practiced for years established it as a tradition that could never be broken. Years of practice, however, do not make something equal to the command of God.

In some countries, when people live for a certain amount of time on a property unclaimed by its owner, they can evoke what is known as squatter’s rights. That is to say, if the owner does not remove them before the number of years has passed, he will no longer

have the right to do so, and they can remain on that land as if it were theirs. I would dare to say that some believers feel the same way about traditions and customs. After several years, they accept these traditions and customs to have equal standing with the Word of God. In their mind, to break a tradition is to break the command of God. No tradition or custom, however, should ever have the same standing as Scripture, no matter how long it has been practiced. There are no squatter's rights for tradition.

Verse 6

Jesus responds to the question asked by the Pharisees. He begins by calling them hypocrites. That is to say that they spoke one thing but did another.

Jesus then points the Pharisees to a passage in Isaiah 29:13, which says:

(13) And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men – Isaiah 29:13 ESV

Jesus recognized that the Jewish religious leaders taught the people of their day, but they did so not knowing the purpose of God. They taught traditions and rituals but not true love and devotion to God.

Verse 7

Still quoting from Isaiah 29:13, Jesus adds that the Pharisees worshipped the Lord God in vain. That is to say, they went through the motions, but God did not accept their worship.

Note also how Isaiah accused the people of his day of attempting to

worship God through the doctrines and commandments of men. That is to say, they made their religion what they wanted it to be. They added their traditions and changed the truth of God's Word into a more digestible human doctrine. The faith they practiced was not the faith of Scripture but their own manufactured religion, their own ideas, and preferences. In essence, Jesus is accusing the Pharisees of inventing their own religion, one that His Father did not recognize.

Verse 8

If what Jesus said was unclear to the Pharisees, what He tells them here would make it clear. He bluntly tells them that they were guilty of leaving the commandment of God to hold to the tradition of men.

Jesus, as well as Isaiah, makes a clear distinction between the command of God and human tradition. Understand that Jesus is not telling us that all human tradition is bad. Note, however, that in this particular case of hand-washing, Jesus is accusing them of placing their human traditions over the command of God. The Pharisees were accusing the disciples of breaking a human tradition. There was no guilt in this. The Pharisees, however, believed the disciples to be as guilty before God as if they broke one of His commandments. This is where the problem lay for Jesus.

Verse 9

Notice the accusation of Jesus here. He accused the Pharisees of rejecting the commandments of God to establish their traditions. I would dare say that this has

continued to be an issue in the church of our day as well.

I must admit that there is teaching in the Scripture that I am not sure I completely understand. I suppose that if it were up to me, I would do things differently. The problem, however, is that it is not up to me. I am obliged to follow the command of God, whether I understand it or not. I do not have the privilege of changing or ignoring that commandment. It is not in my right to change the Scripture so that it is more contextualized or suitable for my culture. The command of God is for all time and all cultures. I cannot change what does not suit me.

Verse 10

Jesus gives the Pharisees an example of what He was telling them. He brings them to the Law of Moses and what it had to say about the relationship

between parents and children. In Exodus 20:12, God commanded children to honour their father and mother. Exodus 21:17 mandated the death penalty for any children who cursed or reviled their parents.

Verse 11

While the Law of Moses was very clear on the obligation of the child to his or her parents, the Pharisees had a teaching that allowed an individual to bypass that obligation. Jesus speaks here of the practice of Corban.

The word corban is a Hebrew word (קֶרְבָּן qorbān). It refers to an offering or gift. In the New Testament times, it took on a new meaning. It referred to a gift dedicated to the Lord and released an individual from normal social obligations such as caring for parents. Individuals could declare property, finances or services as corban

(devoted to God). When this occurred, it was forbidden to use that property, money or service for any secular purpose. Anyone who did use what was devoted to God (corban) for any other purpose was guilty before God of a serious crime.

Imagine an individual who did not want to care for his parents in their old age. He has a property he could move those parents to and a sum of money that could be used to care for them. He decides he does not want the obligation and responsibility of aging parents. To avoid this obligation, he declares the property and funds available to him as corban (devoted to the Lord). This means he cannot use these resources to care for his parents. By devoting what he had available to him to the temple, this individual now removes his obligation to care for his parents because he no longer has anything to care for them.

Verse 12

Speaking to the Pharisees, Jesus reminds them of how they accepted the law of Corban and forbade a man to care for his parents when the money or property he had available to him was devoted to God.

These religious leaders would not permit anything devoted to God to be used for any other purpose, no matter how important that need might have been. They would watch this aging mother and father suffer great hardship rather than release the funds devoted to God. In their zeal for God, they forsook all compassion, love and mercy.

Verse 13

Jesus reminds the Pharisees here how the human tradition of Corban overruled the Word of God. By allowing a man to devote resources that could

have been used to care for his parents to the Lord, the Pharisees justified breaking the law of God to honour one's parents.

The Pharisees were not only lawbreakers but ones who justified breaking the law by establishing and elevating human traditions above the Law of God.

Verse 14

People often came to Jesus to hear Him speak, notice here, however, that, this time, He called them to come to Him. While everything He taught was important, Jesus had a vital message to bring to those He called that day. Note that He asks those who came to Him not just to hear what He had to say but to understand it.

The word translated understand, is *συνίμι* (*suníēmi*), which is derived

from sún, meaning together, and híēmi, meaning see. The idea is that they were to put the facts that Jesus taught together and make sense of them. This would require a certain effort on their part.

Verse 15

Understand that the context of Jesus' words is a question from the Pharisees about why His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate, according to the custom of the day.

Having addressed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders, Jesus now turns to the crowd to bring His instruction on this matter. He begins by telling the people that it is not what is outside a person that defiles him but what comes out of him.

The Pharisees were very concerned about ceremonial purity. They believed

they would be defiled by the things they touched in the course of the day and underwent a special ceremony to remove these defilements to be right with God.

Note, however, that while they were careful to remove the dirt and defilement from their bodies, according to Jesus, they justified breaking the law through their human traditions. The attitude and pride of their heart were more defiling than the dirt on their hands.

Verse 16

There is some uncertainty among translators about this verse. This is reflected in how the various English translations of the Bible handle it. While the King James Version and the New King James Version include the verse in the main body of the text, the New King James Version adds a note

stating that it is not found in some of the ancient texts from which we have translated the English Bible. The New International Version and English Standard Version place verse 16 in a note outside of the main text, indicating that it is uncertain whether it was included in the original Greek manuscripts.

While the question of whether Mark wrote verse 16 in this chapter or not is undetermined by scholars, what is clear is that its call is to listen carefully to what the Lord Jesus taught. If God has given you ears to hear and understand that it is what is inside a man that defiles him, then consider this carefully and address it in your life.

Verse 17

Jesus did not explain what He meant when He told the people that it was not what was outside that defiled a

person but what came from within. He left them to understand this message on their own.

It is easy for us to feel that we need to make the message clear for everyone to understand. While we must be clear in our instruction, know that the Holy Spirit also has an important role in our preaching and teaching. We sow the seed of God's Word, but the Holy Spirit must give it life and understanding. I wonder, how many people left these meetings with Jesus with these stories engrained in their minds and wondered at their meaning? How many times did the Spirit of God open their hearts and minds to the truth these stories contained? Jesus sowed the seed, but the Spirit of God was also at work, opening hearts and minds to the truth of those teachings.

The disciples were among those who heard the message and wondered

about its meaning. Alone with Jesus, they asked Him to explain it to them.

Verse 18

Jesus' comments here seem to express a disappointment with the disciples and their lack of understanding. The curse of sin has all too often blinded our eyes, so we cannot see or grasp the truth of Christ. Even in the believer's heart, there is resistance and a lack of understanding. We have become so accustomed to this world and its ways that we struggle to grasp the deep realities of the truth Jesus taught. We are not always in tune with the Holy Spirit and His instruction and miss what He says. I must confess that those words of reprimand could all too often be directed at me.

Jesus explains the meaning of the words He spoke to the crowd. He tells the disciples that what goes into a

person from outside cannot defile him. Now, admittedly, the Law of God forbade eating certain foods. The question Jesus addresses here, however, is whether abstaining from these foods was sufficient to keep us from defilement. Does what I eat or don't eat make me more spiritual? The disciples had surely seen many Jews of their day who would never eat pork but who did not hesitate to deceive their neighbour or take advantage of Him. They saw the Pharisees who, though very strict in their observance of their dietary law of Moses, wanted nothing more than to murder the Son of God. They understood that abstaining from unclean food did not make these people right with God.

Verse 19

Jesus reminds the disciples that their food did not enter the heart but the

stomach and was ultimately expelled. The word Jesus uses for heart here is καρδία (kardía). It does not refer to the organ that pumps blood through the body but to the emotions, passions and desires of an individual.

What Jesus is telling the disciples is that the stomach and what they put in it did not define their relationship with God. Their heart, with its emotions, passions and desires, was of infinitely greater significance. It was from their heart that they expressed their devotion, love and commitment to God.

Notice how Mark tells us that by saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean. The cross of Christ and a new heart define our relationship with God. What we eat or do not eat is not of significance.

Verse 20

Jesus' words here need some examination. He tells the disciples that it is what comes out of a person that defiles him.

The Pharisees assumed that they were good and that outside influences defiled them. For example, they would be defiled if they touched a Gentile, or something declared unclean by the Law of Moses. By washing their bodies and abstaining from putting anything unclean in them, they would remain in a right relationship with God.

Jesus taught something radically different. He taught that defilement did not come from touching or eating unclean objects but from inside a man's heart. Human beings were defiled in their very nature, and what came out of them was tainted with sin and evil.

The Pharisees saw themselves as good people who needed to maintain their right standing with God by abstaining from anything that would make them unclean. Jesus saw humanity as unclean from the very core and that what came out of a person was more unclean than anything they could touch or eat.

Verse 21

Jesus explains what He means when he says what comes out of a man defiles him. He reminds His disciples of what came out of the human heart. He speaks to them about evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder and adultery. All of these things have their origin in the human heart.

Verse 22

Jesus continues His list of impurities and sins that originate in the human heart by adding coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. While we could spend much time defining each of these sins, what is important for us to see here is that while the Pharisees concerned themselves about what they physically touched during the day, they neglected these great sins that originated in the human heart.

Jesus shows the disciples here that the great human need was for a new heart. Sin was not something outside them but a reality inside them, from which they could not escape unless they were given a new heart.

Verse 23

Jesus concludes His instruction here by telling the disciples that the greatest evil was in the human heart. That evil

heart defiles them, which is why they need to be saved from it. Jesus did not come to save a good people from a wicked world. He came to save a people whose very heart was defiled and sinful.

Verse 24

From Galilee, Jesus travelled northward to the region of Tyre and Sidon on the coast. This was a significant journey at that time. Mark tells us that Jesus did not want anyone to know He was there. This leaves us to believe He wanted time alone with His disciples or time to rest. Note, however, that His presence did not go unnoticed, and even here in the region of Tyre and Sidon, His fame had spread.

Verse 25

There, in the region of Tyre and Sidon, was a woman who had a daughter troubled with an unclean spirit. When she heard that Jesus was in the area, she came and fell at His feet. By falling at His feet, she adopts the posture of a beggar, pleading with Him for support.

Verse 26

Mark makes special mention of the fact that this woman was a Gentile and Syrophoenician by birth. Jesus primarily ministered to the Jews, so this was a significant event for Mark. The Jews generally did not have much dealing with the Gentiles. As a Syrophoenician, the woman would have been born in Phoenicia which is present day Lebanon.

Mark tells us that she came begging Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Verse 27

Notice the response of Jesus to this Gentile woman: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Jesus speaks about two groups of people here — the children and the dogs. The children were the people of Israel, the chosen nation. The dogs were Gentile nations. A dog was an unclean animal. This is how the Jews saw the Gentiles. Jesus uses the language of the time to communicate with this woman.

Jesus tells this woman that it was the custom to feed the children in a household before throwing out what was left over to the dogs. It would be unthinkable to give priority to the dogs over the children of that household. What Jesus is telling the woman is that He had been called to minister to the

children of God (the people of Israel) and not to the Gentile nations. In Matthew's account of this event, Jesus makes this quite clear when He said:

(24) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." – Matthew 15:24 ESV

The time would come when the Lord would open the door for a great missionary movement among the Gentiles, but the gospel was first to be presented to the Jews.

Verse 28

The woman understood what Jesus was saying and knew His ministry had been to the Jewish world. She accepts this fact but reminds them that in the illustration He had just given, even the dogs were granted permission to eat

the crumbs that fell from the children's table to the ground.

In saying this, the woman is demonstrating perseverance. Jesus' comments do not threaten her. She is not offended by the Jewish characterization of her people as dogs. She does not expect special treatment as a Gentile. All she wants is the right to the crumbs. She believed that even those crumbs were sufficient to heal her troubled daughter.

There are times when we give up too quickly. How easy it would have been for this Syrophoenician woman to be offended and walk away. She didn't do that. She held her ground and asked for crumbs. I have had times when opposition made me question if I should continue on my path. I have, at the same time, discovered that resistance does not mean that I am to give up. Sometimes, the greatest

blessings come from holding tight and not giving ground.

Verse 29

Impressed by what the Syrophenician woman had to say and her perseverance, Jesus responds: "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."

Jesus did not go with the woman. There was no special ceremony. He did not lay hands on her daughter or even visit her. There is not even any indication that Jesus spoke to the demon. He just told this mother to go home with the assurance that the demon had departed. It is one thing to believe when a great banquet table is set before you and quite another when all you have is the crumbs that fall from that table. This mother believed, however, that even those crumbs were

sufficient to restore her daughter's health.

Verse 30

Returning home to her daughter, the Syrophenician woman found her in bed with the demon gone. Jesus reached out to this Gentile woman in her need. He demonstrates that while He had indeed been called to minister to the Jews, His heart was also for the Gentile world.

Mark does not give us any indication of any other contact Jesus had in that region. Was she one of the reasons He went to Tyre and Sidon?

Verse 31

Mark describes a route that would have taken Jesus about 40 kilometres (25 miles) north to Sidon and then south over 80 kilometres (50 miles) to the

region of Decapolis on the southeastern side of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 32

Even in Decapolis, people came to Jesus to be healed. Mark tells us that they brought a

deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus and asked Him to lay His hand on Him.

While the Syrophenician woman was content with just a word, the expectation here was that Jesus touch the deaf man to bring about his healing. There was no particular method for how Jesus healed those who came to Him.

Verse 33

Mark tells us that a crowd gathered around Jesus that day in Decapolis.

Jesus took the deaf man aside, however, to heal Him. Away from the crowd, Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears and, likely spitting on His fingers, touched His tongue with His saliva. This encounter was quite personal.

Verse 34

After touching his ears and anointing his tongue with His saliva, Jesus looked up to heaven. By looking up to heaven, Jesus reveals the source of His authority over this deafness.

Mark then tells us that Jesus sighed. This sigh seems to be one of distress. Jesus felt something deeply here as He touched and interacted with this man in his affliction.

Finally, Mark tells us that Jesus then cried out in the Aramaic language the word "Ephphatha," which means be

opened. The fact that the Aramaic word was kept here may show this was a holy moment. The word "Ephphatha" seems so powerful to Mark that he does not want to lose it.

Verse 35

Mark tells us that after Jesus cried out: "Be opened," not only were the deaf man's ears opened, but he also spoke plainly. That is to say, he spoke in a way that people could clearly understand.

Some people feel there was a connection between this man's inability to hear and speak plainly. While possible, note that Jesus addresses both matters in his healing. Not only did Jesus put His fingers in the man's ears, but He also anointed his tongue. The healing of the man's ears would not necessarily have healed his speech

impediment. Jesus heals both his ears and his tongue here.

Verse 36

Jesus commanded those who saw this miracle to keep it to themselves. They were not to tell others about it. Those who saw what took place that day, however, refused to obey. Instead, they proclaimed the news of the healing “zealously.”

This healing was very personal. Jesus took the man aside from the crowd to heal him. He told the people that they were to keep it to themselves. Some works of God are like that. There are things in my life that God has done that I am not free to share with others. In part, this is because they would not understand. Beyond this, however, is that what the Lord did was very personal and ultimately between Him and myself.

Understand here also that Mark tells us in Mark 8:1 that the crowd that pressed in on Jesus in those days was so great and their demands so pressing that Jesus and His disciples did not even have time to eat. This may also be part of why Jesus did not want those who saw the miracle to speak openly about it.

Verse 37

Mark tells us that the crowd, seeing this miracle, was “astonished beyond measure.” What they saw that day was beyond anything they had ever thought possible. They could never have imagined that a deaf and mute could be healed this way.

Notice how the crowd said: “He has done all things well.” Not everyone received the miracles of Jesus in this way. The religious leaders accused Jesus of healing in the power of

Satan. This is not the case here. The crowd believed in Him and accepted the miracle that took place that day was from God.

MARK 8

Verse 1

There was often a great crowd following Jesus and His disciples. Sometimes, the demand of that crowd was such that they did not even have time to eat (see Mark 3:20, 6:31). On this occasion, Jesus and His disciples found themselves surrounded by a crowd that had likely been following them for some time. That crowd was becoming hungry, and Jesus felt compassion for them. Mark tells us that He called His disciples to Himself to discuss the matter.

Verse 2

Jesus told His disciples that He felt compassion for the crowd following them. Notice that they had been with Jesus and His disciples for three days. Of particular concern for Jesus was that the people had nothing to eat. Jesus shows us here that His concern was to minister to the whole person and not just their spiritual well-being. He saw their physical needs as well as their spiritual.

Verse 3

Jesus presents a problem to His disciples here. The crowd had followed them for three days. They were now very hungry. If they sent them home, they would faint with hunger on the way, for they had come from such a long distance.

Jesus knew what He would do about this problem but presented it to His disciples to teach them. By introducing

the problem to them, the disciples are challenged to consider what they would do in this situation.

Verse 4

Notice the disciples' response to the problem presented by Jesus that day. They felt helpless to do anything. They were in a desolate place with no markets to buy bread.

The disciples are very reasonable here. The problem was that their thoughts were also very worldly. They were not taking God and the miraculous into account. They were so anchored in this world and its ways of thinking that it was hard for them to imagine what Jesus had in mind. These very disciples had seen Jesus feed a multitude with five loaves and two fish. They had watched Him raise the dead and heal the sick. Yet here, when confronted with the problem of how to feed the

multitude, they still could not imagine the miraculous. Their first resort is to look at what was humanly possible. They struggled to see beyond this. I suspect that this is a problem more common than we would like to admit.

Verse 5

Jesus moves now to resolve the problem of the hungry multitude. Notice how He begins with what was available to them. The disciples informed Him that they had seven loaves of bread available. Mark does not tell us if the loaves belonged to the disciples or if they discovered them in the crowd.

What is important here is that we make what we have available to the Lord. He has a way of multiplying what we offer Him and using it in ways we could never have imagined.

Verse 6

As the disciples watched, Jesus directed the crowd to be seated. He then took the loaves of bread and, after giving thanks to the Father, broke them and had the disciples set them before the crowd to eat.

It is hard to imagine what the disciples thought as they distributed that bread. This would be a lesson for them as they watched what Jesus could do with the little they had available.

Verse 7

Also available to them that day were a few small fish. Jesus blessed them and had His disciples distribute them to the crowd.

By blessing the fish, Jesus is simply asking for the blessing of the Father upon the fish so that it would sustain,

strengthen and build up those who received it.

Verse 8

Notice what took place that day. The crowd ate what the disciples distributed and were satisfied. The loaves and fish strengthened their bodies and refreshed them. We are not told how much this crowd ate that day but note how Mark tells us they gathered up seven baskets full of leftovers.

While the Lord could strengthen these individuals with just a small thimble full of bread, this is not what happened. They ate all they needed. The seven baskets full of leftovers prove that the loaves and fish were multiplied and that the people were filled due to the normal procedure of eating until they were full.

Verse 9

Mark tells us that the number of people in the crowd who ate until satisfied was about four thousand. It is hard to imagine how Jesus could have ministered to crowds this large. While His disciples would have been some assistance, their faith was still quite weak, and they were still very dependent on Him for everything, and their way of thinking was still quite earthly.

After feeding the multitude, Jesus then sent them home. The crowd does not seem to dissipate on its own. They would likely have continued to follow Jesus if He had not sent them home. Jesus does not hesitate to do this.

Verse 10

It appears from Mark 7:31 that Jesus and His disciples had been in the

region of Decapolis on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that from there, they got into a boat and crossed over to the western side of the sea to the region of Dalmanutha.

It is generally understood that the region of Dalmanutha was also known as Magadan or Magdala. We see evidence of this in Matthew's account, where he tells us that Jesus and His disciples, after feeding the four thousand, crossed the sea to Magadan.

(38) Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. (39) And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan. – Matthew 15:38-39 ESV

Verse 11

Here, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus is greeted by the Pharisees.

These leaders did not come to Jesus to hear Him preach or to be healed of sickness. Mark tells us that they had a very particular goal. They wanted to argue with Him and demand a sign from heaven to test Him. Consider this for a moment.

The Pharisees came for the purpose of arguing with Jesus. Their minds were already made up about Him. They had seen many mighty works, but these miracles did not affect them or their opinion of Him. They wanted to accuse Him of being a false prophet. They intended to kill Him.

Mark also tells us that these Pharisees also came seeking a sign from Jesus. The idea is that they wanted to see clear evidence that He was who He claimed to be. They wanted proof that

he was the Son of God and prophesied Messiah.

Understand that Jesus had already performed many powerful signs. He had raised the dead, healed the sick, and cast out demons. None of these signs, however, were sufficient for the Pharisees.

Note how Mark tells us that the reason they asked Jesus for a sign was to test Him. We need to understand this testing in light of the rest of what Mark tells us in this verse. They were seeking an argument. They were attempting to disprove the claims of Jesus.

Finally, the sign they were asking for was to be a "sign from heaven." It is uncertain what kind of sign they were looking for here. A "sign from heaven" could refer to a miracle that could only be described as being of divine origin. It could also be taken more literally to

refer to some sign in the sky proving the father recognized the Son. Maybe they were looking for fire from heaven or the opening of the skies and the voice of God declaring Him to be the Messiah. It is questionable, however, if even such a sign would convince them of Christ's divinity.

Verse 12

Hearing the Pharisees demand a sign from Him, Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit." The word translated sigh comes from the Greek word ἀναστενάζω (anastenázō), which speaks of a deep groaning. It is an indication of pain and grief.

Jesus felt deep grief in His spirit over this request for a sign. He agonized over the unbelief and hardness of the Pharisee's hearts to Him and His ministry. There is an element of compassion here in Jesus, even for His

greatest enemies who wanted to kill Him.

Jesus did not fall into their trap by seeking to prove His divinity. There was already ample evidence of His character, power and calling. If they refused to believe what was already revealed, they would not believe a sign from heaven.

The phrase “this generation” speaks of a people in that day whose hearts were just like the Pharisees. Everywhere Jesus went, people were asking for more proof He was from God. This request for a sign was evidence of their unbelief.

Verse 13

The extent of Christ’s grief over the unbelief in the hearts of the Pharisees is seen in what takes place here in this verse. Jesus walked away

from them, got in a boat and crossed over to the other side of the sea.

Jesus does not seek to convince them that He was the Messiah. He does not debate with them. He does not give them the sign they were looking for. He sighed deeply and walked away.

Sometimes, we can cause more harm by seeking to prove our point, even if we are right. Sometimes, the best policy is to leave the matter with the Lord and walk away before we make matters worse.

Verse 14

Leaving Dalmanutha (Magdala), Jesus and His disciples got in the boat heading to the northern part of the lake and the area of Bethsaida (see [Mark 8:22](#)). Mark tells us that the disciples forgot to bring bread with

them, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.

Verse 15

As they crossed the sea, Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to teach the disciples. Remember here that in Dalmanutha, He had encountered the Pharisees who demanded a sign trying to test Him. This encounter was very likely on His mind when He said to His disciples: "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Matthew and Luke give us a little more insight into what Jesus meant here. Matthew tells us that when Jesus spoke about the leaven of the Pharisees, He was referring to their teaching:

(12) Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the

*leaven of bread, but of the teaching
of the Pharisees and Sadducees. –
Matthew 16:12 ESV*

Luke adds another dimension when he describes the leaven of the Pharisees as hypocrisy:

(1) In the meantime, when so many thousands of the people had gathered together that they were trampling one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. – Luke 12:1 ESV

Note here that Jesus warns the disciples about the falsehood and hypocrisy of not only the Pharisees but also the Herodians. We learn from Mark 3:6 that the Herodians joined forces with the Pharisees in an attempt to kill Jesus.

(6) The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. – Mark 3:6 ESV

Verse 16

The disciples did not understand what Jesus told them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians. They thought He was referring to the fact that they had forgotten to take bread for their journey. The word “discussing,” used here, comes from the Greek word διαλογίζομαι (dialogízomai), which means to reason, deliberate, debate, dispute or consider. It is hard to say what words were exchanged in the boat between the disciples. The use of the word διαλογίζομαι, however, does not rule out an argument between them or concern about what they were going to do without food on this journey.

Verse 17

Jesus heard the discussion among the disciples and understood they had misunderstood what He was saying about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians. Notice how Jesus meets the disciples in their misunderstanding. When He spoke about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians, He spoke not about food but about falsehood and hypocrisy. The disciples did not understand this and were discussing something different. This is where Jesus met them. He entered into their discussion about the lack of food and revealed their lack of confidence in God and how He could provide for their need.

Jesus could have taken the conversation in a different direction by explaining how He wasn't talking about their lack of bread but the doctrine and hypocrisy of the religious and political

leaders of the day. This was not where the disciples were at that moment in time, however. They were not ready to speak about doctrine and hypocrisy. Their pressing concern was their bellies. Jesus doesn't press His point. Instead, He met the disciples where they were at that moment.

Verse 18

Notice how Jesus describes the disciples in the boat with Him. They had eyes but could not see. They had ears but could not hear. This statement was partly in response to the fact that they had misunderstood what He had told them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herodians. Beyond this, however, was the fact that they were in the boat with the Son of God, who had just fed four thousand people with a few loaves and fish, but they still failed to see what He could do with that loaf

of bread they had with them in the boat (Mark 8:14).

There is often a disconnect between our faith and real life. We accept that Jesus can do the miraculous but don't believe when we find ourselves in need of that miracle.

Verse 19

Meeting the disciples in their need, Jesus reminded them of the miraculous feedings they had witnessed. He asked them first about the time He broke five loaves and fed five thousand people with them. On that day, they had personally gathered twelve baskets full of leftovers.

Verse 20

Jesus also reminded the disciples of the second time He fed a multitude of people with a few loaves and fish. That

time, they had gathered seven baskets full of leftovers. Jesus reminds the disciples of these occasions to show them how foolish their discussion with each other about not bringing bread on this trip was.

These disciples were still anchored in this world and its ways of thinking. They did not live with the expectation of the miraculous. They still lived as if everything depended on them. How different things would be after the Spirit of God fell on them at Pentecost. Their eyes would be lifted from themselves and their abilities to God and His power.

Verse 21

The words of Jesus to His disciples are very convicting. Having seen His mighty works, they still did not understand. They still walked in

disbelief. They lived as if they had no God.

These words still speak today. They challenge our unbelief. They convict us whenever a circumstance troubles us and leads us to despair. The words, "Do you not yet understand?" speak very loudly into my life. They remind me to open my eyes to see the Saviour in my boat. I can almost see the Lord Jesus listening to the discussion among the disciples in that boat, saying: "Hello, can't you see me here? I'm the Son of God. What are you worried about."

Verse 22

The boat arrived in the region of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark tells us that when it was known that Jesus had arrived, some people brought a blind man to Him and begged that He touch him. The understanding was that this touch

would heal the man of his blindness so he could see again.

Verse 23

The blind man's friends seemed to believe that a simple touch would heal their friend.

This was not the case. Jesus took the man by the hand, but his healing was not instant. Instead, the Lord led him outside the village, where He spit in his eyes. After anointing his eyes with saliva, Jesus asked if the man could see.

Jesus did not have a particular system He used to heal those who came to Him. Each situation was different in how it needed to be addressed.

Verse 24

The blind man responds to Jesus' question in verse 23. He tells Him that

he could see people, but they looked like walking trees. The idea here is that his healing was not complete. His vision had only been partially restored.

It is striking that the healing he experienced to this point was only partial. Jesus had anointed his eyes, but that anointing did not heal completely.

Verse 25

When Jesus heard that the man was only partially healed, He then laid His hands on his eyes a second time. This time, when the blind man opened them, he saw everything clearly. He was completely healed. Mark does not explain why the healing required Jesus to touch the man again. We see, however, that not all healing comes about in the same way. It shows us

that we should not give up seeking God for even greater blessings.

Verse 26

After healing the blind man, Jesus sent him to his home, telling him not to enter the village. Some miracles have as their objective to testify to the masses of the power of Christ and His person. Other miracles are very personal. This healing was personal. It was between Jesus and this man. It was not Jesus' intention that the miracle be broadcast to the village while He was there.

Verse 27

Jesus and His disciples travelled northward of Bethsaida on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus used the opportunity to speak with His

disciples. On this occasion, He asked them, "Who do people say that I am?"

This question was certainly a widely debated one, and there were various points of view. The question Jesus asked here, however, allowed Him to speak with His disciples about who He was and why He had come.

Verse 28

The disciples answer Jesus' question in verse 27 by informing Him of some of the opinions they had heard. They told Him that some claimed He was John the Baptist(see Mark 6:14). Other people saw Him as the Elijah who was to come (see Malachi 4:5-6). Still others felt Jesus was "one of the prophets."

It is interesting to note that the opinions of Jesus through diverse, all

saw Him as a deceased holy man raised from the dead. There was something supernatural about Jesus the people could not explain. They saw him as otherworldly, but none of these opinions revealed who He truly was.

Verse 29

Having heard what other people thought about Him, Jesus then asked His disciples who they believed Him to be. Peter answered this question with the famous words: "You are the Christ."

The word Peter uses here is Χριστός Christós. It comes from the word chrío, meaning to anoint. In the Old Testament, the term was used to describe a priest who was anointed and ordained to the ministry. In the New Testament, however, it came to speak of the prophesied Messiah. In saying that Jesus was the Christ, Peter

declared Him the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets.

Verse 30

Jesus told His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah. We need to understand this command in its context.

The command Jesus brought here was for a very specific time and place. Jesus is not commanding us to keep His identity secret today. As Jesus and His disciples travelled throughout the villages of Caesarea Philippi, it was not His intention to reveal His true identity.

There were various understandings at that time about the Messiah. Many believed Him to be a political leader who would overthrow Rome. This was not the idea Jesus wanted to portray in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Their

preconceived ideas of Jesus may have hindered the proclamation of the gospel. It may have also invited unnecessary controversy. People would have to come to their own opinions on who Jesus was based on what they saw.

Verse 31

Peter had just declared Jesus to be the Christ. The implication of this declaration was not something, however, that even Peter fully grasped at that time. According to Mark, Jesus began now to teach them that as the Son of Man, He must suffer many things.

The designation "Son of Man" comes from the prophecy of Daniel, who wrote:

(13) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven

*there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him. (14)
And to him was given dominion and
glory and a kingdom, that all
peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him; his dominion is
an everlasting dominion, which
shall not pass away, and his
kingdom one that shall not be
destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14 ESV*

The Son of Man, as described by Daniel, was given by the Ancient of Days an everlasting dominion, glory and kingdom. People of every nation and language would serve Him. The Son of Man was Christ, the Messiah. Jesus identified Himself here as this Son of Man, the Christ Peter had declared Him to be.

As the Son of Man, however, Jesus also declared that He “must suffer many things.” This was foretold by the

prophet Isaiah, who, speaking of the Messiah, wrote:

(3) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (4) Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. – Isaiah 53:3-5 ESV

Jesus is very specific here in His instructions to His disciples. He predicted that He would be rejected by the elders and chief priests, who would order His death. Jesus also taught that He would rise from the dead after three

days. It is uncertain how much of what Jesus taught that day made sense to the disciples.

Verse 32

When Peter heard Jesus declare that as the Son of Man, He must suffer and die at the hands of the chief priests and elders, he was upset. Mark tells us that Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him.

We are not told the nature of this rebuke. The fact that he felt he could rebuke Jesus, however, is striking. To rebuke implies bringing a correction. Peter had his idea about Christ and how His ministry would unfold. He demonstrates here that while he believed Jesus to be the Christ, he had not grasped what the Scriptures taught about Him, His suffering and death.

Verse 33

Notice Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke.

First, He turned around. The word used here is ἐπιστρέφω (epistréphō). It comes from the word ἐπί, meaning to, and στρέφω, meaning to turn. The idea is that Jesus turned toward something else. In this case, Jesus turned from Peter to His other disciples. We get the sense that Jesus looked away and turned his back on Peter.

After turning His back on Peter, Jesus then rebuked him. What Peter said was contrary to the prophetic word of Scripture and the purpose of Christ in this world. Jesus declared Peter to be wrong in his thoughts and attitudes here.

We catch a glimpse of the harshness of the rebuke Jesus brought to Peter that day.

"Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Jesus declared Peter's words to be from Satan. The adversary was using the words of Peter to tempt Jesus. Jesus faithfully resists this temptation and the idea that He should not suffer for the sins of humanity. Jesus accuses Peter here of not setting his mind on the things of God. Peter was thinking as a mere human. He did not have the mind of God in this matter and did not grasp the purpose of the Father for Christ.

Jesus tells Satan to get behind Him. This may be why Jesus turned his back on Peter that day. By telling Satan to get behind Him, Jesus is telling him to get out of His way and to stop hindering His commitment to the Father's purpose.

By turning His back on Peter, Jesus takes a stand. He commits Himself to

resist Peter's Satan-inspired rebuke. Instead, He submits to the purpose of the Father to suffer and die for sin.

Verse 34

With the words of Peter still on His mind, Jesus called the crowd to Him and began to teach. Notice what He taught that day.

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." – Mk 8:34

To this point, people came to Jesus to hear Him preach and to be healed of their sickness. What Jesus taught here, however, was something quite radical. He calls for followers who would deny themselves and take up their cross. This was a call to self-sacrifice, suffering and even death. Many came

to Jesus for what they could get from Him. Jesus now asks for followers willing to die for Him and what He taught.

Verse 35

After calling for followers who were willing to lay down their lives for Him, Jesus then tells the crowd that anyone who wanted to save his life would lose it. That is to say, anyone who lived for this world, its pleasures, and privileges would forfeit the blessings of the heavenly kingdom. On the other hand, those who were willing to lay down their life for the kingdom of God would be richly rewarded.

Jesus calls for a decision. He tells us that we can lose our life in the pursuit of the pleasures, reputation and privileges of this life if we can gain true life by laying everything down for the gospel's sake.

There is no room for compromise here. Jesus is seeking followers who have made up their mind. Just as He turned his back to Peter and told Satan to get behind Him, so He is calling for believers who will do the same for Him. He wants those who will turn their back on the world and its influences and make a commitment to Him and His Kingdom.

Verse 36

Jesus reminds the crowd that the soul is of more value than the whole world. You can have everything this world has to offer, but if you don't know the salvation of your soul, then what have you truly gained? Will you enjoy the richness of this world at the cost of eternal separation from God? Will you allow life's fleeting pleasures to keep you from an eternity of blessing in the presence of God?

How easy it is to focus on the here and now. Our great enemy, Satan, wants us to close our eyes to eternity and think about the pleasures of the moment. Jesus calls us to see the bigger picture.

Verse 37

What can a man give in return for his soul? The question is an important one. It is one we have not always thought about. Countless souls in hell, however, have nothing more important to think about. They sacrificed a relationship with God for the riches of this world. They turned their backs on an eternity of delight in His presence for a few years of respect and admiration by other human beings.

Am I right with God? Is the destiny of my soul assured? Where will I spend eternity? These are some of the most

important questions we will ever ask ourselves.

Verse 38

Jesus speaks powerful and direct words to the crowd gathered around Him that day. He tells them that if they were ashamed of Him and His words in these times, He would be ashamed of them in the coming age. The word ashamed used here is ἐπαισχύνομαι (epaischúnomai). It is derived from ἐπί, meaning upon and aischúnō, meaning to be ashamed. The idea is to disgrace someone or something. There are many ways we can disgrace the name of Christ and the gospel He declared. We can do so by rejecting it. We can do so by how we live.

Jesus tells us that the day is coming when we will have to give an account to Him before the Father and the angels of heaven. Will we bring shame

upon ourselves when we stand before
them on that final day, or will our lives
declare His glory and praise?

MARK 9

Verse 1

Jesus has been speaking with His disciples, and a crowd gathered around to hear Him about denying themselves and taking up their cross. In this context, He now makes a puzzling statement.

"Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

Jesus tells the crowd that "some" standing there with Him that day would not die before seeing the

kingdom of God come with power. The assumption is that not everyone would see this evidence of the kingdom of God, but rather a select few.

The fact that these individuals “would not taste death” until they saw this powerful demonstration of the kingdom of God shows us that it was something that would happen in that generation. Admittedly, that powerful evidence might continue into future generations, but something would happen soon after Jesus’ declaration that would expose the kingdom and its power.

Remember the context here. Jesus has been speaking about what would shortly happen to Him:

31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the

scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. – Mk 8:31

Consider also what He has been saying to the crowd who listened to Him that day:

34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. – Mk 8:34

It is in the context of His coming suffering and death that Jesus makes this statement about the power of the kingdom of God. His death would expose that power as it conquered sin and the grave and opened the door for the coming of the Holy Spirit and a whole new manifestation of the power of God's Kingdom.

Verse 2

The phrase, “after six days,” connects the contents of this verse with Jesus’ statement in verse 1 about some people seeing the kingdom come with power. Mark tells us that on that day, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain, and there He was transfigured in their presence.

The word transfigured is μεταμορφῶω (metamorphóō), which means to be changed or transformed. The word is used four times in the New Testament. Two of those uses refer to the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus on the mountain (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2). The other two uses of the word μεταμορφῶω (metamorphóō) are found in Paul’s writing to the Romans and the Corinthians.

In Romans 12:2, the apostle says:

(2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by

testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:2 ESV

The word transformed here is μεταμορφῶω (metamorphóō). Paul challenges the Romans in this verse to allow the Lord God to renew their mind and change them from a worldly people to those who are spiritual, with the mind of Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians Paul writes:

(18) And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. – 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

Notice how Paul tells the Corinthians that they were being transformed into

the image of Jesus Christ from one degree of glory to another. Once again, the word transformed is μεταμορφῶω (metamorphóō), and portrays a change taking place in the individual from a worldly to spiritual.

What is clear is that something happened to the Lord Jesus that changed His appearance from that of an ordinary human being to something more spiritual in nature.

Verse 3

Mark describes a physical transformation that took place to Jesus' clothes. This appears to be what the disciples noticed, particularly that day. They described Jesus' clothes as radiant and intensely white –whiter than anything they had ever seen. What they are seeing here is the glory of God upon the person of Jesus Christ, His Son.

Verse 4

The disciples not only saw the glory of God upon Christ, but they tell us that they also saw Elijah and Moses talking with Him.

The question may be asked how the disciples could identify these men. Understand, however, that God wanted to communicate an important message to the three disciples who witnessed this event. He may have given them the knowledge of who these men were.

Understand also that Moses was the Lawgiver. Elijah was a great prophet of that day.

These men represent both the Law and the Prophets.

Both the Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus Christ. The Law, with all its sacrifices and regulations, communicated our need for the great

Messianic sacrifice that would procure the forgiveness of sin. The Prophets spoke often of His coming reign.

Jesus stands now surrounded by the glory of God in the presence of the lawgiver and prophet. The presence of God is powerful on that mountain, revealing that the Father approved the work of His Son in fulfilling the law and the prophetic words of the Old Testament.

What took place on the mountain that day pointed to what Jesus said would take place. The kingdom of God would come with power. The Messiah would be crucified and die for the sins of the world. He would break that curse of sin and death and reveal the kingdom of God on this earth.

Verse 5

Notice the response of the three disciples who watched what happened that day.

First, Peter declared that it was good for them to be present. Peter knew he was privileged to see what he did. The impact of this event would likely have stayed with these men for life. It was a life-changing event.

Second, Peter determined that it would be good for the disciples to make three tents: one for the Lord, one for Moses and one for Elijah. The word used for tent here is σκηνή (skēnē). It can refer to a booth, hut, tent, shade or even a tabernacle. It is unclear what kind of tent Peter intended. Peter does not specify the reason for building such a tent. It may have been intended either for worship purposes, shelter or for remembering the event.

Verse 6

Mark tells us about the motivation behind Peter's suggestion to build three tents— the disciples were terrified. This brings up another possible reason for Peter's suggestion of three tents. Could it be that the glory the disciples saw that day was so overwhelming that they needed a way to cover it up, so it did not terrify them so much?

Consider what happened to Moses when he was in the presence of the Lord:

29 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. 30 Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. – Exodus 34:29-30

The glory of the Lord is not something to be taken lightly. The people of Israel were afraid to approach Moses when the glory of God shone on his face.

Notice how Moses addressed this fear among the people.

34 Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, 35 the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again until he went in to speak with him. – Exodus 34:34-35

Moses wore a veil to cover the glory of God that brought fear to the hearts of his people. It may be that the three disciples were, like the people of

Moses' day, so overwhelmed by what they say that they felt the need to build tents to cover the glory that caused them such terror.

Verse 7

Mark describes not only what the disciples saw and their reaction to what they saw but also what they heard on that mountain. He prefaces what the disciples heard with the statement that a cloud overshadowed them.

We should not see this as a passing cloud in the sky but as evidence of the presence of the Lord. Consider Exodus 16:10:

(10) And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold,

the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. – Exodus 16:10 ESV

Exodus 16:10 describes the glory of God appearing in a cloud. We are seeing this here with the disciples on the mountain with Jesus.

Out of the glorious cloud, the disciples heard the voice of the Father in heaven declaring:

"This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

The words are words of endorsement and approval. God the Father declared His Son to be the fulfilment of the Law and Prophecy. He commands the disciples present that day to listen to Him. He spoke in the name of the Father, and what He said had His approval.

Verse 8

It seems that when the Father spoke, Moses and Elijah disappeared. This should not go unnoticed. The words of the Father declare Jesus to be His beloved Son. Behind this statement, however, is a very powerful reminder that everything Moses ordained in the law would be fulfilled in Him. He would bring an end to the Law. Everything Elijah and the prophets spoke would also come to fruition in the person of the beloved Son. There was nothing more they could add to what He would say and accomplish through His life and death. The Law and the prophets now step aside, having achieved their purpose. All eyes are now on Jesus to fulfil and accomplish everything they predicted.

Verse 9

As they descended the mountain, Jesus told them to keep what they had seen a secret until he had risen from the dead.

Not everything is intended to be shared. Sometimes, God wants to speak to us alone. We need wisdom to know not only what God wants us to share but also when and to whom He wants us to share these things. In this case, the experience Peter, James and John had on the mountain was for them alone until Jesus had risen from the dead and was returned to the Father. As the writer of the proverb said:

*23 To make an apt answer is a joy
to a man and a word in season,
how good it is! – Pr. 15:23*

Notice the phrase, “A word in season, how good it is!” There is a time to speak and a time to remain silent. We

need the wisdom of the Lord to know the right season to declare what He has given.

Verse 10

While the words of Jesus about not sharing what they had seen on the mountain were clear, the disciples struggled to understand what He meant by rising from the dead. What do you do when you don't fully understand the command of Jesus? You do what is clear and live with the confusion.

The disciples did not understand that Jesus needed to die. They could not know what He meant by being raised from the dead. These truths perplexed them. They did understand that Jesus told them not to share what they saw on the mountain. They obeyed what they understood even though they

didn't understand what He told them about His death.

The principle here is vital in our Christian Walk. We will never understand all that the Lord is calling us to do. There are passages of Scripture that will not make perfect sense to us. What is important, however, is that we obey what is clear. I have seen too many believers refuse to walk in the truth that is clear because they have gotten caught up in trying to understand the mysterious.

Verse 11

Note that while the disciples did not want to speak to Jesus about His statement about dying and rising from the dead, they did ask Him a question that needed clarification in their minds. It may be that the question came from seeing Elijah on the mountain with Jesus.

The prophet Malachi spoke these prophetic words:

(5) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

(6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." – Malachi 4:5-6 *ESV*

The prophet Malachi predicted that Elijah would come before the day of the Lord appeared. This was the teaching of the scribes of that day. The disciples wondered why, if Jesus was the Messiah, they had not seen the fulfilment of this prophetic word of Malachi.

Verse 12

In answering their question, Jesus assured the disciples that Elijah had indeed come to make things right. Matthew tells us that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come:

(13) For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, (14) and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. – Matthew 11:13-14 ESV

Moving from this brief statement about Elijah, Jesus turned His attention to what He knew was the real source of confusion for the disciples: why He would suffer and die. He reminds them of the prophecies of a suffering Messiah.

The focus of prophecy was not on Elijah, who would come, but on the Messiah, who would suffer and die as a sacrificial lamb for the forgiveness of sin.

Verse 13

Jesus tells the disciples that the prophet Elijah, prophesied by Malachi, had come in the person of John the Baptist. The people's response to John, as the one prophesied to announce the Messiah, was to do to him "whatever they pleased." We know from the story of John the Baptist that Herod would kill him and give his head as a gift to his wife (see Mark 6:14ff). The Messiah and the prophet announcing His arrival did not look like the people of the day felt they should. How easy it is to miss what God is doing because of our perception of how things should be and what they should look like.

Verse 14

Jesus and His three disciples, Peter, James and John, had been on the mountain where Jesus was

transfigured. While they were away, a great crowd gathered around the other nine disciples. Among them was a group of scribes. Mark tells us that when Jesus, Peter, James and John rejoined their brothers, they found the scribes arguing with them. We can only imagine how relieved these nine disciples may have been to see reinforcements arrive.

Verse 15

As the argument between the scribes and the disciples was unfolding, the crowd saw Jesus, Peter, James and John approach. Mark tells us that upon seeing Jesus, the people were “greatly amazed” and ran to greet Him.

Mark’s use of the phrase “greatly amazed” is perplexing and leaves us to wonder why the crowd had this response. This may be because they

were unsure of where Jesus was at the time and were very happy to see Him arrive. Other commentators feel that the glory of God, which had fallen on Jesus on the mountaintop, was still present upon Him and stirred up this amazement. The problem with this interpretation, is found in the fact that the crowd ran to greet Him rather than standing back in fear as would normally have been the response to great glory.

What is clear is that the argument between the disciples and the scribes was not what the crowd was looking for. When they saw Jesus, they ran to Him in amazement.

As important as our doctrines and debates may be, the answer is only found in the person of Jesus Christ. It is by knowing Him alone that we can understand truth.

Verse 16

As Jesus approached, He was aware of the argument that was taking place between the scribes and the disciples. He also knew that it was a debate that needed resolution for the sake of the crowd. He enters this debate by asking what the argument is about.

Verse 17

When Jesus asked about the subject of the argument between the disciples and the scribes, someone in the crowd volunteered to answer. This individual told Jesus he had brought his mute son to the disciples for healing. He told Jesus that an evil spirit had caused this muteness. The next verse tells us how this individual had discerned that the source of his son's problem was an evil spirit.

Verse 18

The individual who had brought his son to Jesus discerned that it was an evil spirit that caused his son's muteness by his son's actions. This evil spirit would seize his son and throw him to the ground. His son would foam at the mouth, grind his teeth and become rigid.

In our day, we would interpret what was going on with this boy to be some form of epileptic seizure. Understand, however, that the context of the verse makes it quite clear that behind this seizure was an evil spirit.

Note that the disciples could not cast this evil spirit out of the young man.

Verse 19

Jesus responds to the disciples' inability to cast out the evil spirit by calling them a "faithless generation." In saying this, Jesus is angered by the unbelief of

those present. He sees here a demonstration of the powerlessness of the human race to address their spiritual problems. I cannot help but think that those words are addressed to me personally. How little I know of the power available to me through the Spirit of Christ. How little I believe what He can and will do. How my weakness and unbelief must vex my Saviour.

Notice here that despite His disappointment with the people of that generation, Jesus calls for the boy to be brought to Him. His patience with us is immense. He stands with us when we do not have faith to stand in His strength.

Verse 20

Note what happened when the boy was brought to Jesus. Mark tells us that when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it

immediately convulsed the boy. This fact alone shows us that while the boy may have suffered from an epileptic condition of some sort, an evil spirit was somehow connected with this affliction.

When the boy was presented to Jesus, this evil spirit threw him to the ground, convulsing and foaming at the mouth.

Understand from this verse two important details. First, we must not be quick to assume that all epileptic seizures are the result of an evil spirit. Second, we must be aware that evil spirits can be involved with this medical condition and in certain cases, there is a spiritual component to this affliction that may need to be addressed.

One of the great problems we face in our day is that we either make everything a medical problem or a spiritual one. The fact of the matter is that we are both physical and spiritual

and need to approach each issue from both perspectives.

Verse 21

Jesus asked the father how long this condition had afflicted this young boy. The father told Him that it was from his childhood. This statement is important for what it tells us about evil spirits.

We often attribute oppression by evil spirits to something an individual does. Maybe they have been involved in occultic behaviour and provided an opening for an evil spirit. In this case, we have a young child who likely had no time in life to get involved in some form of demonic activity, yet a demon still oppressed him. Evil spirits will take every opportunity to oppress. We are not told how this evil spirit came to be in the boy. How it happened was not the issue. Dealing with it was.

Verse 22

The father of the young boy told Jesus that he was aware of this evil spirit in the boy from his childhood. He goes on to explain that this spirit would cast the lad into fire or water in an attempt to destroy him. We can only imagine how difficult this would have been for the young boy's parents as they sought to bring him up.

Note how the father, speaking to Jesus, says, "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." The father comes to Jesus seeking compassion. Notice the word "us" here. The compassion this father asks for is not just for his son but for the parents as well. As caregivers, they were also suffering due to this evil spirit and what it was doing to the boy.

Notice also the words, "If you can do anything." There is an element of doubt here. He wasn't sure what Jesus could do. He had watched the disciples trying to cast out the demon unsuccessfully and began to wonder if it was even possible now. Could it be that he was giving up hope?

Verse 23

Jesus picks up on the words, "If you can," spoken by the father. He understood this father's faith may not have been where it should have been. Jesus tells the man, however, that all things are possible for one who believes.

This phrase has led many to conclude that faith is the power to accomplish anything we want in life. Understand, however, that faith, if it does not have an object in which to place itself, is of no value whatsoever. The faith Jesus

speaks about here is in Him. The power to do all things is not found in faith but in Christ. It would not be faith that healed the young lad that day but Christ. When we trust faith, we pat ourselves on the back and credit ourselves for the great work we did because of our faith. When we trust Christ by faith, He alone receives the glory for what is accomplished. The challenge for us here is to trust Jesus by faith to do the impossible.

Verse 24

The father understands his lack of faith here. His faith was insufficient to heal His son. If the boy were healed, it would not be because he had great faith but because He trusted the Lord to do what he could not do himself. Notice how he pleads with the Lord to help his unbelief.

The miracle that took place that day was not dependent on the father's great faith, for he declared he struggled with unbelief. His words, "I believe, help my unbelief," show us that while he struggled to believe, he was willing to commit his son's future to the Lord

Jesus. Sometimes, we can only find enough faith to surrender the matter to the Lord.

Verse 25

Notice how the crowd came running to see what Jesus would do about the boy. Note the words of Jesus as He addressed this unclean spirit in the boy.

First, Jesus addresses the spirit as a mute and deaf spirit. It seems best to understand this phrase to mean that this spirit had been tasked with making the boy mute and deaf rather than the spirit itself being deaf and mute.

Second, Jesus commanded the spirit to “come out of him.” This shows us that the unclean spirit was living in the boy and was the obstacle to his speaking and hearing.

Finally, Jesus tells the evil spirit that it is never to enter this boy again. An evil spirit can be cast out but return to the same person again. Jesus tells a parable in Luke 11 about an evil spirit being cast out but returning with seven more to the same person.

24 "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. 26 Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there.

And the last state of that person is worse than the first.” – Lk 11:24-26

By commanding the evil spirit never to enter the boy again, Jesus is closing the door forever against any further oppression by this spirit in his life.

Verse 26

The evil spirit responded to the voice of Jesus and His command by “convulsing him terribly.” There is a struggle on the part of the evil spirit here, but it was forced to obey the command of Jesus and came out of the boy.

Notice that when the evil spirit finally left, the boy was “like a corpse.” The phrase likely refers to the fact that there was no movement or indication of life in him. According to Mark, people thought that the evil spirit had killed him.

Verse 27

While the sight of the motionless boy caused some to believe that he was dead, Jesus took the boy's hand, and he arose. Remember that the evil spirit had convulsed him terribly, and there would have been no more strength in this young boy. By touching him, Jesus gave him strength to stand on his feet.

Verse 28

After the healing of the young boy, Jesus and His disciples returned to the home where they were staying. What took place that day was very much on the disciple's minds. They had tried to cast out this evil spirit but had been unsuccessful. They ask Jesus to explain why they could not cast it out. This shows us that the disciples wanted to

learn how to walk and minister as the Lord.

Verse 29

In response to the disciple's question about why they could not cast out the evil spirit from the young boy, Jesus told them:

"This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

Notice two details here.

First, observe the words "this kind." Jesus uses these words to describe the evil spirit that he had cast out of the boy. He seems to be telling His disciples here that not all evil spirits are the same. This may have to do with their degree of connection to the individual or organizations they are oppressing or possibly even their roles.

Second, Jesus tells the disciples that this particular spirit could only be driven out by prayer. The idea seems to be that they could not just walk up to a spirit that had been so deeply connected to this young boy and demand it leave. It would not listen to them. Instead, they needed to cry out to God for this kind of exorcism.

Some roots go so deep that the average person, no matter how hard they try, cannot pull them up. When this happens, they need to call for reinforcements. There are demonic forces so deeply rooted in our culture, politics, and entertainment industries that no one person can walk up to them and remove their influence. This requires a movement of prayer, crying out to the Father in heaven for the breaking down of demonic strongholds.

Verse 30

There were times in Jesus' life when He treasured solitude. Mark tells us that from this incident with the young boy, Jesus went through Galilee but did not want the crowd to know where He was.

Anyone serious about the ministry to which they have been called will find this verse challenging. All around Jesus in Galilee were needy, and sick people, oppressed by demons and spiritually lost. How do you walk away from them and their pain? How can you not use every second of your life to share with them and minister to those pains? The idea that Jesus did not want those suffering and lost to know He was in their midst is a challenge to those who want every moment of their lives to count. Jesus did walk away from the crowd. He did take time away from the constant demand.

Verse 31

Notice why Jesus did not want people to know He was in their midst. At this point in His ministry, He had another priority. He wanted time to be with His disciples to prepare them for what was ahead.

It was at this time that Jesus began to emphasize to the disciples that He was going to be delivered into the hands of His enemies. He tells the disciples that these enemies would kill Him, but they were not to despair because He would rise from death after three days.

Verse 32

While Jesus taught about His death and resurrection, this teaching seemed to go over the disciples' heads. They did not take it in or even understand what He told them. They had their ideas about the Messiah and what He would do. They could not imagine that He would die. They had no concept of

what He was saying when He told them that He would rise on the third day. Nor do we have a record of the disciples asking for further clarification about this talk of death.

Verse 33

As Jesus and His disciples travelled in the region of Galilee, they came to the town of Capernaum on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. After settling into the home where they were staying, Jesus asked His disciples a personal question: "What were you discussing on the way?"

Before moving on to discuss this, consider this question for a moment. If Jesus asked them what they were discussing along the way, it is quite likely that He was not present with them when they were having this discussion. They did not likely always walk side by side on these journeys.

Jesus may have had time alone as He was walking. It may be that these journeys provided the disciples with both alone time or times of debate and discussion, as indicated here by Jesus' question.

Verse 34

When Jesus asked the disciples what they had been discussing on their journey to Capernaum, they responded with silence. Mark tells us that the reason for this silence had to do with the fact that they had been speaking about who was the greatest among them.

It is hard to say what initiated this debate. Remember, however, that Peter, James and John had just been on the mountaintop with Jesus and had seen Him being transfigured. While we have no evidence that they shared what they saw on the

mountaintop, their selection by Jesus may have been part of the debate.

The silence of the disciples shows us that there were things they did and discussed that they did not want the Lord Jesus to know about. I suppose we can all identify with this to some extent.

Verse 35

After learning what the disciples had been discussing along the way, Jesus sat them down and instructed them on the matter of greatness in the kingdom of God.

The priorities of God's kingdom are not those of the world. In this world, the greatest people have servants to cater to their needs. In the kingdom of God, however, the servant is the greatest. Position is important in this world, but

service is of greater importance in the kingdom of God.

Verse 36

To illustrate what He was teaching the disciples, Jesus brought a child into their midst.

The word used for a child here is παιδίον (paidíon), which refers to a little child or infant. Such a child was helpless and in need of constant care. Jesus takes this small child into His arms to illustrate what it means to be great in the kingdom of God.

Verse 37

With the little child in His arms, Jesus made two important statements.

First, Jesus told the disciples that whoever received such a child in his name received Him. The child Jesus held in His arms exemplifies the type of

person He sought. This child was helpless, meek and dependent on Him. In the eyes of the world, little children are often ignored or bypassed. Jesus is not, however, looking for proud leaders who are ready to take on the world in their strength. He is looking for those who, like this little child, recognize their need and trust in Him.

Jesus calls us to receive those who are humble and dependant on Him. They may not be confident in their ability and strength, but they trust Him. They may not be powerful, but God's Spirit empowers them. They may not be great orators, but they are God's mouthpiece. Don't be deceived by worldly qualifications and qualities. Seek those who are humble servants rather than bold and powerful worldly leaders.

Second, Jesus told the disciples that whoever received Him received the one who sent Him. He illustrates what He

has just said in His first point here. Jesus came as a small child to this earth. He lived a humble life. He did not demand the best this world had to offer. He was often overlooked. Yet, he was dependent on the Father in all things. To receive Him and the word he spoke was to receive the one who sent Him, for He acted on behalf of the Father.

Verse 38

As the disciples were together with Jesus, John informed him that he had seen someone casting out demons in His name. He told Jesus they had tried to stop this individual from doing so because he was not following them.

John believed that this matter of ministry had to be tightly controlled. Only those who were part of Jesus' disciples, regularly sitting at His feet,

and commissioned by Him were to be involved in any ministry in His name.

Notice, however, that the individual concerned was actually “casting out demons in Jesus’ name.” The implication was that this person had a measure of success in this ministry. John, however, found it hard to understand how anyone outside his group who didn’t do things as they did could have any ministry success. They were Jesus’ disciples, and that had to count for something. How could someone not trained and chosen by Christ as they were minister in His name?

Verse 39

Notice the response of Jesus to John’s comments in verse 38. He told John not to stop such people, reminding him that a person who saw Jesus do a

mighty work through them would not easily speak evil of Him.

Note two details here. First, Jesus declares the work of this man who was not part of their group to be a “mighty work.” That is to say, a work that was done in the power of God. Jesus is informing John, who was involved in the discussion about who was the greatest in the kingdom of God, that even those outside this elite group of disciples could perform miracles in His name. This would have been a very humbling thought.

Second, Jesus tells John that the one God uses to do a mighty work will not quickly speak evil of Him. In other words, when God revealed His power to this individual, that person would have no choice but to recognize Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Jesus did not want His disciples to forbid what the Father was doing. God was revealing the power of His Son to this individual

outside of their group. He was not bound to reveal Himself only to his formally selected disciples with whom He communed regularly. God could also speak and minister through people outside of their group. John was not to stop what God was doing, even though it did not look like something he was accustomed to.

The work of God's kingdom is not always ordered and neat. Sometimes, God works in ways we can't understand. We need to be careful not to stand in God's way.

Verse 40

Jesus reminds John that those who were not against them were for them. God is not bound to work in a way we understand and approve. When Jesus performed miracles in His day, He did not follow any particular rule. Sometimes, He touched the person He

healed, and other times He did not. Sometimes, He anointed them, but then there were occasions when He healed them at a distance without even seeing them. God is not bound to work in a certain way.

We see this in how God works through different denominations in our day. Not all churches are the same. Not every ministry functions in the same way. Sometimes, we do not agree with how another church is doing something, yet we see people coming to faith in Christ through their efforts.

What does it mean for someone to be against us? This is not always easy to define. They may not believe the same doctrine as us, but they still preach Christ crucified. They may not worship as we do, but they still lift the name of Jesus. Jesus challenges John's idea that only the immediate disciples of Jesus could minister in His name. He calls

him to be more open to the greater work God is doing outside of His circle.

Verse 41

The context of this verse is John's comment about trying to stop an individual who did not belong to their group from casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus told him not to do this because whoever was not against them was for them.

Note how Jesus adds yet another dimension to His statement here. He tells John that whoever gave a cup of water to someone who belonged to Christ would not lose his reward. Jesus is telling John that not only are we to tolerate those outside our group who advance the purpose of God, but we are also to stand with them.

Giving a cup of water to a brother or sister outside our group shows us that

we need to support each other in the body of Christ. All too often, we focus exclusively on our group. When we stand with those who serve the kingdom, even if they are different from us, we advance the cause of Christ. Jesus challenges John here to open His eyes to the fact that they were not the only ones to legitimately advance Christ's kingdom on this earth.

Verse 42

It may be best to see this verse in the context of verses 36 and 37:

(36) And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, (37) "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." – Mark 9:36-37 ESV

In this context, Jesus has been challenging the disciples who had been discussing who was the greatest among them. Jesus told them that the greatest among them would be a servant and have the attitude and faith of a little child.

This conversation was interrupted by John, who told Jesus about a man casting out demons even though he was not part of their group. John may have seen himself as privileged because of being with Jesus. The individual casting out demons without training was somewhat despised in John's mind because Jesus had not chosen him as one of His twelve disciples.

Jesus challenges the attitude of the disciples here, however. He tells them that if they caused one of these "little ones" to sin, it would be better for them that a millstone be hung around

their neck and that they be thrown into the sea.

Consider this for a moment. How easy it is for us to criticize those who are not part of our theological persuasion. We can easily condemn those who do not worship the same way we do. We lift ourselves above them as we mature in our doctrine and practice. The Lord reminds His disciples that this attitude could cause great hardship for those who are not as "mature" as they were. Their criticism and actions against these "little children" could cause them to become discouraged and fall into sin. Instead, they were to offer a cup of water to encourage and spur them on to greater growth and maturity. How much damage is caused to the cause of Jesus' kingdom because of the pride of one group over another, their refusal to accept each other and their unwillingness to support and grow together?

Verse 43

We need to take our spiritual walk seriously. Jesus tells His disciples here that if their hand caused them to sin, they were to cut it off. He reminded them that it was better to go to heaven crippled than to have two hands but go to hell.

The intention of Jesus here is not to encourage self-mutilation but to demonstrate the importance of taking sin seriously. Understand that cutting off the hand does not remove sin in our lives. You can cut off your right hand only to transfer the sin to your left. You can cut off every body part and still sin in your mind.

What Jesus is telling His disciples here is that they need to be serious about sin. There are things we need to remove from our lives because they are a source of great temptation. This may mean turning off the television rather

than feeding our sinful lusts with images that will only cause us to fall. It may mean distancing ourselves from the people at the coffee shop engaged in ungodly conversation and damaging our spiritual testimony. What Jesus is telling the disciples is that when they saw that their actions were leading them to sin, they were to cut off those actions rather than allow themselves to be buried more deeply in ungodly thoughts, actions or attitudes.

Verse 44

Not all Bible versions include this verse as it is not found in a number of ancient manuscripts. The words are clearly the words of Jesus, however, and are repeated word for word in verse 48. For comments on this verse see verse 48.

Verse 45

Jesus repeats the idea here that we need to cut off from our lives those things that would keep us from being everything He wants us to be. Understand that living for Jesus will require discipline. I have met believers who said: "If God wanted me to stop this sin, He would take the desire from me." These same believers are unwilling to cut off what offends the Lord.

If you want to live a godly life, it will require discipline and a conscious effort. The Spirit of God will work in your life and convict you of sin. Be aware, however, that He will sometimes put His finger on things you don't want to get rid of in your life. There have been times when I have fought hard against the conviction of the Spirit. If you want to live for Christ, there will be some hard sacrifices to make.

Verse 46

Not all Bible versions include this verse as it is not found in a number of ancient manuscripts. The words are clearly the words of Jesus, however, and are repeated word for word in verse 48. For comments on this verse see verse 48.

Verse 47

There are many ways sin can enter our lives. Jesus speaks here about our hands doing things contrary to the purpose of God. In the last verse, He reminded His disciples that our feet can take us to places that will only damage our testimony and lead us into a path of sin. Here, He speaks about what the eye sees. There are times when we need to turn off the screen. Sometimes, we need to turn our heads and look the other way. We can allow

our eyes to linger longer than they should, leading us into a world of sinful thoughts. Believers need to guard their eyes so that they are not feeding the sinful lusts of the flesh.

Verse 48

Jesus reminds us that hell is a very real place of suffering and pain. He speaks of hell by using the illustrations of worms and fire.

Notice first that the worms of hell do not die. Worms feast on decaying flesh. There is an eternal supply for these worms to feast on in hell. The picture here is ever-decaying but undying flesh. Hell is a place of endless decay.

Second, the fire of hell is not quenched. Once again, Jesus paints a picture of a fire with an endless supply of fuel to burn. That supply is

constantly being burned but never being consumed. This, of course, is a picture of eternal suffering.

The Lord paints a very gloomy picture of hell as a place of endless decay and suffering. Understanding the nature of hell should give us the motivation to cut off anything from our lives that would seal our destiny.

Verse 49

Jesus has just reminded the disciples that there will be sacrifices to be made in the Christian life. He goes on to tell them that everyone will be salted with fire.

Our Lord speaks about two objects here. First, he speaks about being salted. Salt has a purifying and preserving effect on objects. Second, fire consumes impurities. If you want to live for the Lord, you will be salted

with fire. When you come to the Lord, you come as you are. Understand, however, that He does not intend to leave you that way. He will do a work in you. He burns away the chaff in your life. He will consume the impurities that you bring with you into your relationship with Him. He will then salt those wounds to purify them and bring healing. This salt may sting but it is for our good.

Verse 50

Jesus reminds us that salt is good. It purifies, heals and preserves. It brings out the best flavours in food. This is what God wants to do with the salt He pours into us. That salting may occur through the struggles we encounter in life. It may be seen in how the Spirit of God is transforming our character and attitudes. The salt of God's sanctifying

and healing work is a good thing, even though it may not always be easy.

Notice how Jesus tells His disciples that if salt loses its saltiness, it cannot become salty again. What happens when we resist the salt of God's sanctifying work? What happens when we turn from Him and what He wants to do in us?

The salt of God's sanctifying work stings. Sometimes, it will place us in sick beds and hospitals. Sometimes, fiery trials may be sent our way to refine and purify the ungodliness in our lives. I remember going through such a trial in my life at one time. Walking to a coffee shop to do some writing one morning, I remember praying, "Father, I am willing to face these trials, but I ask that I would not be the same on the other end." My heart was to be changed by what God was doing. I have often told people that there is one thing worse than going through a fiery

trial, and that is coming out the other end the same.

What happens when we resist the sanctifying work of God? What else will change us if we resist the work of His Spirit? If the salt of God does not have its effect, what impact will our lives have in this world?

Jesus ends with two challenges. First, He challenges us to receive this salting by fire and allow it to change us. "Have salt in yourselves," He tells the disciples. Allow the salt of God to have its effect on your life. Surrender to its purifying work. Allow the circumstances God brings your way to transform your character into His image.

The second challenge of Jesus here is for us to "be at peace with one another." The context of this final challenge is the disciple's argument about who was the greatest and John's attempt to stop an individual not in his

group from casting out demons. Jesus calls for greater humility and support for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Only then can the salt of our testimony and walk with God have its true impact. We cannot be salt in the world if we are divided as brothers and sisters in Christ.

MARK 10

Verse 1

Mark tells us that Jesus left the region of Capernaum (Mark 9:33) and went into the area of Judea. Galilee, where Jesus and His disciples were located, was north by the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was on the northern shore of the sea. Jesus and His disciples travel south past the region of Samaria toward Jerusalem into the area of Judea.

Mark tells us that crowds of people came to Jesus when He arrived in Judea. According to Mark, it was the custom of Jesus, when the crowds

gathered around Him, to use the opportunity to teach them.

By moving into the region of Judea, the Lord Jesus has come to the place where He will ultimately be betrayed and crucified.

Verse 2

Among those present in the crowd that day were the Pharisees. Mark tells us that they came to test Jesus. The idea here was to get Him to say something that they could use against Him. On this occasion, the Pharisees brought up the question of whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. The issue was a contentious one in the day, with religious leaders taking various positions on the matter.

Verse 3

Notice the response of Jesus to the question about divorce. He asked the Pharisees to tell Him what Moses commanded in the law. Jesus pointed them to the written Word as the guide to God's purpose.

We often fall into sin because we do not make this our priority. I have seen many people turn first to their reasoning and not to God's Word. We often do what is right in our own eyes rather than seek the counsel of God as found in His Word. The first response of Jesus here is to turn to the Scriptures. They were His authority in life and practice.

Verse 4

The Pharisees were not ignorant about what Moses taught. They told Jesus that Moses allowed a man to write a divorce certificate and send his wife

away. The Pharisees are likely referring to Deuteronomy 24:1 here, which says:

(1) "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house – Deuteronomy 24:1, ESV

Deuteronomy 24:1 is written in the context of a woman leaving her first husband, marrying a second and returning to her first husband when things didn't work out. The law quoted here forbade the woman to remarry her first husband. Divorce was not to be taken lightly, according to this law. God required that vows be taken seriously. He also required that the breaking of a vow be respected. If a man or woman could come and go as

they pleased, it made a mockery of the vows they made to each other.

The law's intention in Deuteronomy 24:1 was not to give guidelines on divorcing one's partner. It was to show the seriousness of the breaking of a vow. While all vows were to be respected, Moses did recognize that those vows would be broken. In this case, He required documentation to be drawn up to finalize the divorce. He also required that when those papers were drawn up and agreed upon, these partners would not live again as marriage partners. There was to be a finality in this matter.

The Pharisees focus here on the fact that Moses allowed for a certificate of divorce to be drawn up, thus permitting divorce.

Verse 5

Notice the response of Jesus to the Pharisees' statement about a divorce certificate. He told them that it was because of the hardness of the human heart that Moses made this provision for divorce.

Sometimes, the legalistic application of the law causes more harm than breaking the law. Some marriages are toxic, and living in these conditions is very detrimental to the mental and physical health of one or both partners. Moses understood that there was no peace in such relationships and believed that it was better to allow a separation. Behind this toxicity is the hardness and sinfulness of the heart, unwilling to change.

This hardness of heart comes in the form of pride and unwillingness to submit or confess shortcomings. It may also be in the refusal to forgive. It may demonstrate itself in a selfish and

self-centred attitude that refuses to consider the other partner.

Moses understood that the law was intended to help God's people walk in the purpose of their Creator. It was designed for their good, and its ultimate objective was advancing the kingdom and intimacy between the Lord and His people. When the law no longer accomplishes that objective, we are left with a decision. What is more important, the law or the objective? Moses determined that the objective was more important than the law. He allowed for the breaking of the law to accomplish the greater aim of God and the advancement of His kingdom.

Verse 6

While Moses was forced to make a provision for the breaking of the law because of the sinful human heart, Jesus reminded the Pharisees that

God's intention was very different. Jesus takes the Pharisees back to the book of Genesis, where God created both male and female. Why did God make two sexes? The intention was that they should complete each other. Marriage was not a human invention. Its beginnings are found in creation and how God created both men and women for each other.

Verse 7

Having stated that God created marriage, Jesus then quotes Genesis 2:24, where Moses made God's intention quite clear:

(24) Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. – Genesis 2:24 ESV

Moses tells us here that it was the purpose of God for a man to leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. Moses taught three principles here.

First, a man (or a woman) was to leave their father and mother. There was to be a separation from other relationships. They were not to allow anything to come between them.

Second, this couple was then to hold fast to each other. There was to be a lifelong committed relationship that nothing should separate.

Finally, they were to be one flesh. The idea is that they were not to be on two separate tracks in life. They were to stand with each other, support each other and commit themselves to each other's well-being for life.

According to Jesus, this was God's intention for marriage.

Verse 8

Continuing His exposition of Genesis 2:24, Jesus tells the Pharisees that God intended that a husband and wife become one flesh. He defines this as no longer being two but one flesh.

Probably the best way to understand what Jesus means by one flesh is to see it in the context of our relationship with Him. Paul tells the Corinthians that the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him:

(17) But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. – 1 Corinthians 6:17 ESV

When I am one with the Lord, He becomes part of everything I do. I do not live for myself but for Him. My ambitions and desires are one with His for me. God's intention for marriage is

that the couple become one with each other. That is to say, they do not live for themselves but for each other. They join their purposes in life and stand with each other's needs and ambitions. This oneness is such that it is almost impossible to see one without the other. Imagine trying to separate myself from my relationship with Christ.

Verse 9

While Moses permitted writing a certificate of divorce because of the hardness of the human heart, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that God joined together the couple who entered a marriage agreement. That is to say, they entered an agreement before God to be faithful to each other for life. God witnessed that agreement and legitimized their union. Any agreement made before God was to

be taken seriously and should not be broken.

In saying this, Jesus is telling the Pharisees that while Moses permitted divorce, it was not God's intention neither in Moses' day nor in ours.

Verse 10

Jesus does not challenge the law of Moses about divorce. However, He reminds the Pharisees of God's original purpose for marriage. This is what they were to be focusing on rather than whether it was permitted to divorce. In essence, Jesus was telling the Pharisees that while there were some exceptions to the rule because of the hardness of the human heart, God intended that a marriage be a commitment for life.

Later, when the disciples were alone with Christ in the home where they

were staying, they asked Him to explain His words to the Pharisees more fully. Mark does not tell us here what it was that they needed explained.

Verse 11

Jesus speaks very plainly here. If a man divorced his wife and married another, he was guilty of adultery against her. His marriage commitment was considered binding for life. Divorce did not necessarily remove a man's obligation to be faithful to His wife. By having a sexual relationship with another women, he was breaking His vow to be faithful to her alone. This was true, even after He divorced his wife.

Verse 12

What was true of the husband divorcing his wife was true for the wife who left her husband as well. If she divorced her husband and married another, she was guilty of breaking her vow of faithfulness to her husband by engaging in a sexual relationship with the other man she married.

Jesus speaks here about the nature of a marriage vow. It is considered by God to be a vow for life that nothing should break. While divorce separated the couple and released them from certain obligations, Jesus seems to be implying that their vow of faithfulness to each other was still in play and needed to be respected.

Verse 13

The crowds continued to flock to Jesus in Judea. Among them were the Pharisees who were trying to test Him. Mark speaks here about another group

that was coming to Jesus that day. This group included those who brought children. Note the intention of those who brought these children. They wanted Jesus to touch them. In Matthew's account, he tells us that it was the intention of those who brought these children to Jesus to have Him lay hands on them and pray for them:

(13) Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, – Matthew 19:13 ESV

Those bringing the children to Jesus wanted His blessing on them.

Note the response of the disciples to those bringing these children — “the disciples rebuked them.” There were many people with real physical and spiritual needs coming to Jesus. The disciples seem to be filtering those who

approached the Lord that day. They did not see these children as being needy. They compared these healthy children to the sick and infirm who were also coming and felt that they did not need the Lord's attention. They seem to rebuke those who brought the children for taking the Lord's time that could have been used for healing those who were sick and in need.

Verse 14

Jesus expressed indignance toward His disciples when they rebuked those who brought children to Him. The word used here is ἀγανακτέω (aganaktéō). It is derived from ágan, meaning very much, and áchthos, meaning grief or pain. Jesus felt deep grief over what His disciples had done that day.

Jesus told the disciples to let these little children come to Him. The word used for "little children" here is παιδίων

(paidíon) and refers to a small child or infant. Many of these “little children” may have been carried to Jesus as they could not yet walk.

Jesus told the disciples that the reason they were to allow little children to come to Him was that the kingdom of heaven belonged to ones like them.

It is important to note what Jesus is saying here. That day, the crowd was filled with people of all kinds. We have already seen how the Pharisees had come to test Jesus with questions about divorce. Others with physical illness came seeking healing. Many religious leaders present that day had their minds made up about Jesus. They just wanted to kill Him. Others wanted to take advantage of His healing power. These little children were refreshing to Jesus. They did not come seeking anything for themselves. They did not have their minds made up about Him. They did not approach with any sense

of worthiness demanding a sign from Him. They willingly surrendered to His arms as he reached out to them.

Jesus is not saying that all of these children belonged to the kingdom of God. He is saying, however, that the kingdom of heaven belonged to people who had the attitude of a young infant –dependant, humble, and open to Him and His purpose.

Verse 15

Jesus told the disciples that no one could enter the kingdom of God unless they received it like a little child. These little children were humble and dependent. They did not come with any sense of their worthiness but opened their arms trustingly to receive what Jesus wanted to give.

Verse 16

Jesus took these little children in His arms. This shows us how small they were. He laid his hands on them and blessed them. This act of blessing was not dependent on the family the child came from. These little children did not understand who Jesus was or why He had come. Some may have grown up to serve Jesus, while others may have chosen a very different lifestyle. This was not considered when Jesus prayed for and blessed these little ones.

Verse 17

From their house in Judea, Jesus and His disciples set out for another journey. Mark 10:32 tells us that they were heading toward the city of Jerusalem.

As they set out, a man came running up to them and kneeling before Jesus asked Him the question:

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

The man recognized Jesus as a "good teacher." He seemed troubled in his soul about this matter of eternal life. He understood that not everyone would have eternal life but was unsure how he could obtain this privilege.

The man's use of the word inherit shows us that he knew eternal life belonged to the Father and he needed to obtain it from Him.

Notice also that this man believed that he needed to do something that would stir up the Father to give this gift of eternal life to Him. He did not know what he could do to have the assurance of this life.

Verse 18

Jesus challenges the man's use of the words "good teacher." He does so on the basis that there is only one person who is truly good, that is, God alone.

Understand that Jesus, as God, was worthy of being called a good teacher. We are left to wonder if Jesus was asking the man if he understood that He was the Son of God and the source of this eternal life he sought.

Verse 19

Before pointing the man to eternal life, Jesus begins by reminding him of his sin. Directing the man to the commandments of Moses, He told him not to murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or defraud. He was also to honour his father and mother.

One of the great barriers to eternal life is that we can believe we can obtain it

through our good works. Remember, however, that there is no one good but God. All our efforts to obey will be tainted with sin and unworthy of a good God.

Verse 20

The man tells Jesus that he had obeyed the commandments from his youth.

What is interesting here is that while the man had obeyed the commandments from his youth, he still stood before Jesus with no assurance of eternal life. His valiant efforts to please God and obey His commandments could not give him the assurance He needed. He could not figure out what was missing. All he knew that day was that he had lived a good life but was unsure that he would go to heaven.

Verse 21

Notice Jesus' response to this man, his attitude and his heart. Mark tells us that He loved him. Jesus connected with this man's pain and felt love and compassion for him in his need.

Speaking directly to the man, Jesus told him he lacked one thing. He told him to sell all he had, give it to the poor and then come and follow Him. He promised that if he did this, he would have treasure in heaven.

Let's break this down. According to Jesus, the man lacked one thing. That could be remedied by selling everything he had. What was it he lacked that could be obtained by selling everything? What he lacked was freedom from the love of riches. He loved his rich lifestyle and possessions. This had become the obstacle to him knowing eternal life.

Jesus illustrates what he meant by His teaching in Mark 9:43:

(43) And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. – Mark 9:43 ESV

Here was a case where the man's handful of riches caused him to sin and led him straight to hell. These riches meant more to him than God. They had become his god. If he wanted to inherit eternal life, he needed to renounce this god and follow Jesus only. Jesus pointed this man to the one thing he loved more than God.

Verse 22

Mark describes the young man's response to Jesus' words about selling

everything and following Him. He was “disheartened.” The word used here is στυγνάζω (stugnázō) and speaks of someone who is gloomy and melancholy. Mark goes on to tell us that he went away sorrowfully. The nature of that sorrow was the cost of eternal life. It would cost him more than he was willing to pay.

While he left sorrowful, he had received the answer to his question. Jesus revealed to him the obstacle to eternal life. Mark tells us that this man had “great possessions.” We are not told how that man’s life would unfold. He would not, however, be able to look at his riches the same from that day forward.

Verse 23

Looking to His disciples, Jesus reminded them of how difficult it was

for those who had riches to enter the kingdom of God.

Understand here that it is not just the rich who have wealth. Many things can keep us from the kingdom of God. These blessings may be in the form of a job we like, a family, or our possessions. Any of these things can mean more to us than God. To love God, we must love these things less. Too many people will sacrifice the kingdom of God for their pleasures, privileges, and possessions.

Verse 24

The words of Jesus about the rich man and how difficult it was to enter the kingdom of heaven because of the attraction of wealth and worldly privileges amazed the disciples. That is to say, they were astonished at what Jesus told them. There was a cost to

eternal life that these disciples had not considered.

Jesus reminds His disciples, however, that it is difficult to enter the kingdom of God. This difficulty, in this case, was due to the love of money, possessions and worldly privileges.

Several years ago, I was speaking with a Cuban pastor. He shared how many North American pastors visited and talked with him. He told me how many of these Christian workers admired him for his faith because he did not have much in this world. He expressed, however, that he had greater admiration for these North American pastors because they had wealth but still followed the Lord.

Communism or poverty cannot take away our faith, like materialism and the love of money and possessions. It is very difficult for those who love this world to surrender it for the sake of

God's kingdom. Yet, we must make a choice. Will we be committed to God, or will we choose this world? As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24:

24 No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. – Mt 6:24

The choice is not an easy one for many people to make.

Verse 25

Jesus expresses how difficult it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven by using an illustration of a camel and the eye of a needle. The camel was one of the largest animals in the region. Jesus tells the disciples that it would be easier for a camel to

squeeze through the eye of a sowing needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He shows us here how strong the pull of this world is in our lives. The lust for possessions and pleasures is so strong that nothing but the grace of God can remove the attraction and change the heart of one who has been trapped by it.

I would dare say that this worldliness has caused many hindrances for us in our walk with God. Even as believers, we struggle with the attraction of this world, hindering our progress for the kingdom's sake. Only God can give us victory and change our hearts.

Verse 26

Mark tells us that the disciples were exceedingly astonished by Jesus' teaching about the obstacle of wealth in the kingdom of God. The word used here is ἐκπλήσσω (ekpléssō). This is a

strong word that means to knock someone out with a hard blow or to terrorize. The teaching of Jesus that day seemed to put fear in the hearts of His disciples. While it is hard to understand the nature of that fear, we do catch a glimpse of what is going through their minds when they ask the question, "Then who can be saved?"

Consider what has been happening here. Jesus has just interacted with a rich young man. Mark tells us that seeing the man, Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21). He had made an impression on Jesus and the disciples. He came with a heart burdened for his salvation. Here before them was a man whose life was exemplary. He had, from His youth, followed the commandments of God. If there were ever a man who deserved to be saved, it would have been this man. As they spoke together, Jesus told this man, however, that if he wanted assurance of eternal life, he would have

to give up everything he had and follow him. This statement struck the disciples. This man, who had been so faithful to God, was required to give up everything he had to have eternal life. If such a faithful man needed to give up everything, what about other people? What did God require for eternal life? Could anyone pay the price necessary to obtain it?

Verse 27

In response to the disciples' question about who can be saved, Jesus replies: "With man, it is impossible."

Salvation is not something that can be bought or earned. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves or earn our salvation. No amount of good works or the sacrifice of worldly goods could ever pay for this assurance of eternal life. There is nothing a sinner can do to deserve, earn or merit eternal life.

Jesus goes on, in His response, to tell the disciples that what was impossible for humankind was not impossible for God, for all things were possible with Him. Jesus is saying that what is impossible for man to achieve, God gives as a gift of grace.

The disciples were still learning that salvation is by grace and not based on the works we have done. This was likely a pivotal moment for the disciples in their understanding of salvation by grace.

Verse 28

Peter, likely contemplating what he had just seen with the rich man, reminded Jesus that they had given up everything to follow Him. Peter reminds Jesus that they had done what this man could not do.

It is hard to understand Peter's intention in this statement. Was he speaking out of pride when he said they did what this rich man could not do by leaving everything to follow Jesus? Or was he speaking out of sincere amazement that they had somehow, by God's grace, left everything to follow Jesus? Was he sincerely overwhelmed by the grace of God that had given him the strength to do what that rich young man could not do?

Verse 29

Jesus' response here shows us that Peter and the disciples would not be the only ones to leave their homes and families for the gospel's sake. The grace of God would be extended beyond the immediate followers of Jesus to the whole world. Peter and the other disciples would experience in

their lifetime a great work of God in saving souls. They would witness men and women in the thousands leave families, lands and homes for the gospel. Acts 2 is an example of this work of God in the early church.

Verse 30

Jesus promised His disciples that those who left homes, families, and lands and suffered persecution for the gospel's sake would receive a reward. Jesus promises a hundredfold now and eternal life in the age to come. Notice two details here.

First, understand that God is no one's debtor. He knows what we have surrendered to Him and will repay all who have willingly given all for His sake.

Second, we will not have to wait until we go to heaven to receive this

reward from God. Notice that the hundredfold reward is “now in this time.” There is much blessing to be obtained here on this earth. That blessing may not come in riches and wealth, but it will certainly be a hundred times greater.

Verse 31

Jesus concludes His teaching here with the statement that many who are first will be last and the last first. The word “first” is πρῶτος (prōtos). It refers either to place or time or to rank and status. In other words, those of high standing in this world will not have the same status in the eyes of God. Those of the lowest status on this earth will be among the greatest in the kingdom of God.

Notice the word “many” here. In using the word many, Jesus recognizes that not all who are first in this world will

be last in the kingdom of heaven. Some have power, prestige and wealth in this world and will still be considered great in the kingdom of God because these things did not stand in the way of their relationship with God, but they used them for His name's sake.

Verse 32

Mark tells us that the Lord Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. Notice here, however, that Jesus was walking ahead of the disciples. He did not always walk side by side with them but would, from time to time, place a distance between them so that He could have some alone time.

Mark tells us two things about those who followed Jesus. Note first that they were amazed. What was the cause of this amazement? The context tells us that after the encounter with the rich young ruler, the disciples were

amazed at the teaching of Jesus about eternal life:

(24) And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! – Mark 10:24 ESV

Likely, the disciples took the opportunity while among themselves to speak about the teaching of Jesus. They may be amazed here at what Jesus had been teaching them. Notice, however, that Mark also tells us that those who followed Jesus were also afraid. While it may be that they were fearful about the question of eternal life and who could obtain it, the immediate context indicates that Jesus had begun to teach them about what would happen to Him. This is likely the source of their fear. It may also be the source of their amazement that Jesus would

willingly face the opposition that He predicted would come.

Verse 33

Mark details what Jesus taught His disciples as they travelled to Jerusalem. He told them that the Son of Man would be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes. They would condemn Him to death and hand Him over to the Gentiles to kill.

Note the reference to the Son of Man. The term Son of Man was used by Daniel the prophet:

(13)"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages

should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14 ESV

According to Daniel this Son of Man was given dominion, glory and a kingdom by the Ancient of Days. This kingdom would be an everlasting kingdom that would never be destroyed. The understanding was that this Son of Man was the Messiah.

Jesus identified as the Son of Man here. Notice, however, that He predicts that as the Son of Man, He would be handed over to the Gentiles and die. This idea would have been very difficult for the disciples to understand. The Son of Man was to set up a dominion. How could He do this if He died at the hands of the Gentiles?

Verse 34

Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that when He was handed over, He would be mocked, spit on, flogged and killed. Jesus demonstrates here that He understood what was ahead for Him. He speaks as a prophet here. The disciples would know He was a true prophet when these things were fulfilled to the smallest detail. Jesus predicted four details here:

1. They would mock Him
2. They would spit on Him
3. They would flog Him
4. They would kill Him

All of these things took place exactly as He predicted.

Notice also one other prediction here. Jesus predicted that after three days, He would rise from the dead. When the disciples saw the fulfilment of the

first four prophecies, they could be assured that the final one would also occur. The prediction of Jesus is not only in terms of what would take place in Jerusalem, but He also predicts the number of days He would be in the tomb. Every detail came about just as Jesus prophesied.

Verse 35

Two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, came to Him with a strange request. They wanted Jesus to do something for them. In Matthew's account of this event, he tells us that their mother brought the request to Jesus. It is hard to know exactly how this unfolded, but all parties were involved in this request –James, John and their mother.

The request is bold: "We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Many such requests have been made

throughout history. Some people believe Jesus is obligated to do for them whatever they request of Him.

Verse 36

Despite the boldness of their approach, Jesus is willing to receive the request from James and John. He asked them what they wanted Him to do for them. We do not need to fear bringing our bold requests to Jesus. He is willing to listen to us. We must, however, be willing to allow Him to answer as He pleases and accept His response.

Verse 37

James and John express their desire to sit, one at His right hand and the other on His left hand, in Jesus' glory.

Note the reference to Jesus' glory. Matthew words this differently when he says:

(21) And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." – Matthew 20:21 ESV

Mark's reference to Jesus' glory then is to the coming kingdom. It was understood that the Messiah would set up a kingdom and rule as Lord. James and John wanted a position of authority in that coming Messianic kingdom.

Verse 38

Jesus tells James and John that they did not know what they were asking. Prayer is not something we should take lightly. Like James and John, we come boldly before the Lord God with requests. The problem is that we don't truly understand the implications of what we ask. We do not have enough

understanding of the purpose of God or the truth of His kingdom to be asking for these things.

Notice how Jesus responds to this request. He asks them if they could drink the cup He was about to drink and be baptized with the baptism with which He was about to be baptized. To understand what Jesus is asking James and John first consider His reference to the cup He would drink. Listen to Jesus' words to His disciples in Matthew 26:27-28 when they shared in the Last Supper:

(27) And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, (28) for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. – Matthew 26:27-28 ESV

The cup Jesus drank with the disciples that evening represented his blood shed on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of sin.

The apostle Paul speaks about what it means to be baptized when he says:

(3) Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (4) We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. – Romans 6:3-4 ESV

Paul speaks here about a baptism of death. Jesus' baptism, therefore, is also a reference to His coming death.

Understand here that this death of Jesus was no ordinary death. It was a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of

the world. What Jesus is asking James and John here is very powerful. Are you able to die as the perfect lamb of God to take away the sin of the world? The Lord of this Kingdom of God obtained this position by His death on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for sin. Did James and John think they could walk up and take a position of honour by His side without having proven their worthiness to sit there? Who were they to assume that they could sit beside such a glorious king?

Verse 39

Clearly, James and John did not understand the implication of what they asked nor the nature of Christ's work on the cross. They told Jesus, however, that they could drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism.

Jesus confirmed that they would have to drink a cup of sorrow and be

baptized with a baptism of death for His sake. Jesus prophesied here that both James and John would indeed be martyred for their faith.

Verse 40

While James and John would die for the Lord Jesus, the privilege of sitting at His right and left hand was not for Jesus to grant. The Father granted Jesus His place on the throne of the kingdom. Is there anyone worthy of sitting on His right or left-hand side? Who could ever be compared to Him or take such a position of honour? God alone has the right to honour such a person.

Verse 41

Mark tells us that when the other ten disciples heard what James and John had asked the Lord, they were

indignant. The word used here is ἀγανακτέω (aganaktéō). It is derived from the word ágan, meaning very much and áchthos, meaning pain or grief.

In the minds of these ten disciples, James and John were lifting themselves above them.

They felt betrayed and were very angry with them over this.

Verse 42

Seeing how angry the disciples were at James and John, Jesus spoke to them as a group. He reminded them of the mindset of the unbelieving Gentile world on the question of leadership. For the unbeliever, rulers “lord it over” their subjects and exercise authority over those under them.

This worldview sees leaders as privileged. They are treated differently

from their subjects. They occupy a higher place in society and are served by those under them. They tell others what to do and use their position for gain and special favour. They do so at the expense of those who are under their authority. This, according to Jesus, was a worldly understanding of leadership, but it was not the Christian view.

Verse 43

Jesus tells His disciples that the Christian view of leadership differed greatly from the position held by the unbelieving Gentile world. Those who were truly great were servants. Jesus is an example of this. He lived His life ministering to the needs of those around Him. He laid His life down for His people. He was crucified for their forgiveness. He lived a simple life devoted to those He came to serve. To

be truly great, we must be like Jesus. A great leader is a servant.

Verse 44

According to Jesus, if you want to be first, you must learn to be a slave to all. This does not mean that we have no rights of our own. Jesus was not controlled by the people He served. He only had one master, and that was His father. Being a slave does not mean doing what everyone tells us to do. It does, however, mean being willing to spend our lives for those around us. It requires an expenditure of energy, time and resources for those we minister to. It may even mean laying down one's life in service. Those who willingly give of themselves this way are great in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 45

Jesus sets Himself up as an example of a true Christian leader. As the Son of Man (Messiah and Ruler of the Kingdom of God), He came to this earth as a servant. He paid the ultimate price by offering His life as a ransom for many. His greatness as a leader is seen in His humility and willingness to lay down His life for those He came to serve.

Verse 46

As Jesus and His disciples make their way to Jerusalem, they arrive in Jericho, over forty kilometres (about 25 miles) to the northeast. As they were leaving the city, a great crowd followed Him. Likely, Jesus taught and talked with them as He travelled. It was here in this region that they encountered a blind beggar sitting on the roadside. His name was Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. The phrase bar before a word

usually means the son of. In this case, Bartimaeus was the son of Timaeus. What is interesting to note, however, is that the name Timaeus comes from the Hebrew word תָּמֵעַ (tāmē), which means unclean, impure or defiled. Bartimaeus means the son of an impure or defiled one.

Verse 47

Bartimaeus likely heard the crowd and discovered that Jesus was with them that day. We are not told how Bartimaeus knew Jesus, but hearing that He was passing by, he called out to Him, asking for mercy.

Notice that Bartimaeus calls Jesus the Son of David. This phrase identified Him as the Messiah who was to be a descendant of David. The one whose name meant the son of the unclean and defiled one, calls out here to Jesus the Messiah. He pleads with Him

to have mercy on him in his condition of poverty and blindness.

Verse 48

Observe the response of the crowd toward Bartimaeus and his persistent calling out to Jesus. They told Him to be silent. The crowd would not have taken note of this blind beggar were it not for the fact that he was crying out "Son of David, have mercy on me." His need was not significant to them. They do not have any feelings of compassion toward him in his suffering. He was just one of those beggars they would walk past without giving any thought to Him or His need.

Verse 49

While the crowd tried to silence Bartimaeus, Jesus stopped and asked

them to call him. The idea here seems to be that they would get him and bring him to Jesus. Notice the words that those who went to see him brought to Bartimaeus: "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you."

Those who spoke to Bartimaeus challenged him to take heart. The word used here is (θαρσέω) tharséō. It implies that Bartimaeus was to be bold, full of good cheer and encouraged. The reason for this boldness and encouragement was in the faith that Jesus was asking for him.

We can only imagine what was going through this blind beggar's mind to know that Jesus was calling for him and even now waiting to see him.

Verse 50

Mark tells us that Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up and came to

Jesus.

The cloak referred to here was likely some form of outer garment to protect Him from the weather. It may also have been used as a covering at nighttime. Bartimaeus cast this off himself as one would cast off a blanket.

Note also that Mark tells us that Bartimaeus sprang up. The word ἀνίστημι (anístēmi) means to stand again. Taken together with the word threw off his cloak, however, we can be sure there was a certain enthusiasm in his rising to see Jesus.

Verse 51

Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted Him to do for him. It would be obvious to those present what Bartimaeus wanted, but Jesus wanted him to express this personally. That day, standing before Jesus, Bartimaeus

asked Him for healing to recover his sight.

The apostle James said this:

(2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. – James 4:2 ESV

Notice particularly that James speaks about people who need something, and so they covet, fight and murder to get what they want, but they do not ask the Lord. They do not have what they need because they do not ask God for it. Sometimes, God is our last resort when we can't get what we want through human means.

Jesus required Bartimaeus to ask Him for his healing. I dare say that there are many things we do not have because we do not bring the matter to the Lord. God wants us to come to the

end of ourselves, recognize our needs, and that He alone can minister to those need. He asks us to humbly confess that we require Him to act on our behalf. Understand here that there are also many things we try to obtain on our own that we need to bring to the Lord seeking His leading and provision instead.

Verse 52

Hearing his request, Jesus told Bartimaeus to go on his way because his faith had made him well. With the declaration of Jesus came the healing. It was an immediate healing. His eyes were opened, and he could see again.

While Jesus told Bartimaeus to go on his way, he chose to leave his roadside post and follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. This would have given him time to hear Jesus speak. He would have learned more about His healer

and what it meant to follow Him as he
joined that crowd.

MARK 11

Verse 1

It was in the region of Jericho that Jesus encountered Bartimaeus and healed him of his blindness (see Mark 10:46). From Jericho He continued His journey toward Jerusalem. He is now on the outskirts of Jerusalem in the region of Bethphage and Bethany. At this precise moment Jesus and His disciples are on the Mount of Olives.

Verse 2

While on the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of His disciples into the village on an

errand. According to Mark, the disciples were to go to the village before them. Mark tells us that they were in the vicinity of both Bethany and Bethphage. He does not tell us which of the towns Jesus was referring to here when He sent His disciples.

Luke's account of this event is very similar to Mark's. He speaks of the two towns of Bethany and Bethphage and tells us that Jesus sent His disciples into one of them:

(28) And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. (29) When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples – Luke 19:28-29 ESV

Matthew's account may be helpful here in that he only mentions one town:

(1) Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, – Matthew 21:1 ESV

The fact that Matthew does not mention Bethany in his account could indicate that the disciples went to Bethphage on this errand.

Notice the nature of the errand. The disciples were to go into the village. Jesus told them that immediately, as they entered, they would find a colt. They would be able to identify this colt by two details. First, it would be tied, and second, it had never had anyone sit on it. This may be an indication that the colt was young. Jesus would be the first person to ride this colt.

Understand here that riding a colt that had never before been ridden would have been somewhat of a miracle in

itself. Jesus intended to ride this colt into the city of Jerusalem. We understand that a large crowd was present when Jesus rode this colt for the first time. The fact that a colt, never before ridden, not only took our Saviour into the city but was undeterred by the crowds that flocked around it would certainly not be natural.

Verse 3

We can imagine what the disciples would have felt as they entered the city, found a colt that was not theirs, untied it and brought it back to Jesus. They would have felt like they were stealing this animal from its owner.

Jesus understood their feelings and told them that if anyone asked what they were doing, they were to say to them that the Lord needed it. These words would have been sufficient.

Understand that as God and Creator, Jesus had the right to all of His creation. You cannot steal what is already yours. We are called here not to hold onto anything He may choose to use for His glory. All we have is His to use as He pleases.

Verse 4

The two disciples entered the village and found the colt, as Jesus had told them. Mark tells us that it was tied outside a door in the street. To all indications, the colt belonged to someone who had possibly tied it up outside their home. We have no indication of the disciples knocking on the door to ask permission to take the colt. Mark tells us that they untied it to take it back to Jesus.

Verse 5

Mark tells us that as they were untying the colt to take it back to Jesus, "some of those standing there" asked them what they were doing and why they were taking it. From Luke's account, we discover that among those who asked that question were the colt's owners:

*(33) And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" (34) And they said, "The Lord has need of it."
– Luke 19:33-34 ESV*

Verse 6

When the disciples explained to the owners that the Lord needed the colt, there was no conflict. They were permitted to take it to Jesus. It would certainly have been interesting to understand the backstory behind these owners giving over their colt to Jesus,

but we have no record of how God was working in their lives at that time.

Verse 7

Mark tells us here why the Lord Jesus needed this colt. He was going to ride this animal into the city of Jerusalem. Note a couple of details here.

First, Mark tells us that when the disciples brought the colt to Jesus, they threw their cloaks on it. The word used here is ἱμάτιον (himátion). It refers to a garment or clothing. It is not specific about the type of garment. It was likely a coat or cape of some kind that was used to put on the colt. There was no fancy saddle or equipment used here. They used what was available to them at that moment.

Second, Jesus sat on the colt. Jesus was making a statement here. Listen to the prophetic words of Zechariah 9:9:

(9) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. – Zechariah 9:9 ESV

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on “a colt, the foal of a donkey,” He fulfilled a prophecy and declared Himself the “king coming in righteousness, having salvation.”

Zechariah went on in His prophecy to say that this king who rode into Jerusalem on a colt would end war, bring peace to the nations and rule from sea to sea. He would, also by the blood of His covenant set the prisoner free:

(10) I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from

*Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (11) As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. – Zechariah 9:10-11
ESV*

What took place that day was a clear fulfilment of prophecy. Jesus declared by riding a colt into Jerusalem that He was the Messiah to come.

Verse 8

Notice what took place as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The people gathered in the city for the Passover spread their cloaks on the road. Others gathered leafy branches they had cut from the fields and spread them before Him to

ride on. We honour special dignitaries today by spreading a red carpet before them. This is what the people of that day were doing. They honoured Jesus as a coming king, riding into the city. While they had no red carpet to spread, they used what they had available.

Verse 9

Mark tells us that the people cried out Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! as Jesus rode into the city. Notice two details here.

First, the people shouted, "Hosanna." The Hebrew word means save or help us now. The crowd cried out to Jesus to come to their aid. They looked to Him as the prophesied Messiah. Understand, however, that their concept of what Jesus would do was very different from what would take place. They anticipated a great political

leader. Jesus would die as a sacrificial lamb.

Second, notice that they blessed Jesus as the one who came in the name of the Lord. They declare Him to be the one sent by the Father to be their deliverer. At this time, deliverance implied freedom from Roman oppression, taxation and authority. Few of those in the crowd fully understood what the salvation of Jesus would look like.

Verse 10

The crowd gathered in Jerusalem expected “the coming kingdom of David.” They had some understanding of the prophecies of the Messiah. Consider, for example, the prophecy of Isaiah, who, speaking of the Messiah, said:

(6) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. – Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV

Notice that Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would sit on the throne of David and rule over a kingdom that would have no end.

The prophet Jeremiah said:

(5) "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will

raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. (6) In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' – Jeremiah 23:5-6 ESV

Observe how Jeremiah predicted that the Messiah would rise as a Branch of David and reign as king.

Those in the crowd understood these prophecies and declared Jesus to be the one who would sit on the prophetic seat of David and establish an everlasting kingdom of peace and justice. It is in this light that they cried out Hosanna in the highest.

The phrase “Hosanna in the highest” is somewhat difficult to understand. Hosanna means save us or help us

now. What did the people mean when they cried out save us in the highest?

It may be that by declaring Hosanna in the highest, they are calling heaven itself to recognize Jesus as the one predicted from ages past to be the help for His people. They are calling heaven to rejoice and praise this Saviour who came to fulfil His purpose on earth.

It may also be that the people are declaring that the source of their help and salvation is from the highest authority. In other words, this help was from God. Jesus was a heavenly Messiah, came from God and endowed with power from on high to stand with His people in their hour of need.

Verse 11

When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, Mark tells us that He arrived at the temple. Mark does not

go into detail about what Jesus did at the temple. He did not minister to the people at that time, however, because it was getting late. According to Mark, after He visited the temple, Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and went to Bethany.

Verse 12

Notice two preliminary details in Mark's account of the fig tree here. First, it was the morning after Jesus entered Jerusalem. Verse 11 tells us that because it was getting late, He and His disciples left the city and went to Bethany, where they likely stayed the night. Second, Mark also tells us that Jesus was hungry.

Verse 13

According to verse 15, Jesus and His disciples were going to Jerusalem

from Bethany that morning. Jesus was hungry and saw a fig tree in leaf at a distance. Even though it was not the season for ripe fruit, Jesus approached to see if anything was on it. All He discovered was leaves.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary has this to say about the fig trees in the region of Jerusalem at that time:

At this time of year, edible figs were still about six weeks away, but the bland fruit had recently appeared on the tree in late March; they would become ripe by late May. These were the early figs that preceded the main crop of late figs, which were ripe for harvest from mid-August into October. If only leaves appeared, without the early figs, that tree would bear no figs that year—whether early or late. – "The IVP Bible Background Commentary". Marion, IA: Laridian,

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The tree before Jesus should have had some evidence of fruit, even if it was not the season for ripe fruit. Mark tells us, however, that they found nothing but leaves, an indication that that particular fig tree would not likely produce any fruit that season.

Verse 14

Notice Jesus' response to the barren fig tree. Mark tells us that He cursed it, saying: "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." Now, admittedly, Jesus was hungry that morning, and some ripe fruit would have been welcome. There was something much

more profound going on here, however. Mark makes two important points about the fig tree in this story. First, it was full of leaves. Second, it had no evidence of fruit, even unripe fruit.

There are people like this. They make a strong pretence, but there is no evidence of spiritual fruit or the power of Christ in them. They are filled with leafy traditions and rules, but there is nothing more than that. As Jesus looked at the city before Him, He likely saw that. He saw Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests dressed in their religious garments parading the town. What He didn't see was the life-transforming power of God. He didn't see the work of His Spirit or a genuine heart for God. They were content to be leafy fig trees that bore no fruit. These leafy fig trees would soon bring Jesus to trial, sentence and kill Him.

Jesus reacts strongly toward this hypocrisy in the land. He demonstrates this by cursing the fig tree for life. Every opportunity had been given to the religious leaders of the day, but they resisted the Son of God. They would try and condemn Him to death, sealing their fate. The wrath of God would fall as it did on the fig tree outside the city of Jerusalem. The city would suffer for its rejection of the Messiah. The fig tree was a symbol of the coming judgement of God upon a hypocritical people, full of religion, traditions and rituals but devoid of any lasting spiritual fruit.

Verse 15

Leaving Bethany, Jesus and His disciples travelled into Jerusalem. This time, His entry is much quieter. Once again, however, just as they did the

day before, Jesus and His disciples went to the temple.

Notice what they encountered when they arrived at the temple. The courtyard was filled with merchants and money changers. Consider this for a moment. It was the time of the Passover. Jews from all around came to the temple to bring their sacrifices and worship. Some travelled long distances and from foreign lands. The temple provided animals these travellers could purchase on arrival in the city, so they did not have to travel long distances with their own animals. The temple also provided a money-exchange service so that they could exchange their foreign coins for a currency accepted for use in the temple.

On the outside, these services appeared to be helpful. The reality, however, was very different. The temple courtyard became so full of merchants and money changers that it

was more of a bazaar than a worship centre. People were making good money and taking advantage of these travellers. We get this impression from Jesus, who would later call them robbers (see verse 17). The scene angered Jesus so that He overturned the money-changers tables and upset the animal stations.

Many things start with good intentions but quickly degenerate into something they were never intended to be. The service to foreigners, because of the greed and selfishness of the human heart, quickly became a great profit-making business that distracted from the true intention of the Passover. A warning call goes out from this verse to all believers, challenging us to be ever watchful lest our good intentions destroy our worship and service, requiring that God overturn our tables as well.

Verse 16

Jesus' actions at the temple that day were two-fold. First, He drove out the evil that was in the temple. Second, He refused to allow anything more into the temple that did not honour His Father. Both of these ministries are required in the work of the kingdom.

Verse 17

We saw in verses fifteen and sixteen that Jesus both cleansed the temple and stood as a guard over what came in. Notice also here that the final aspect of His ministry that day was one of teaching. Jesus pointed the worshippers of that day to the prophet Isaiah, who said:

(6) "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of

the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— (7) these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” – Isaiah 56:6-7 ESV

Isaiah prophesied of a day when foreigners would join God’s people in the temple. On that day, they would bring their offerings and sacrifices, and God would accept them because His house would be “a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Opening up that passage of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus reveals how the worshippers of that day had made the temple a “den of robbers” instead. Jesus’ rebuke was very strong. We see

here, however, now, a three-fold ministry of Jesus — cleansing, guarding and instructing. This three-fold ministry of Jesus at the temple that day merits more consideration, but we do not have time to consider it in this context. I invite the reader to consider the words cleansing, guarding and instructing in the context of their church and personal lives.

Verse 18

What Jesus did at the temple that day was very powerful. Mark shows us the response of the chief priests and scribes who saw and heard what Jesus did that day —they sought a way to destroy Him. Note why they sought to destroy Him —they feared Him because of the impact of His teaching on the crowd.

Consider this for a moment. For years, during the Jewish Passover, merchants

and money-changers had set up their booths in the temple courtyard to service the worshippers coming to Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations. This had become a tradition, and people depended on this service. Jesus went into the temple and, in a single day, disrupted the tradition and instructed the people with such power that they were "astonished." He made people think about this yearly practice of turning the temple courtyard into a bazaar. It wasn't just the animal cages being rattled that day, but so were the traditions of many years. What their customs and religion had closed their eyes to, now Jesus was opening their eyes to see in a new way. The deception of the enemy was exposed to the shock of those present. The religious leaders functioned in the context of spiritual blindness, traditions, customs and control. Jesus' actions and teaching exposed their

hypocrisy, and the chief priests and scribes hated Him for it. They had to get rid of Him to continue their deception.

Verse 19

Mark tells us that it was evening when the Lord left that city that day. This had been a full day for Him. Cleansing the temple, guarding it against further merchants and moneychangers, instructing the people and angering the religious leaders had filled that day with tiring activities. He left the city as it was getting dark and likely returned to Bethany, where they had been staying.

Verse 20

The next morning, as Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem, they passed by the fig tree Jesus cursed the

day before. They noticed that the tree had “withered away to its roots.” The idea is that it was completely dead, with no hope of ever being restored to life. Jesus’ curse had a complete and total effect on that tree. The next morning, as Jesus and His disciples returned to Jerusalem, they passed by the fig tree Jesus cursed the day before. They noticed that the tree had “withered away to its roots.” The idea is that it was completely dead, with no hope of ever being restored to life. Jesus’ curse had a complete and total effect on that tree.

Verse 21

It was Peter that brought up the fact that the tree had died. He recognized it as the one Jesus had spoken to the day before. Peter seems to be somewhat amazed at how the fig tree

had responded to the voice of Jesus that day.

Verse 22

Jesus' response to Peter's comments on the fig tree is quite interesting. He tells him to have faith in God.

These words of Jesus seem to indicate that Peter was someone astonished at how Jesus could curse a fig tree and it would die. Jesus, picking up on Peter's amazement, tells him that such miracles are possible only by having faith in God.

By pointing Peter to God, Jesus is showing Him that the power to do such a miracle was in God alone. We don't look into ourselves for the miraculous but to God.

We need to understand here that God is the source of miraculous power, and faith is the means to reach out to God

for that power. I have met all too many people who trust in faith and not in God through faith.

Verse 23

Jesus goes on here to use the dead fig tree to illustrate what can happen when one has faith in God. He tells Peter that he could command the mountain to root itself up and throw itself into the sea, and if he didn't doubt, it would come to pass.

Note first that Jesus speaks about moving mountains. While Jesus might have been referring to a particular mountain on that occasion, most commentators agree that the mountain Jesus refers to is any impossible task we find before us in life.

Jesus speaks also about throwing this mountain into the sea. When

something is thrown into the sea it will never be recovered or seen again. The idea is a total removal of the mountain or obstacle before us.

Jesus goes on to tell Peter that the requirement for the mountain to be removed was believing and not doubting in his heart that what he asked would come to pass. The word translated, doubt, is διακρίνω (diakrínō). It is derived from the word diá, implying, separation and krínō, meaning to judge or decide. It is used eighteen times in the New Testament in a variety of contexts.

In Matthew 16:3 we read:

(3) And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. – Matthew 16:3 ESV

The word διακρίνω (diakrínō) is translated by the phrase “interpret” (ESV) or discern (KJV). The idea is that these individuals were able to separate out the various signs in the sky and make an informed judgement about the weather to come.

Consider also Acts 11:2:

(2) So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, – Acts 11:2 ESV

In this case, the word διακρίνω (diakrínō) is translated by “criticized.” The circumcision party in Jerusalem separated out the facts about Peter and his teaching and made a judgement about him.

Paul uses the word διακρίνω (diakrínō) in 1 Corinthians 4:7 when he writes:

(7) For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? – 1 Corinthians 4:7 ESV

In this case διακρίνω (diakrínō) is translated by the phrase “anything different.” When everything was separated and divided up, all the parts were the same. No one was shown to be any more important than the other. This was observed by a careful examination of each separate part.

Finally in 1 Corinthians 6:5 we read:

(5) I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, – 1 Corinthians 6:5 ESV

Here Paul's use of διακρίνω (diakrínō) is translated by the phrase "settle a dispute." Once again this implies a separating out of facts and a final judgement.

Here in Mark 11:23 the word διακρίνω (diakrínō) is translated by "doubt." In this case when all the facts were separated out and considered, they were found wanting. The belief was not in line with the words. The heart was not in line with the mind. This inconsistency would hinder the removal of the mountain.

The word belief (πιστεύω pisteúō), on the other hand, implies a firm conviction and assurance and certain expectation. There is no room for doubt in this kind of belief. Understand here that the belief is not in my faith but in the God of my faith.

Verse 24

Jesus tells Peter that when he prayed, he was to believe that whatever he asked in prayer would be given him, and it would be his.

The word translated believe here is πιστεύω (pisteúō). It means to have faith or trust. It can also carry the sense of becoming a believer by putting one's faith in Christ. The type of belief Jesus is speaking about here is one that places its complete confidence in the Lord God.

Notice that Jesus tells Peter that not only was he to have faith, but he was also to ask. We see this in the phrase, "whatever you ask in prayer." The word ask is the Greek word αἰτέω (aitéō). The word means to request or beg and seems to carry with it the sense of someone inferior asking from his or her superior. The request I am making is one I cannot resolve myself and I must

put my trust or confidence in someone greater or richer than me to find the solution. The beggar, in this case is aware of his or her need and the calls upon the generosity of a benefactor for aid. There is an implied humility and dependence in this word.

The picture here is of a bigger standing before a mountainous obstacle way beyond his ability to endure. Confessing his inability, he turns to the only one who can remove that mountain, places his confidence in Him, and humbly submits his petition to Him for resolution, believing that He will take the matter in hand.

The faith required here is in God, our relationship with Him, His willingness to act on our behalf, and in His ways, which are often different from ours.

Verse 25

Before concluding his instructions on prayer, Jesus adds one further detail. He told Peter that when he prayed, he was to forgive his brother or sister of any offence. Jesus told him that if he did not forgive them, then God might not forgive his sins. This, of course, would be an obstacle to the answering of his prayer.

Taken in the context of verse 24, we understand that we cannot pray a believing prayer if we are not in a right relationship with God or a brother or sister. True belief cannot be found outside of obedience and genuine fellowship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verse 26

Many ancient manuscripts do not contain this verse which says:

But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

While there is some debate among scholars as to whether Mark included the verse in his original text, the truth of the passage is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Verse 27

Jesus and His disciples have been travelling daily to the temple from Bethany. On this occasion, the chief priests, scribes and elders approached Him with a question. The fact that they all came together may indicate they have been particularly looking for Him.

Remember, they were looking for an opportunity to get rid of Him.

Verse 28

The chief priests, scribes and elders question Jesus about His authority to minister in the temple doing what He was doing. Understand that over the past few days, Jesus had cleansed the temple and drove out the money changers and merchants. He stood boldly in the crowd and rebuked them for turning the temple from a house of prayer into a den of robbers. He taught those who would listen.

The priests had been ordained into their ministry. They came from a long line of priests spanning generations of history. The temple also recognized the scribes and elders as official leaders. In their minds, however, Jesus just seemed to take over, ignoring the religious protocol. They ask Jesus something like this: What right do you have to come into our temple and do what you please? In their minds, they were the only true temple leaders,

properly elected and recognized to minister.

Verse 29

Understanding the nature of the question, Jesus tells the religious leaders that He would answer them if they first answered His question. Jesus knew the intentions of these men here. If He challenged those intentions directly, it would only make matters worse. By asking the proper question, Jesus would not only answer them but also expose their hypocrisy.

Verse 30

Jesus' question to the religious leaders related to the baptism of John. He asked them if this baptism was of heavenly or human origin. The question was a very important one. John had baptized many people. It was

generally accepted that John was a prophet of God. Jesus taught that John was the Elijah the prophet Malachi spoke about when he wrote:

(5) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

(6) And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." – Malachi 4:5-6 *ESV*

Note that John baptized Jesus and declared Him to be the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (see John 1:26-29). By asking the religious leaders about John's baptism, Jesus allowed John to declare the answer to the question posed by the leaders that day.

Verse 31

The religious leaders took Jesus' question and discussed it among themselves. In doing so, they quickly understood they were in a bind. If they declared that John the Baptist was a prophet of God and that his work was the work of God, then Jesus would ask them why they did not believe what John declared about Him. John publicly proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. If Jesus was the Messiah, as John declared, His authority was from heaven, and they had no right to stop Him or seek His death.

Note here that the religious leaders understood the teaching of John about Jesus, yet they were still seeking to kill Him. Their positions meant more to them than the truth declared by a prophet of God.

Verse 32

As the religious leaders consider how to answer Jesus' question about the baptism of John, they know that if they told Him that it was not of divine but of human origin, then they would have to answer to the people of that day. It was the commonly held belief that John was a true prophet of God. The religious leaders were unwilling to call John the Baptist a false prophet. They feared the response of the crowd and their fury.

While they were unwilling to call John a false prophet, they would not listen to what he declared about Jesus. They expose themselves here as leaders who cared little for the truth and everything for their reputation and position.

Verse 33

Stuck in the crevice between truth and reputation, the religious leaders did not know where to turn. They refused to accept John's declaration about Jesus but would not declare him a false prophet for fear of what the people would say. These leaders based their opinions and theology on what worked best for them and what pleased the crowd. The spiritual children of these leaders are among us today.

The chief priests, scribes and elders were forced to tell Jesus they could not answer His question. As a result, Jesus refused to answer theirs. Understand, however, that the answer would have been quite clear. When they asked Jesus about His authority, He pointed them to John the Baptist and what he taught.

MARK 12

Verse 1

Mark introduces a period of Jesus' teaching ministry when, just before His trial and crucifixion, He began to teach again in parables. Mark gives us here an example of the kind of parable Jesus taught at that time. The lesson Jesus wanted to convey in this parable was likely one the disciples had trouble understanding. Teaching in parables would have made this clearer.

Jesus tells a story here about a man who planted a vineyard. Notice several details about this vineyard.

First, the man planted it and built a fence around it. The fence separated this land from the surrounding territory, designating it as a vineyard and devoting it to his stated cause. The Lord God did this with the Jewish nation.

Second, the owner then dug a pit for a winepress. This pit would store the wine that flowed from the stomped grapes. The construction of a winepress revealed the owner's intention for his vines to produce an abundant harvest. God set His people aside for His glory and honour. He anticipated that they, too, would bear fruit for Him.

Next, the man built a tower. The watchtower was intended for protection and would house watchmen who protected the property from intruders. Some see reference here to the temple in Jerusalem with its priests and religious leaders whose purpose

was to guard the truth of God and His purpose.

Finally, the owner leased this land to tenants and went away on a trip to another country. God set up priests, Levites, prophets, and ordinary believers to be His representatives in the vineyard. Their responsibility was to honour His name and produce fruit on His behalf.

Verse 2

The master of the vineyard, though he was away in another country, was still concerned about the productivity of his vineyard. When the time was right for harvest, he sent servants to the tenant workers to obtain some of the fruit.

The owner of the vineyard leased his land to tenant farmers who paid him for the use of the land. This payment

would come in the form of a percentage of the harvest. What we see here is the master's servants now coming to collect the portion required as payment for the use of the land. The day will come when God requests this from each of us as well.

Verse 3

Notice what took place with the owner's servant. Jesus tells us that the tenants beat him and sent him away "empty-handed." The idea here is that the tenants began to resent that they should have to give anything to the landowner. They did all the work, so they should get all the profit. They failed to remember that the land they worked on was not theirs and were it not for the landowner's willingness to allow them to use his land, they would have nothing.

How quickly we forget what we owe to God. Were it not for His blessing and the life He gives, we would have nothing. He deserves our gratitude.

Verse 4

After his first servant was sent away empty-handed, the landowner sent a second. This second servant was treated worse than the first. This time, the tenants physically beat him and treated him shamefully before sending him away empty-handed.

Understand here how God sent His prophets to Israel, but many of them were beaten and shamefully treated.

Verse 5

Demonstrating infinite patience, the landowner sends a third servant to collect his rent. While the tenants beat and abused the second servant before

sending him away emptyhanded, this time, they killed the servant sent them.

Mark goes on to say: "And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed." These words show us that the landowner did not stop trying to obtain his rent and demonstrated incredible patience with the farmers who worked his land. A quick look at the Old Testament will show us the number of prophets God sent to speak in His name. Any final action taken on God's part will not be without much warning.

Verse 6

Finally, the landowner determined to send his "beloved son." His feelings were that, while they showed no respect to his servants, they would listen to his son. Surely, they would not disrespect his flesh and blood who came in his name. The reference is to

the Lord Jesus, the beloved Son of God, who came to His people in His Father's name.

Understand that, unlike the Father in the parable, God knew what they would do to His Son when He sent Him. The Son also knew He would die and came specifically for that purpose. We need to be careful about not reading too much into a parable when we interpret it. The idea here is to show, in a very general way, what took place when Jesus came and how people would mistreat and kill Him.

Verse 7

Note the tenants' response to the arrival of the landowner's son. They see him as the heir to all the land. If they killed the son, there would be no one to inherit the vineyard, and so, in their mind, the land would remain in

their possession, and they could do with it what they wanted.

We catch a glimpse of the evil intentions and thoughts of the tenants here. So it is, however, with anyone who does not give God what is owed to Him.

Verse 8

Acting on their evil thoughts, the tenants killed the landowner's son and threw him out of the vineyard in a rebellious act of claiming his right of inheritance for themselves. By removing his body from the vineyard, they believed they were removing any claim he had to the property.

Verse 9

Jesus ends His parable with a question: "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" The tenants have killed

the owner's servants and son, but the landowner himself has been untouchable. The tenants have done him a great injustice.

The Lord answers His question here. He tells His disciples that the landowner's response would be two-fold.

First, he would destroy the tenants. There would be justice. The landowner would respond to this great evil done to him. Those who did such evil would not go unpunished. They would face the consequences of their actions.

Second, the landowner would give his vineyard to other tenants, acting in his best interest. Jesus is telling His disciples that the day was coming when God would turn to the Gentiles and open the door for them to be partakers and fellow workers in the kingdom of God. The death of the Son of God would move God's hand to the

Gentile world, and men and women from every nation would become co-workers in expanding God's kingdom purposes on the earth.

Verse 10

Jesus quotes here from Psalm 118:22. He connects what the Psalmist says with His parable. Consider the connection.

The Psalmist uses an illustration of some builders constructing an important building. One of the most important things that needed to happen in creating a great building was the selection of a cornerstone. This stone was among the first stones to be laid in the foundation and would be the one from which everything was measured. The length, width and level of the foundation would all be based on this stone. It was important, therefore, that this stone be carefully chosen. In

the illustration of the Psalmist in Psalm 118:22, a rejected stone becomes the very stone upon which that whole building would take its measurements.

The connection between Psalm 118:22 and this parable of Jesus is that the person the tenants rejected would become their judge. The one the Jews rejected would rise to call them to account. He would be their Saviour and Judge.

Verse 11

The psalmist goes on in Psalm 118:23 to tell his readers that the idea that a rejected stone should become a cornerstone was marvellous in his eyes. The word translated marvellous is פֶּלִא (pālā'). It speaks of something that is both wonderful and difficult. The idea is that it is too hard to understand or almost impossible to believe.

The Father raised His Son Jesus to be the cornerstone. Jesus was despised and rejected by this world. He was born as an infant in a manger, lived an ordinary life and was ultimately crucified on a cross. This despised and rejected man would be the Saviour of the world. He was a rejected stone, but God chose this rejected stone to be the foundation and cornerstone. Everything God intends to do is founded on the person and work of this rejected stone, Jesus Christ.

Verse 12

Note here how the religious leaders of the day, hearing this parable, wanted to arrest Jesus. They had a sense that He was speaking about them and how they tried to kill him. Even though Jesus quoted from the Scriptures, these leaders were unwilling to consider the warning He brought.

The only thing that kept the religious leaders from arresting Jesus on the spot was their fear of the people. These people had lined the road crying Hosannah when Jesus came into the city on a donkey. The religious leaders feared what the crowd might do if they openly arrested Jesus. Mark tells us that on this occasion, they left Jesus and left, waiting for a more appropriate time to arrest Him.

Verse 13

In the last section, Jesus told a parable about the religious leaders that infuriated them. This resulted in them wanting to arrest Jesus, but they were unable to do so because they feared the response of the people. Mark shows us that they did not give up trying to find a way to arrest Jesus, however. Here in this verse, we see how these leaders sent some Pharisees

and Herodians to follow after Him, looking for a way to trap Him and find cause to arrest Him.

It is of some significance to note this combination of Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees were Jewish nationalists who resented the Roman occupation of their land.

The Herodians, on the other hand, were servants of the Roman Empire. Politically, the Pharisees and Herodians had opposing views about the future of Israel. The fact that the religious leaders sent Herodians may indicate that they were not only looking for a spiritual reason to arrest Jesus but possibly a political one.

Verse 14

The Pharisees and Herodians sent to trap Jesus approached Him with a question. Notice how they address Him here.

First, they address Jesus as a "Teacher." This was a show of respect. They approach Him as one who has knowledge and insight.

Second, they confess Him as true by saying, "We know that you are true." What they were trying to convey is that they could have confidence in the Lord Jesus and His wisdom on the matter they were bringing to Him. The reality is that they were trying to trap Him.

Third, they declare that Jesus would tell the truth without fear of what others said. In other words, Jesus was not one to be swayed by public opinion or influenced by people. He spoke the truth without regard for what people might think of Him.

Finally, they proclaim that Jesus taught the way of God. They were trying to give the impression that they believed Jesus to be one who spoke from God and declared His truth. He was not

one to shape his message to suit people but spoke the heart and truth of the Father.

While all these qualifications were true in the life of Jesus, it is not likely that the Pharisees and Herodians truly believed what they said to Jesus that day. Remember here that they were trying to trap Jesus, and so they spoke these words in an attempt to gain His confidence and have Him say something they could use to accuse Him of some crime.

After this lengthy introduction, the Pharisees and Herodians present their question to Jesus. The question pertained to the matter of paying taxes to Caesar.

The Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus if it was "lawful" for them to pay taxes to Caesar. The question here was a legal one. The law referred to here is not

Roman law but Jewish law. Roman law required the payment of taxes. The Jews saw the Romans as pagan Gentiles. By paying taxes to an ungodly nation, the Jews saw themselves as supporting their evil ways. Was it right for a child of God to help the evil of the Roman Empire by paying taxes?

Verse 15

The insincere flattery of the Pharisees and Herodians did not deceive Jesus. Mark tells us that He saw through their hypocrisy and asked why they were trying to test Him.

Having uncovered their deceit, Jesus asked that a denarius be brought to Him. The denarius was a Roman silver coin used as the standard currency in those days and the currency in which taxes were to be

paid. It was the equivalent of a day's wages for a Roman soldier.

Verse 16

Someone present that day brought a denarius to Jesus. He then asked those present to tell Him whose image was stamped on the coin. They told Him that Caesar's image was on it.

Verse 17

When those present told Jesus that Caesar's image was on the denarius, Jesus then told them to give to Caesar what was his without neglecting their obligation to give to God what belonged to Him as well.

Jesus challenged the religious leaders to be faithful citizens of the nation to which they belonged. They were to honour their Roman masters and pay what they demanded. This obligation

to their political leaders, however, was not to diminish their commitment to God. They were to continue serving Him, giving their tithes and offerings to advance His kingdom.

Jesus' response was not what the Herodians and Pharisees expected. He had seen through their deceit and answered their question, so they had nothing to accuse Him.

Verse 18

Mark tells us how the Sadducees also tried to trap Jesus. While we do not know much about this group in Israel at that time, it is quite clear that they denied the resurrection and any form of spiritual beings, such as angels or spirits.

(8) For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees

acknowledge them all. – Acts 23:8
ESV

The Sadducees also had a question to ask Jesus. This question was about the resurrection. Mark prefaces this question with the statement that these Sadducees who asked the question did not believe in the resurrection. The fact that they came asking a question about something they didn't believe in shows us something of their intention.

Verse 19

The Sadducees address Jesus as a teacher. This shows a level of respect for Him and His position. Notice how the Sadducees preface their question to Jesus — “Moses wrote for us.” We understand from this that the Sadducees followed the law of Moses. Their question to Jesus was based on an authority they held in high regard.

The basis for the question the Sadducees were going to ask Jesus was the law of Moses found in Deuteronomy 25:5:

(5) "If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. – Deuteronomy 25:5 ESV

This law of Moses required that when a man died without giving a child to his wife, his brother was to marry her and give her a child. The first child born to that union belonged to the deceased brother and would inherit his estate. This prevented whole families in Israel from being erased.

Verse 20

The Sadducees set the question they have for Jesus by using an illustration of a woman who married the eldest brother in a family of seven brothers. Her husband died without leaving her a child to carry on his name. The law of Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5 would now need to be applied to this situation.

Verse 21

Observing the law of Moses, the second brother of the seven, married the childless widow of his deceased brother. He also died, however, without being able to give her offspring.

The legal obligation to provide the eldest brother's wife with a child now fell on the third brother. In this illustration used by the Sadducees

here, however, like the second brother, he also failed to provide offspring.

Verse 22

According to the Sadducees, all six remaining brothers took their eldest brother's wife and tried to give her a child to carry on his name, but all failed to do so before passing away. Finally, the woman died without a child.

Verse 23

Having set up a situation where seven brothers married the same woman, the Sadducees now ask Jesus their question. They wanted to know whose wife this woman would be in the resurrection. A woman with seven husbands at once seemed to be quite ridiculous in the minds of these Sadducees and seemed to reveal the

foolishness of believing in the resurrection of the dead.

Verse 24

Unphased by their question, the Lord Jesus tells the Sadducees that they were wrong in their reasoning and fell short in two ways.

First, they did not understand the teaching of the Scriptures. It was not that they did not quote whole sections of Scriptures and attempt to follow them daily, but rather that they misinterpreted them or did not understand their true intention. Many people quote Scripture who do not truly understand the whole counsel of God, its intention, and application.

The second problem Jesus addressed with the Sadducees was that they did not know the power of God. Many people become so academic and

intellectual in their application of Scripture that they give no place for the power of God and the work of His Spirit. There is an aspect of God that we can never comprehend. God is not limited to human intellectual arguments. He does what is impossible to us. Any attempt to systematize God and put Him in a box will fall short.

We must live with these two principles in mind. God has given us His Word to guide us, but we must never think that we can ever understand all there is about Him in our finite human mind. There are aspects of God we will never fully understand. His power and ability defy all human attempts to understand Him and His ways. What Scripture does not answer for us, we must allow the power of God to work out.

Verse 25

Jesus goes on to tell the Sadducees that in the resurrection, there was no marriage. All marriage covenants are dissolved at death, and there are no marriages in heaven.

Jesus tells the Sadducees that those who rise from the dead will be like angels in heaven. We should not take this to mean that we will become angels. Angels and humans are different now and in heaven. We will, however, be like angels in that we will be given eternal life, and that worldly passions and limitations will not govern the bodies in which we live.

In telling the Sadducees that our bodies will be like those of angels, Jesus is making His position about the existence of angels known to the Sadducees who did not believe in them. He also showed them something about the Scriptures that He thought they did not understand.

Verse 26

Taking them to the Scriptures they claimed to believe, Jesus points the Sadducees to the words of the Pentateuch found in Exodus 3:6:

(6) And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. – Exodus 3:6 ESV

These were the words of the Lord given to Moses when God spoke to him in the burning bush. On that occasion, God introduced Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What is of particular importance here is that God uses the present tense. He told Moses that, even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had passed from this world, He was still their God.

Verse 27

Having quoted Exodus 3:6 and showing that even after the death of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God still declared Himself to be their God, Jesus then moves on to make His point. Speaking to those who did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus reminded the Sadducees that God was not the God of the dead but the living. In other words, the only way God could claim to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was if they were still alive. God did not tell Moses that He used to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but that he was, at that very moment, their God. The use of the present tense would only make sense if the resurrection were a fact.

Verse 28

Being in Jerusalem, Jesus is encountering many groups. Mark records meetings in this section of his gospel with the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. In this verse, we see a scribe coming to Jesus with a question.

Note here in the verse what motivated this scribe to ask Jesus a question. Mark tells us that he had seen how the Sadducees had been “disputing” with Jesus, and He had answered them well. The Sadducees intended to trap Jesus, but they could not do so. We are left to wonder if the scribe felt he could do better with his question.

The scribes were the religious lawyers of the day. Their specialty was the law. The nature of the scribe’s question pertained to this law. He asked Jesus what he thought was the most important law.

Verse 29

In response to the scribe's question about the most important law, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

(4) "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. (7) You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (8) You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. (9) You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. – Deuteronomy 6:4-9 ESV

Notice how God told Moses that the Israelites were to teach that the Lord God was one Lord. The idea is that there were no other gods, nor were any other pagan deities to be worshipped or loved. The Lord God of Israel alone was to be their God.

Verse 30

Jesus continues to quote from Deuteronomy 6 in response to the scribe's question. Not only was Israel to recognize only one God, but she was also to love Him with all her heart, soul, mind and strength. Each of these words deserves a study of its own. What Jesus is telling the scribe is that Moses taught that God's people were to love their God and Him only with their whole being. That love was to be demonstrated in their devotion and consecration of everything they were and had to Him and His purpose.

Verse 31

Jesus gives the scribe what He calls the second commandment. The word second here implies that there is a priority. If the second commandment is to be effectively observed, the first must already be in place.

The second most important commandment, according to Jesus, was found in Leviticus 19:18, which says:

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbours as yourself: I am the LORD. – Lev 19:18

The focus of Jesus here is on the second part of Leviticus 19:18, where the law taught that an individual was to love their neighbour as themselves. They were to consider their

neighbour's needs as they would consider theirs. They were to treat their neighbour as they wanted to be treated. They were to do this out of a love for God.

According to Jesus, if a person loved God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loved their neighbour as they loved themselves, all the other commandments would fall into place naturally.

Verse 32

The scribe who asked Jesus the question recognized the good answer Jesus gave here in the words, "You are right, Teacher." Notice also how the scribe confesses that the Lord God is the only God and that there were no other gods besides Him.

Verse 33

The scribe, reflecting on the answer Jesus gave, recognizes here that to love the Lord with all the heart, understanding and strength and to love one's neighbour as oneself was of greater worth than any burnt offering or sacrifice.

In saying this, this scribe recognized that there was a ceremonial aspect to the Jewish faith but love for God and one's neighbours was of much greater significance. Many of the religious leaders of that day did not understand this concept. They were busy doing their religious duty, making sacrifices and offerings to God, but their hearts were not in what they did. Their faith was all about the externals and had nothing to do with a genuine love for God. At least this scribe understood that God was looking not for outward actions so much as an inner devotion from a heart filled with love for Him.

Verse 34

Notice Jesus' response to the scribe who had asked him this question. He saw how the scribe had answered wisely. He saw an uncommon wisdom among the religious leaders of that day. He understood the heart of God more than his fellow leaders.

Jesus went on to say that the kingdom of God was not far from this scribe. The kingdom of God is the reign of God in the heart, mind and soul of those who receive Him.

There is a difference between religion and the kingdom of God. Religion contents itself with the externals and lifestyle. The religious leaders lived a certain way, observed certain practices and followed a set of beliefs. You can do this with a heart that is not surrendered to God. You can be religious without being in tune with God. You can be religious but not be

filled with God. Your religion is merely a lifestyle, but there is no guarantee that you know the God you serve.

The kingdom of God, on the other hand, is a submission to God from the heart. Those who belong to the kingdom of God have hearts that have been conquered by God and are in full submission to Him. These hearts have been broken and ripped from the world. They have come to love the Lord and bow willingly in submission. They live their lives out of devotion and love for Him. The sovereign God has been working in their lives, conquering sin and rebellion and shaping them into His image. The concept of a kingdom implies a king and willing subjects. It also means a willing submission to the lordship of that king in every aspect of one's life.

Mark concludes the verse with the statement that no one dared to ask any more questions. Jesus had

answered every question used to test Him. No one had anything more to say on this matter.

Verse 35

Jesus was teaching in the temple and asked a question to those who were listening to

Him. The question was this: "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"

The idea of Christ, the Messiah, being the Son of David was a well-accepted doctrine. This was the clear prediction of the prophet Isaiah, who said:

(6) For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of

peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. – Isaiah 9:6-7 ESV

A child would be born and placed on the throne of David. His kingdom would have no end.

Isaiah would prophesy furthermore that the Spirit of the Lord would fall upon a shoot of Jesse, the father of David and his descendant would judge the earth with righteousness:

(1) There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. (2) And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the

Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (3) And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, (4) but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. (5) Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. (6) The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. – Isaiah 11:1-6 ESV

This child born from the root of David would usher in a kingdom of peace and righteousness.

It is clear from prophecy that the Messiah would be a son or descendant of David. The scribes taught this as an accepted fact and doctrine. By pointing people to this doctrine and prophecy, Jesus wants those who listened to Him that day to reflect further on it.

Verse 36

From the prophecy of the Son of David being the Messiah, Jesus then moves on to quote from Psalms 110:1, which says:

(1) The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." – Psalms 110:1 ESV

To understand what Jesus is saying here, it is important to understand

what David is speaking about in the psalm.

Note David's use of the word LORD in Psalm 110:1. The English word, Lord, occurs twice in this verse, but in the Hebrew language, the author uses two different words. The first word is יהוָה (yehōwāh). This is used only to speak of God and was a sacred word for no one else. The second word, translated as Lord in the verse, is the Hebrew word אֲדֹנָי (ʾādôn), which can speak of a God but also of a human being. David is talking about two Lord's here in this verse.

There is no question as to the identity of the person referred to as יהוָה (yehōwāh). This is the Lord God of Israel. Who is the second person identified as Lord here by the word אֲדֹנָי (ʾādôn)? To understand this, we must examine the context of Psalm 110.

The Lord God of Israel, speaking to the person referred to as אָדוֹן ('ādôn), invites him to sit at His right hand. Who can sit at the Father's right hand in heaven? We find the answer in Acts 7:56, when Stephen saw a vision of the Lord Jesus:

(56) And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." – Acts 7:56 ESV

This is confirmed by the writer of Hebrew when he says about Jesus, our High Priest:

(1) Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, – Hebrews 8:1 ESV

The other clue we have as to the identity of the person referred to here as אֲדֹנִי ('ādôn) comes in the words of Psalm 110:4:

(4) The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Note here that the individual concerned is described as a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilled this prophetic word of Psalm 110:4 when he wrote:

(5) So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; (6) as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." – Hebrews 5:56 ESV

When Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1, He quoted a passage that referred to Him. The Lord God of Israel spoke to the Messiah, Jesus, calling Him to come and sit at His right hand, the seat of honour.

Verse 37

Jesus now comes to the point He wants to make to the scribes. If the Messiah was a human son of David, why would David write about the God of Israel calling Him Lord in the divine sense? What Jesus seems to be saying is that the Scriptures taught that the Messiah would be both human and divine. This was something the religious leaders of the day were unwilling to accept. They could not believe that Jesus who was born on this earth was also the Son of God.

Verse 38

As Jesus taught in Jerusalem, He warned the people about the scribes. He declares them false teachers who loved to walk around in long flowing robes, soaking up the respect of the people in the marketplace. They were more concerned about what people thought of them than the truth.

Verse 39

Jesus goes on in His description of the scribes here from verse 38. He tells those who listened to Him that these men loved the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts. While the role of the scribe was connected with copying and interpreting the law of Moses, they seemed to find more pleasure in gaining the admiration and respect of the people.

Verse 40

While the scribes loved places of honour in the synagogue and feasts, according to Jesus, they were guilty of two sins.

First, they devoured widows' houses. Jesus does not go into any detail about this. What we can understand is that their legalistic interpretation of the law created hardship for those who had very little. Did they side with the rich who contributed abundantly to the temple, ignoring the needs of these poor widows? These widows suffered while the scribes sat in places of honour at great feasts.

Second, Jesus accused the scribes of long-winded and half-hearted prayers designed to impress rather than speak to God. God was not impressed. Jesus tells those who listened to Him that these scribes would one day be called to account for their actions. Their position as teachers of the law placed

them under a greater obligation, and they would be judged more severely.

Verse 41

Jesus and His disciples sat down opposite the treasury in the temple and watched people coming in to worship. As they came in, the worshippers put money in the offering box. What was placed in the box varied. Of particular note were the rich people who brought large offerings. What is interesting to note here is that what was given was quite visible to Jesus and the disciples. The offering was somewhat public. In fact, for certain individuals, being noticed for what they gave was important.

Verse 42

As Jesus and His disciples watched what people were giving, they noticed

a poor widow enter and place two small copper coins in the offering box. The total amount of those coins was a penny. This small amount is contrasted with the “large sums” of the rich in verse 41.

Verse 43

When Jesus saw the poor widow putting her offering in the box, He was profoundly touched. He called His disciples to Himself and told them that she had put in more than anyone else.

This concept may have surprised the disciples as the amount she contributed was very small compared to what others had brought that day. God, however, does not measure the value of our contributions by their financial worth. He has another standard by which he measures our gifts.

Verse 44

Jesus told His disciples that day that while the rich contributed out of their abundance, the poor widow gave out of her poverty everything she had to live on.

While the rich brought large offerings to the temple, they still had much left to live on. They would not have suffered any loss in their quality of life. They would go home and continue living a life of luxury and blessing. They would sit at their tables loaded with provisions and sleep in the warmth of their comfortable beds at night. They did not worry about tomorrow.

The poor widow, however, had a choice to make. She could offer all she had left to the temple and go without food, or she could keep it and eat tomorrow. She decided to do without her food and give whatever she had left to the work

of the Lord. She returned home with nothing. She wasn't sure where her next meal was going to come from. Her sacrifice was a true sacrifice. More than this, however, her attitude of full surrender to God touched the heart of Jesus. She chose to honour God before herself. This did not go unnoticed. Her sacrifice was of infinitely greater value than those who gave of their abundance.

MARK 13

Verse 1

Jesus and the disciples have been in the temple watching people putting their offerings in the treasury box. Our Lord had used that occasion to speak about a poor widow's offering. Leaving that day, one of the disciples commented on the building. He was impressed by the wonderful stone construction and how beautiful the temple was. The contrast between what Jesus had just taught the disciples about the value of the widow's two small coins and this comment about the luxury of the temple is striking. It seems to indicate that this

disciple did not see things as Jesus did. He had not understood Jesus's lesson about sacrifice and the attitude of the heart as being of much greater value than all these external riches.

Verse 2

In response to His disciple's comment about the temple, Jesus prophesied that the day was coming when this wonderfully constructed building would be destroyed. He told His disciples that day that no stone would be left upon another, but the building would be completely desecrated and ruined.

Behind this comment is the idea that God cared little for all this luxury and masterful construction. Don't get me wrong here. There is a place for these things, and God is a wonderfully creative God. In His list of priorities, however, devotion and love for Him are

of much greater significance and beauty.

It was in 70 AD that this prophecy of Jesus would be fulfilled when the temple was looted and destroyed by Rome.

Verse 3

Leaving the temple, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Mark tells us that this was opposite the temple. From this high point, on the Mount of Olives, they had a full view of the temple building. We have a record of Peter, Andrew, James and John with Jesus.

Mark tells us that while they were on the Mount of Olives, these four disciples privately asked Jesus what He had just told them about the destruction of this great building they were looking down on at that moment.

Verse 4

On the Mount of Olives, Peter, Andrew, James, and John privately asked Jesus to explain when the temple destruction would occur. They also asked Him to tell them about any signs that would appear before this happened. The reality is that many of these disciples would be dead before this significant event took place. What Jesus explains here, however, would greatly benefit believers who lived in 70 AD.

Verse 5

Jesus responds here to the disciple's question about the signs of the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the trouble that would occur in those days. He begins here by warning His disciples about deceivers who would lead God's people astray.

Jesus' warning is significant. One of our clear protections against falsehood is the truth of God's Word. When the enemy wants to destroy the work God is doing, the first thing he will do is seek to compromise, water down or distract people from the Word. This is what is happening here. Prior to this great destruction, there would be an increase in falsehood, false prophecy, and error. Jesus tells us that if we want to be prepared for what is ahead, we need to remain true to the Word, for the days will come when that Word will be compromised and disregarded, issuing in a great destruction and devastation. "See to it," Jesus says, that no one leads you astray."

Verse 6

As the time of devastation drew near, Jesus told the disciples that they would see people coming in His name

declaring themselves to be the Messiah. Many false christs would arise in those days. Understand here that the Jewish concept of the Messiah, at that time, was a political saviour, who would set them free from Roman oppression and control. Jesus tells His disciples that there would be greater unrest as these false messiah's stirred up trouble in a Roman controlled Israel.

Verse 7

Jesus' response to His disciple's question about the devastation of the temple in Jerusalem moves beyond Israel to the world. He describes worldwide events that would take place in the years following His death.

Our Lord predicted worldwide unrest with nations rising against each other and delicate relations between countries that could, if provoked,

result in war. According to Jesus, however, this was only the beginning of the end. Much more would take place before the final devastation.

Verse 8

Worldwide unrest would follow the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nations would rise against each other. Jesus came that we might have peace with God, but not everyone would accept that peace. The death of Jesus would stir up the forces of hell to increase their efforts to defeat His kingdom. This would result in deep unrest around the world.

Beyond the political unrest, there would also be environmental catastrophes. Jesus predicted that following His death and resurrection, there would be an increase in earthquakes as the earth itself responded to His work.

Thirdly, Jesus tells us that famine would also increase as a result of this political and environmental unrest ravaging the earth.

Understand here that people would die as a result of these wars, earthquakes and famines. How many millions of lives have been lost since the resurrection of Jesus Christ to these natural disasters and political unrest? We are seeing the fulfilment of this prophetic word of Jesus in our day.

Jesus reminds His disciples here, however, that these events did not mean that the end was near. They were only the birth pains indicating that there was more to follow.

Verse 9

Jesus declared that after His death and resurrection, falsehood, political unrest, and environmental catastrophes would

become more common. He moves on next to describe a lack of tolerance for the truth of the gospel and a general persecution of those who belong to Jesus Christ.

Jesus told His disciples to be on their guard. Their lives would be in danger. They would be delivered to councils, governors and kings to determine their fate. Jews would beat them in synagogues.

Notice here that they were to bear witness to the name of Jesus on these occasions.

Their persecution would bring them places where they would not normally be able to go. They were to declare His name in those places.

Verse 10

Jesus informs His disciples that it was the will of God that the good news of

the gospel be proclaimed to all nations. This would have been a difficult concept for these disciples to understand, not only because of their Jewish mentality that saw themselves as the only children of God but also because of the sheer magnitude of the task of sharing the gospel with the whole world.

In our day of mass communication, we have a much better understanding of how this can happen. We are seeing the truth of this prophetic word of Christ come into fulfilment. People from every nation and tribe are now hearing the good news of Jesus Christ through our various communication channels.

It is the heart of God that every nation hears about His Son, Jesus Christ, and the work He has done on their behalf. One of the signs of the end is that despite the persecution of believers,

the gospel message will spread as never before to the ends of the earth.

Verse 11

While the gospel would spread to the ends of the earth, there would be a high cost.

Jesus informed His disciples that they would be handed over and tried for preaching in His name. Notice the phrase, “when they bring you to trial.” Their trial as believers was not a possibility but a reality. They were to live and serve the Lord, knowing that they would suffer and possibly even die for the sake of their Lord.

Notice the counsel of the Lord to those who would suffer for His sake. They were not to worry about what they would say to their accusers because when the moment came for them to speak, the Holy Spirit would give them what they were to say. Why would the

disciples need to talk to their accusers? There may be two reasons for this.

First, they may need to speak in defence of themselves. Jesus tells them, however, not to fret over this but to trust His Holy Spirit instead. It is easy to feel the need to defend and protect ourselves and our reputation, especially when falsely accused. There is one, however, who can defend us better than we can defend ourselves. Jesus calls His disciples to trust that the one who sent them could also defend them in their time of need.

The second reason why the disciple might need to speak is found in verse 9:

(9) "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my

sake, to bear witness before them.
– Mark 13:9 *ESV*

Notice that Jesus told the disciples that they would stand before governors and kings to bear witness before them. That is to say, they were brought before their accusers to testify to the Lord and share their hope in Him. While their accusers had evil intentions, God would use this to spread the good news of the gospel. His disciples would be brought before their strongest opponents to testify to the power of Christ and His salvation. Standing there before their accusers would have normally caused great fear. They would wonder if they would have the courage to stand strong and declare the Gospel message. Jesus tells them to trust the God who allowed them to stand before their enemies. He would give them boldness and words to speak when they needed them.

Verse 12

The intense hatred for the believer will increase as the days of the end draw near. Jesus told His disciples that this would be seen in how brother would deliver brother over to death. The word translated brother is ἀδελφός (adelphós). It comes from the word *a*, meaning unity and *delphús*, referring to the womb. The original idea was that brothers were individuals who shared the same womb or had a common mother. This meaning expanded, however, to refer to individuals who shared a common bond of any kind. What Jesus is saying is that the bitter hatred toward Christianity would be such that even individuals united in a common bond or experience would turn against each other because of Christ.

The days were coming when strong family ties would be insufficient to

protect the believer in Jesus Christ. A father would deliver his child over to death because of his faith. Children would stand against their parents and hand them over to be killed.

Jesus warned His disciples that hard times were coming. They would lose friends and family for His name's sake. Being a believer would be both costly and dangerous.

Verse 13

Jesus told His disciples that the day was coming when people would hate them because of His name. We sometimes have the fanciful idea that if we love Jesus and walk in love, forgiveness and compassion, everyone will love us. Who doesn't love a good Christian?

Jesus tells us, however, that this will not always be the case. The day will

come when Christians will be hated because of their stand. The moral principles of the Word of God rebuke the immorality of our day. The salvation Jesus offers calls for a death to self and an unconditional surrender of our lives to Christ. Kingdom principles stand in opposition to the ideals of this sinful world. Our stand against this world and its ungodliness will bring a strong reaction. Life will not be easy for those who commit themselves to resisting the world and embracing the purpose of God.

Jesus calls His disciples to endurance. He does not promise to make things easy, but we have His assurance that all who persevere will be saved.

We need to take a moment here to consider what Jesus means by the phrase, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Whenever we see the word saved in the New Testament, we automatically think of

our forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ. The word saved is σωζω (sōzō). It refers to being delivered, made whole or preserved and protected from harm. We can understand how this could be applied to the salvation of our souls through the work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is not telling us here, however, that our salvation depends on how well we endure persecution on this earth.

Admittedly, the persecution of the end times will weed out those whose faith is not genuine, but Jesus is not teaching a doctrine of works here. He is not telling us that our salvation depends on how well we can face trials and temptations. Our salvation is secure because of what Christ has done and not what we do.

If the phrase, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved," does not mean that we must successfully endure persecution to go

to heaven, then what does it mean? To understand what Jesus is saying, we need to see the word σῶζω (sōzō) in its broader sense. That is to say, God will deliver those who endure to the end. He will preserve those who persevere. He will make those who struggle under the weight of oppression whole again. Jesus is assuring those who struggle that the presence of God the Father will be with them to deliver, preserve and renew as they bear this trouble in His name.

Verse 14

Jesus prophesied about what He called the abomination of desolations. The word abomination is βδέλυγμα (bdélugma) and refers to something very impure, emitting a foul odour and considered to be abhorrent or

disgusting. In the Jewish mind, it was something ungodly and unclean.

The word desolation is ἐρήμωσις (erēmōsis) and refers to the process of making something desolate, deserted, or empty.

Jesus refers here to something so vile and disgusting that it made the place where it was located desolate and empty. Mark does not detail this abomination except to say it would be found in a place it should not be.

The phrase “abomination of desolation” is not unique to Jesus. Many years before this, the prophet Daniel used this phrase. Consider what Daniel prophesied in Daniel 9:26-27:

(26) And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the

sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. (27) And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.” – Daniel 9:26-27 ESV

Daniel predicted that an anointed one would be cut off, the city destroyed, and then there would come an abomination that made desolate.

The prophet went on to speak more about this in Daniel 12:10-11:

(10) Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked

shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. (11) And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. – Daniel 12:10-11 ESV

Notice here that wickedness would increase, regular offerings would be taken away, and an abomination that makes desolate set up.

Daniel's prophecy was partially fulfilled when, in 168 BC, Antiochus IV desecrated the temple, stopped the daily offerings and erected his pagan altar. Jesus seems to be predicting yet another desecration of the temple. Around AD 66 Zealots would enter the temple and slaughter its priests. Under Titus, in AD 70 Romans would invade Jerusalem, take over the temple building, polluting it with their

presence, pagan deities and ungodly activities.

Jesus warned His disciples of these events following His resurrection. He told them that when they saw these things unfolding, they were to flee Judea for the mountains.

Understand here that there is a time to take our stand, and there is also a time to retreat. Jesus encouraged His followers to retreat here. Evil would be unleashed upon the nation, and it would be better for believers to leave rather than remain in the wickedness that would unfold in the city. We need the wisdom of God to know when to take our stand and when to retreat.

Verse 15

Jesus told His disciples that when they saw signs of the desecration that would occur in the years to come, they

were to flee Judea. Observe the urgency of these times. Jesus told those on the housetop not to go down or enter their house to take anything out.

The natural response of a fleeing man is to look for his valuables to bring with him. Jesus tells His disciples, however, that the days would be so evil that they were not to consider their valuables. They were to flee with nothing rather than remain a second longer in this evil.

I wonder how well we have learned this lesson. How often we linger in sin just a little too long. Instead of fleeing, we go downstairs to pack up our valuables before considering our flight. Sometimes, that delay is all that is required for the enemy to target us with his arrow. Our love for the things of this world may very well be our demise.

Verse 16

To convey the urgency of fleeing the evil to come, Jesus tells those in the fields not to return to their homes even to get their cloak. The cloak would be considered a necessary item to protect one from the cold. Jesus tells us here that there are things more important than these necessities in life.

You can imagine the individual who heard that the Romans were invading their land, deciding to return to the city to collect what he considered essentials before fleeing. That decision to return to the city, however, might very well prove fatal. Evil is not something we can flirt with. All it takes is a second for temptation to hit its mark, and we become its prey. Jesus is encouraging a hasty retreat from evil here.

Verse 17

The nature of the trouble to come for believers is pictured in what Jesus says about pregnant mothers and their young infants. If there were anyone to show compassion to, it would be these. The words, "alas for women who are pregnant and those nursing infants," however, show us that there would be no compassion even for them. There is a hint here that the enemy would kill and injure even the most vulnerable.

Verse 18

Notice how Jesus encouraged His followers to pray that this great evil would not happen in winter. From a practical point of view, winter was cold and more dangerous for those fleeing the enemy.

Interestingly, Jesus does not tell His followers to pray that this evil would not happen, but that God would have compassion on them and time it so that

it would not be so troublesome or overwhelming.

Some things must happen. I don't pretend to understand why God allows certain events or people to do what they do. His purpose is beyond my ability to understand. I know that if I must face a certain trial, His grace will be sufficient for that trial. I may not be able to pray away the burden, but I can ask Him for grace to face it and that He would consider what I need to overcome.

Verse 19

In the days following the resurrection of Jesus, there would be great tribulation on the earth. Jesus describes this tribulation as worse than anything the world had seen from the beginning of creation until that day. He adds that such tribulation would never again be seen on this planet. The evil

unleashed on the earth would be as bad as it could get.

While the evil unleashed on Jerusalem in AD 70 was bad, the words of Jesus may speak of days yet to come. The book of Revelation describes horrible events before the return of the Lord. The events described in this last book of the Bible will bring about the end of this earth as we know it. It would seem reasonable to understand that the events described by Jesus were not contained in Jerusalem at a certain period of history but are continuing to unfold and will only be brought to an end by His second coming.

Verse 20

While these days of evil must be, notice the compassion of the Lord in these times. Jesus tells us that God would cut them short for the sake of the elect.

Note first that Jesus told His disciples that the Lord would cut short these days. The Greek word translated, cut short is κολοβόω (kolobóō) and refers to something that is maimed or mutilated. When used to speak of time, it has the sense of shortening or bringing to an end. It is a fairly strong word and speaks of the power of God at work in shutting down the evil in those days. It shows us that as powerful as the influences of that day were, God was still in control.

Notice the power of evil unleashed in those days in the phrase, "No human being would be saved." If it were not for the intervention of God, every human being on the earth would be destroyed. No human army or wisdom could counter this terrible evil. But for God, this evil would overcome us all.

Finally, note that God takes action on behalf of "the elect, whom He chose." God's heart was for His children.

Among those who suffered in this great unleashing of evil were His people, who loved Him and belonged to Him. His heart would go out to them, and He would act compassionately on their behalf, bringing this great tribulation to an end and giving them relief.

Verse 21

Jesus told His disciples that the tribulation to come would bring out many false christs.

At that time, these false christs would offer hope to the suffering at the expense of truth. We can understand how appealing that might be to those agonizing under the cruelty of the day. Jesus warns His followers, however, about believing the false claims of these imposters. False hope is no hope at all.

Verse 22

The attractiveness of these false christs is seen not only because of the cruelty of the day but also because they would perform signs and wonders, offering false hope to those who saw them. Jesus tells us, however, that the purpose behind these signs and wonders was "to lead astray, if possible, the elect."

Note first here that the power behind these false prophets was evil. They would "perform signs and wonders, to lead astray." That is to say, the forces behind these prophets intended to deceive and lead people away from Jesus and His purpose.

I am not convinced that all of these false prophets will be aware that they are acting for evil. It would seem completely logical to assume that even they were being deceived and manipulated by forces of evil.

Notice, finally, the words “if possible.” The idea is that while demonic forces were attempting to lead the children of God astray, there was a power greater than theirs at work in the lives of God’s chosen children. The Spirit of God was also at work, revealing the truth and keeping His people true to Christ, His Word and His purpose.

Verse 23

Jesus challenges His disciples to be on guard. The word translated guard is βλέπω (blépō) and means, to see. The idea here is that those who had been forewarned were to be looking for the fulfilments of what Jesus told them. They were to be ever watching and waiting like guards scanning the horizon for any sign of enemy attack.

Verse 24

As Jesus continues to describe what would occur after His resurrection, He moves forward in time to the days after the tribulation that God would cut short for the sake of His children. He tells His disciples about days when the sun would be darkened, and the moon would no longer give its light. It is helpful to see that the apostle John also predicted that this would happen in his prophecy in Revelation 6:12:

(12) When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood – Revelation 6:12 ESV

He describes a similar event to come in Revelation 8:12:

(12) The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon,

and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. – Revelation 8:12 ESV

This shows us that the words of Jesus, while in part fulfilled in the days just after His resurrection, are still awaiting further fulfilment in our day. He describes events here that we have still yet to see.

Verse 25

The day will come when the sun darkens (verse 24). Jesus tells His disciples that in those days, there would be great unrest in the sky, and stars would fall from heaven. The apostle John wrote about this in Revelation 6 when he says:

*(12) When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, (13) and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.
– Revelation 6:12-13 ESV*

John sees in his vision exactly what Jesus predicted: a great earthquake and shaking of the world, the darkening sun and moon, and stars falling from the sky. We still await the fulfilments of this prophetic word.

Verse 26

Jesus has just described a time when the sun would be darkened, and the stars fall from the heavens. He tells the disciples that when they saw these things happen, His second coming

would be near. He informed them that in those days, they would see Him coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

Notice how Jesus describes Himself as the Son of Man. The designation "Son of Man" comes from the prophecy of Daniel, where he describes one as the son of man receiving an everlasting dominion of glory over all nations from the Ancient of Days.

13 "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he went to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his

kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14, ESV

This prophecy of Daniel was understood by the Jews of Jesus' time to refer to the Messiah. Jesus declared that He would return as the Messiah a second time. Notice, however, that, unlike His first coming, the Lord Jesus would come this second time in "great power and glory." When He came as a baby, He came mostly unnoticed and in very humble circumstances, but this will not be the case upon His return.

Verse 27

When Jesus returns the second time, He tells us He will send out His angels to gather His elect from the four winds, the ends of the earth and heaven.

Notice first that these angels, sent by Christ, would gather his elect. The elect

refers to those who belong to the Lord Jesus.

Second, these angels gathered these elect from the four winds. The phrase “four winds” is used several times in the Bible. The apostle John seems to explain this when he wrote in Revelation 1:7:

(1) After this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. – Revelation 7:1 ESV

Notice how the four angels stood at each corner of the earth, holding back the wind. The idea seems to be that these angels stood at that north, south, east, and west. When Jesus tells us that He would send his angels to the four winds, he is telling us that

He was sending them in all directions to find those who belonged to Him.

Notice finally here that these angels would go in obedience to the command of Jesus to every corner of the earth and heaven in search of those who belonged to the Messiah. No corner would be overlooked. There would be no place too remote or dark for these angels to go. Not one child of God would be forgotten or undiscovered.

Verse 28

It was common knowledge that when the fig tree began to produce leaves, the summer was near. This was one clear evidence of signs of the approach of warmer weather, a sign of the season to come.

Verse 29

Jesus explains His point about the fig tree producing leaves as a sign of summer. He tells His disciples that when they saw signs of political unrest, false christs, tribulation, the sun darkening, and stars falling from the sky, they were to understand that the day of His return was approaching and that He was at their gates getting ready to enter their world for the second time.

Verse 30

Jesus seems to place a time on these prophecies here. He tells His disciples, "This generation will not pass away until all these things occur." There are several details we need to consider here.

Notice first the reference to "this generation." The word used here is γενεά (geneá). It has a couple of uses in the New Testament.

The word γενεά (geneá) may refer to the children of any given family. These children grow up, marry, and their offspring begin a whole new generation in the family.

The word γενεά (geneá) has a larger definition, however, and can refer to a period of time that is defined by certain parameters. For example, we are living in a very technological generation. The sense here is that the people of our day share a common experience with technology. There can be many different parameters that define or unite a people of a certain period of time. Jesus describes the people of His day as a sinful and rebellious generation (see Matthew 12:39; Mark 8:38; Luke 16:8). In this use of the word, generation, there is no specific time associated with the generation. How long does this sinful generation last? We could say that we are still in this generation. A technological

generation could last for hundreds or even thousands of years.

The question we are forced to ask ourselves here is this: How is Jesus using the word γενεά (geneá) here? It seems to me that He is using it in both senses.

First, the familial generation that lived in those days would see a partial fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus in the devastation that took place in AD 70, when the Romans invaded and set themselves up in the temple, causing great desolation for the people of Jerusalem. People were living in Jesus' day. Who would see this prophecy fulfilled?

On the other hand, notice the words "until all these things take place." Jesus told His disciples that all His words would come to pass before this generation passed away. Part of the words of Jesus in this passage related

to His return and the signs in the heavens that introduced His second coming. These prophecies have not yet come to pass. Therefore, we must see the word γενεά (geneá) here in its fuller sense. This sinful generation will not pass away until Jesus returns and brings His final judgment. In this sense, we are part of that generation Jesus refers to here. We await the fulfilment of all His words.

Verse 31

Jesus assured His disciples of the certainty of His words. While He may be specifically speaking here about His prophecy about the end times recorded for us here by Mark, we should not limit the application of this verse to these words only. Jesus tells His disciples that heaven and earth would pass away, but His words were surer than this. They were more reliable than

the earth and the heavens, would last longer and were more secure and trustworthy.

Verse 32

Jesus told His disciples that this sinful generation would not pass away until He returned to Judge them. He reminds us here, however, that no one knows when that day will be. Let's break down what Jesus is saying here.

First, Jesus has just told His disciples what the signs of His second coming would be. He taught that when they saw these signs, they were to understand that He was even then at their gate (Mark 13:29). Clearly, we can discern that the coming of Jesus is nearby through these signs.

Notice second that Jesus speaks here about the day and hour. While we can discern, through the signs of the times,

that Jesus' return is near, our Lord tells us that the specific day or hour is unknown to anyone. Though many have tried, no one can put a date and hour on His return. Jesus told His disciples that only the Father knew the day and hour. He informs them that neither the angels nor the Son know the exact day and hour.

The idea that the Son of God should not know the day and hour of His return has troubled many. If Jesus is God, how can He not know all things? We should not read too much into this statement of Jesus. It seems best that we understand it from the perspective of Jesus' submission to the Father. It would be at the command of the Father in heaven alone that He would break through the skies and make His presence known. Imagine a great military commander sitting on his horse, sword in hand, with his army behind him. In the silence, every ear is

attentive to the sound of the trumpet, ordering the attack. Jesus will break through the clouds at that word of the Father. He does not take this on Himself but submits to the precise timing of the Father as the heavenly military commander.

Verse 33

Because we do not know the day or hour of the Lord's return, we need to be on guard and keep awake. It should be noted that some ancient manuscripts add the words "and pray" to this list.

The phrase, "Be on guard" is translated from the word βλέπω (blépō). It refers to the ability to see with the eyes. Beyond this, however, the phrase refers to the ability to understand with the mind. Further, it carries the sense of being conscious of or carefully watching something. What

Jesus is telling His disciples here is that they were to be watching for the signs of the time, understand what He taught them about those signs and take heed to live in a state of preparedness.

The second phrase, "be awake," is translated from ἀγρυπνέω (agrupnéō) derived from the word α, meaning without, and húpnos, meaning sleep. In other words, be without sleep. Imagine a guard on duty at the city gate. That guard is to be careful not to fall asleep but watch constantly, always ready to sound the alarm in the event of an enemy attack. Jesus is telling His disciples that they were never to let their guard down. They were in the midst of a spiritual battle, and the enemy was constantly looking for an opportunity for his arrow to penetrate. When they were least expecting it, the Lord Jesus would come. He calls them

to be always ready and waiting for that return.

Verse 34

Jesus illustrates what He means about being ready by telling a story of a man who went on a journey. Before leaving on that journey, he put servants in charge of various responsibilities in his absence. He particularly challenges the doorkeeper to stay awake.

This is what the Lord Jesus has done. He left this earth, rising to be with His Father, but will one day return. In the meantime, He has given the responsibility of caring for His church to us as His representatives. Notice particularly the reference to the doorkeeper. It was his responsibility to protect those in the home. As these servants carried out the daily routine, the doorkeeper watched the door, protecting them from danger but also

watching for any signs of the master's return. The roles of service in the home and doorkeeper were both necessary. In particular, this doorkeeper was to stay awake, always guarding and watching over those who were in the home. God has given the church doorkeepers to guard it from false influences and teaching but also to keep us prepared for the return of our Lord.

Verse 35

Not knowing when Jesus will return ought to keep us alert. Jesus reminds us here that He might return in the evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or later in the morning. We do not know the day or hour. What is important, according to Jesus, is for us to stay awake.

Being awake implies constant diligence to do the work of the Lord and walk in

His ways.

The enemy will seek to lull us to sleep or distract us from our God-given responsibilities. We will find ourselves tempted to compromise in our doctrine and commitment to the principles of God's Word, or we will become less than faithful in the calling of God on our lives. We must be ready to give everything we have and not give up.

Verse 36

Notice the reason we should always be alert — “lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.” There is nothing wrong with sleep and rest. Listen to the words of Jesus to His disciples in Mark 6:31-32:

(31) And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they

*had no leisure even to eat. (32)
And they went away in the boat to
a desolate place by themselves. –
Mark 6:31-32 ESV*

The sleep Jesus speaks about here is not a rest from hard work but a spirit of compromise, irresponsibility and slackness in spiritual matters. This is what we do not want our Lord to see when He returns.

Verse 37

Jesus wants to clarify that the words He shares with His disciples here, He intended for all believers. He wants to explain that every Christian is responsible for being faithful and diligent in their spiritual responsibilities. He will return at a time unknown to all and demand an accounting. We are, therefore, to be diligent, never give up,

and never compromise in our faith and spiritual walk.

MARK 14

Verse 1

Jesus and His disciples have been in the region of Jerusalem. It is now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The Passover was a significant celebration for the Jewish community. It commemorated the day when the angel of death passed over their homes in Egypt, sparing the firstborn sons in every home where the blood of a lamb was painted on the doorpost. God instituted the annual celebration of the Passover in Exodus 12:43-49 in remembrance of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated at the time of the Passover. For seven days, the people of God did not eat bread with leaven or yeast. This is detailed in Exodus 13: 6-10:

(6) Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. (7) Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. (8) You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (9) And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. With a strong hand, the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. (10) You shall, therefore, keep this

statute at its appointed time from year to year. – Exodus 13:6-10 ESV

It is striking to note that as they were so diligently keeping the law regarding the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, the chief priest and scribes were seeking means to arrest Jesus “by stealth and kill Him.”

The word translated as “stealth” is δόλος (dólos). It speaks of fraud and deceit. In other words, they were trying to find any means possible, honest or dishonest, to arrest Jesus and kill Him. Their religion was only surface-deep. They were very keen on the externals, but inside, they were full of corruption and evil.

Verse 2

The chief priests and scribes intended to arrest Jesus and kill Him. They did not want to do this during the

celebration of the feast because it might have created an uproar.

The religious leaders did not want to arrest Jesus during the feast "lest there be an uproar from the people." Let me say a couple of things about this.

First, the Passover brought multitudes of people into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus had for three years been moving among those people, healing their sick and teaching. We have records of thousands of people gathering around Jesus as He taught. He had an impact on many lives. When He came into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey, the streets were lined with cheering crowds. We can only imagine what the result would have been, at this time, if the chief priests and scribes arrested and put Jesus to death.

Second, we see here the motivation and priorities of the religious leaders.

They believed they needed to kill Jesus, but they wanted to do so secretly because they were afraid of the people. They tried to get rid of Jesus but maintained the support of the crowd. What the Jews thought about them was a big matter for them. They wanted a following, but Jesus was exposing them as hypocrites. They were more concerned with maintaining a following than with the truth Jesus proclaimed.

Verse 3

At this time of the Jewish Passover, Jesus and His disciples are staying in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. They have been making regular trips to the city. According to Mark, Jesus was "in the house of Simon, the leper." It is uncertain whether this was the home where He and His disciples were

staying or whether they were visiting His home.

The name Simon, the leper, shows us that this man had been a leper. Did Jesus heal him of his leprosy? Mark does not tell us here, but clearly, there was some connection between Jesus and Simon. He is not the principal subject of this story.

Mark tells us what Jesus and His disciples were doing at Simon's home in the words, "he was reclining at the table." They were eating a meal.

As the meal progressed, a woman came to the house with an alabaster flask. Alabaster is a soft rock that can be used for carving. This alabaster flask contained an ointment of pure nard. Mark describes it as being "very costly." The value is estimated in verse 5 as three hundred denarii or three hundred day's wages.

This woman took the contents of this flask and poured it over Jesus' head in an extravagant act of worship.

Verse 4

Jesus was not the only person at the meal at Simon's home. There were individuals present that day who saw how this woman had anointed Jesus' head with this very costly ointment. Some of them felt that what she did was a waste. They had a different opinion about how that perfume could have been better used. This is the nature of the body of Christ. We have various opinions, gifts and viewpoints. The challenge is to learn how to work together with those differences.

Verse 5

Those who believed the woman's act was a waste expressed how it could

have been sold for three hundred denarii (the equivalent of 300 days' wages). The money obtained from this ointment could then have been given to the poor. Mark tells us that these individuals "scolded" the woman for her decision.

Understand here that the ointment belonged to this woman. It was her right to use it as she saw fit. No one in that group would have scolded her if she kept it and used it for her enjoyment. Why, then, did they scold or reprimand her when she decided to give it away?

We all have our priorities, and it is very easy for us to put those priorities on other people. Clearly, this woman saw Jesus as a worthy recipient, and this was her priority at that time.

Verse 6

When Jesus heard individuals in the group scolding the woman who had anointed His head, He spoke up in her defence. He told them to "Leave her alone."

Notice that this scolding had troubled the woman. I receive thousands of requests for books and funds. For every need I choose to give to, there are many more requests. Everyone feels that their need is the most urgent. I have often been "troubled" by these many requests and demands. I always struggle to know how God wants me to use what He has given.

Consider what is happening here. This woman, with a pure heart and flask of pure nard, approached Jesus to offer a gift of praise and thanksgiving. Her heart was filled with joy and peace as she brought her gift and anointed His head. Then she heard the whispering voices condemning her act of praise. They rose into a scolding consensus

and rebuked her for her lack of compassion for the poor. Her joy was transformed into trouble, doubt and discouragement. The worship of the moment was shattered by rebuke, bitterness and anger.

Then, out of that thick and dark cloud of confusion came the voice of Jesus, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." Jesus rebuked the spirit in that room and restored her worship and gratitude. How easy it is for us to allow Satan a foothold.

Verse 7

I can imagine that the woman who had anointed Jesus with nard was quite confused and troubled by the rebuking voices in that room. If I were her, I would wonder if I did the right thing by pouring this perfume over Jesus' head rather than feeding the poor. Notice,

however, that Jesus affirmed in verse 6 that she had done a beautiful thing for Him. He does not stop there, however, but moves on to speak to this matter of giving to the poor. Jesus reminded those present that the poor would always be on this earth. They would be able to do good to them whenever they wanted. On the other hand, He would soon be taken from them. This was the time to minister to Him. In saying this, Jesus affirms the woman's decision to anoint Him with ointment instead of giving it to the poor.

Verse 8

Still speaking in defence of the woman who anointed Him with nard, Jesus declared to all present in Simon's home that this act was symbolic. Jesus tells those present that the woman had anointed His body beforehand for burial.

It is not likely that the woman understood this was what she was doing. The body of the deceased was anointed with ointment and spices out of respect and to help preserve it. Jesus interprets her act as a loving gesture preparing Him for burial.

The woman's act was prophetic and declared the death of Jesus to those present. It was also a reminder to Jesus that His time on this earth was coming to an end.

Could the perfume be sold, and the money given to the poor? Yes, and it would have been good use for it. Was the act of anointing Jesus with it instead a waste? No, for it was the purpose of God to anoint Him in preparation for His death. The woman acted in God's will and purpose in what she did.

Verse 9

As Jesus concludes His words about the woman who anointed Him for burial, He tells those present that wherever the gospel of His death and resurrection was declared around the world, the story of what this woman had done and her role in anointing Him, would be part of that story. In saying this, Jesus blesses the woman and her act by calling it to be remembered wherever the gospel was preached.

Verse 10

It was after the women anointed Jesus with nard that Judas went to the chief priest to betray Jesus. Her act seemed to set in motion the final events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Notice that Mark tells us that Judas betrayed Jesus. The word translated betray is παραδίδωμι (paradídōmi). It

comes from the phrase *pará*, meaning to the side of or over to, and *dídōmi*, meaning to give. The sense here is to give someone over to someone else. Generally, this handing over is seen in a negative sense. That is to say, the person being delivered over will likely be hurt, condemned or possibly even killed as a result.

In using the word betray, Mark is conveying an intentional act. Judas knew what he was doing and sided with the chief priests in an attempt to arrest and kill Jesus. We are not told what brought Judas to this point in his relationship with Jesus. The apostle John tells us that Satan had entered him, and this was likely a big part of the betrayal:

(26) Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he

gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. (27) Then, after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." – John 13:26-27 ESV

Verse 11

Note the response of the chief priests to the news of Judas' desire to betray Jesus — "they were glad and promised to give him money." These religious leaders had been looking for an opportunity to arrest and kill Jesus. Judas provided them with the solution. This rejoiced their hearts. The idea of murder rejoicing the hearts of the religious leaders is very troubling and reveals the evil of their hearts and bitter hatred of Jesus.

We learn from Matthew 26 that Judas asked the chief priests for money to betray Jesus:

(14) Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests (15) and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. – Matthew 26:14-15 ESV

This adds another dimension to our understanding of Judas' motivation. He would profit financially from betraying his Master, and money meant more to him than devotion to Him. With a promise of thirty pieces of silver in hand, Judas began looking for a plan.

Thirty pieces of silver was a significant amount of money, but many commentators estimate it to be the cost of an average slave based on the law of Moses in Exodus 21:32:

(32) If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver,

*and the ox shall be stoned. –
Exodus 21:32 ESV*

The chief priests would pay no more for Jesus' life than what the law required if an ox gored and killed a common slave.

Verse 12

It was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus and His disciples were preparing for the Passover meal. On that day, a lamb was sacrificed and eaten by the Jewish family. According to Jewish law, this Passover lamb was to be eaten in Jerusalem, so the disciples were looking for a place to gather for the meal. They bring the matter up to Jesus and ask Him where they should go to prepare.

Verse 13

Jesus sends two of His disciples into the city in response to their question about where to prepare the Passover meal. He gave these two men particular instructions. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they would see a man carrying a jar of water. They were to follow him. As most homes did not have running water, this man, possibly a family servant, would likely be bringing this jar of water to the house where he served. It was at this home the disciples were to prepare the Passover.

Verse 14

The disciples were to follow the man carrying water to the house where they were to prepare the Passover meal. When they saw where he entered, they were to speak to the master of the house and tell him that “the Teacher” was wondering where

the guest room was so He could eat the Passover with His disciples. The assumption here is that this master would have known about Jesus and His disciples, and there was no need for any introductions and explanations.

Verse 15

Jesus told His two disciples that the master of the house would show them an upper room to prepare for Him and their fellow disciples. According to Jesus, this room was already “furnished and ready.” It is hard to understand what the phrase “furnished and ready” meant, but we can assume it had a table and appropriate seating for Jesus and His disciples. Likely, all these two disciples had to do was prepare the food and wait for Jesus to arrive with their brothers.

Verse 16

Mark tells us that these two disciples, sent out by Jesus, went into the city, found the man Jesus was speaking about and talked to the master of the house. Everything was just as Jesus said it would be, and so they prepared the Passover.

Verse 17

It was in the evening that Jesus arrived at the house the disciples had prepared for the Passover.

Notice the phrase, "he came with the twelve." It is unclear what Mark implied by this. Two of the twelve disciples had gone to prepare the room, so only ten other disciples remained with Jesus. It may be that these two completed their preparations and returned to Jesus, coming back later with Him for the meal. It is also possible that the phrase, "he came with the twelve," implies that there was a party of

twelve disciples and Jesus in the room as guests.

Verse 18

As they were reclining and eating at the table, Jesus made an astonishing declaration. "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." The word betray in the Greek language is παραδίδωμι (paradídōmi). It refers to handing someone over to another with evil intent.

What is particularly striking are the words "one who is eating with me." It was not a stranger who would betray Jesus but a friend who sat in that intimate group celebrating Passover with Him. We can only imagine the shock that reverberated through the room and the questions it would have stirred in the bewildered minds of the disciples present that evening.

Verse 19

The disciples' response to the news that one of them would betray Jesus is twofold.

First, "they began to be sorrowful." The word translated as "sorrowful" is λυπέω (lupéō). It speaks of grief, sadness and affliction. It is a fairly strong word and would have changed the atmosphere at that table from joyous celebration to grief and pain.

Second, they all begin asking Jesus if it was them who would betray Him. It is striking that they do not point the finger at each other instead. The fact that they question themselves shows us just how baffled they were by this statement. It also shows us that they were taken by surprise. None of them knew the betrayer's identity, and it seemed as likely that any of them could be the one Jesus was speaking about.

Verse 20

Jesus responds here to the question posed by the disciples regarding the identity of the betrayer. Notice that He does not give the name of this individual. Instead, He informs the disciples that it was the one who dipped bread into the dish with Him.

Eating together demonstrated a bond between those who gathered around the same table. To hear that someone would betray that bond was unimaginable. Note, however, that not only did the disciples share the same table, but in this case, at least one of them shared the same dish with Jesus at that table. Mark does not tell us what was in that dish, but some scholars believe it may have been bitter herbs into which the participants would dip their bread.

The context would lead us to understand that everyone at that table

did not share that dish. Otherwise, the identity of the individual could never have been known. There were likely multiple dishes into which the disciples dipped their bread as they ate. These dishes were placed in different places on the table, and disciples dipped bread into the dish closest to them. In this case, Jesus shared His dish with a single disciple sitting near Him that evening.

Verse 21

Having given the disciples a clue as to the identity of the individual who would betray Him, Jesus shared two important facts about this betrayal.

First, Jesus told His disciples that God's purpose was that He leave them. Prophecy foretold that He would be crucified and die.

21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him

Second, Jesus issues a stern warning to Judas about betraying Him:

But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

Jesus tells Judas, who sat at the table with Him, that there were serious consequences for him if he went through with his plan to betray Him. Jesus does not go into detail about these consequences, except to say what he would suffer as a result of his betrayal would be so horrendous that he would wish he had never been born.

Note here the tension between the foreknowledge of God and the actions of Judas and Jesus' warning. If the prophets predicted that Jesus would

die, did Judas have an option not to betray Him?

Humans are subject to time and see everything in the past, present and future. God sees and knows the future as the past and present. From eternity past, God saw what would happen and recorded these events as if they had already happened. Yes, we have a choice in what we do and how we live. Yes, we can heed the warning and cease our evil plans. Yes, God already knows the decisions we will make.

Verse 22

Jesus and His disciples now sit down to eat the Passover meal. During that meal, Jesus took bread and blessed it. The word translated bless here is εὐλογέω (eulogéō). It comes from the word eulogḗ, meaning good or well, and lógos, meaning word. In a general sense it refers to speaking well of

someone or something. Beyond this, however, it also speaks of praying for a person's welfare or devoting an object to God for His glory and honour.

Writing about this incident, the apostle Paul says:

(23) For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, (24) and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." – 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 ESV

The apostle described what Jesus did that evening, when He blessed the bread, as "giving thanks." In other words, Jesus thanked the Father for the bread and what it represented.

Notice that Jesus also broke the bread, telling His disciples that this

was His body. Jesus was demonstrating, using a very simple illustration, what would happen to His physical body. The time was fast approaching when His body would be broken like this bread.

By breaking the bread Jesus adds another dimension to what He did when He gave thanks and blessed that bread. In essence, Jesus thanked the Father for the work that would shortly be accomplished. He would be handed over to His enemies. They would beat Him and cruelly kill Him. This is what the bread represented to Jesus as He picked it up that evening. Still, Jesus gave thanks. He asked for His Father's blessing on this work that would be accomplished and praised Him for the plan set in motion for the forgiveness of sin and the establishment of an eternal kingdom filled with those who accepted what He had done for them.

It is hard to know what the disciples understood by this symbol. Certainly, when Jesus died, the message of the bread would come alive to them.

Verse 23

After breaking the bread and giving thanks, Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

The imagery here is one of a common cup from which all the disciples drank — “He took a cup ... and gave it to them.” The wine came from a single cup. It was that one body that was broken for them.

Verse 24

Jesus explains the cup as the “blood of the covenant, pour out for many.”

A covenant is a binding agreement between two or more individuals. In this case, it was an agreement between the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit and humanity.

When a covenant was made between two or more parties, it needed to be agreed upon and made official. Sometimes, this would mean affixing an official seal. At other times, it would be signed by both parties. In other cases, it was sealed by an act of death. An animal was sacrificed to ratify the agreement before God between the two parties involved.

Jesus tells us that the cup was the blood of the covenant. In other words, this covenant He was making was sealed by a sacrifice and the blood of that sacrifice. Observe here the little word "my." Jesus told His disciples that the blood and death that would seal this covenant between God and humanity was His blood and His death.

Jesus' blood would be poured out for many. The word "many" here is πολὺς (polús) and refers to a large number or multitude of people. Some might see this as saying that

Jesus did not shed His blood for all people but only a selected group referred to here as "many." The word πολὺς is not necessarily intended, however, to limit the number of people for whom Jesus' died, but rather to demonstrate the vast number of people for whom this blood was shed.

Verse 25

As Jesus lifted up the cup to drink it, He told His disciples that this would be the last time He would drink of the fruit of the vine until they shared a glass in the kingdom of God. Jesus was informing His disciples that He would soon be leaving them.

Observe the phrase, “When I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” The word “new” refers not to the kingdom but to the cup. Jesus tells His disciples, here that He would drink a new cup in the kingdom of God. Matthew helps us to understand what Jesus is speaking about when he writes:

(29) I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” – Matthew 26:29 ESV

The new cup Jesus would drink would be with His disciples in the “Father’s kingdom.” The next time Jesus and the disciples shared this cup would be in heaven with the Father.

Verse 26

As the Lord and His disciples completed their meal, they sang a hymn together, left the room where they had eaten the Passover meal, and went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples are unaware of what would occur in that location, but Jesus seems fully aware of the events about to transpire.

Verse 27

There, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus made a startling declaration. He told the disciples that they would all fall away in fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7:

(7) "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand

*against the little ones. – Zechariah
13:7 ESV*

Zechariah predicted a shepherd would be struck resulting in the sheep being scattered. Jesus is the shepherd referred to by Zechariah. He was betrayed by Judas, the man standing next to Him. Jesus informs the disciples that the remainder of the prophecy would be fulfilled. The disciples, as His sheep, were about to be scattered. At this precise moment in time, the disciples had no way of understanding how this would take place. Jesus, however, knew what was about to transpire and what the result would be in the minds and hearts of His disciples.

Verse 28

Jesus offers a word of encouragement to His disciples here. He tells them that

while the shepherd would be struck and the sheep scattered, He would rise from the dead and go before them to Galilee.

We can only imagine how confusing these words must have been to the disciples, who, at this point, did not understand the necessity of Christ's death and had no concept of the resurrection.

Verse 29

The idea that they would scatter like sheep was somewhat offensive to Peter. He told Jesus that even if every other disciple fell away, he would remain faithful. Let me make two points here.

First, observe Peter's inflated view of himself and his relationship with Christ. He was not aware of how weak he was. He was one incident away from

abandoning Jesus to His enemies. Beyond this, he would prove to be so ashamed of Jesus that he would deny knowing Him three times. We must always be on our guard, for we are only one incident away from turning our back on Him. Were it not for the preserving work of God's Spirit, we would all be scattered like the disciples. This is a warning to us to take care and be ever watchful.

Second, consider what Jesus just told Peter. He quoted a prophecy from Zechariah predicting that the sheep would be scattered. Peter understood what Jesus implied because he told Jesus that while everyone else would abandon Him, this would not be the case for him.

Listen to the words of Jesus here: "You will all fall away, for it is written." Jesus is very clear in what He says. All of them would fall away. This was confirmed by the prophet Zechariah.

Peter denies what Jesus said and tells Jesus that the prophecy of Zechariah did not apply to him.

Peter's refusal to take the word of Jesus and the prophecy of Zechariah seriously was a grave matter. He declared that Jesus was wrong in His declaration. He lifted himself above the inspired word of prophecy and said that it didn't apply to him. If there is anyone who will be scattered and fall, it is those who, like Peter, deny the teaching of Jesus and the inspired word of prophecy.

Verse 30

Jesus does not rebuke Peter here. He tells him, however, that his bold declaration would be proven that very night. Jesus told Peter that before the night was over, he would deny Him three times.

Sometimes, the greatest rebuke is our own experience. Peter would fall worse than any other disciple apart from Judas. His boldness and pride needed to be corrected. But before it was corrected, it would get him into serious trouble. God did not give up on Peter, but He did allow him to learn by failing and falling hard.

Verse 31

Note that Jesus' declaration does not change Peter's attitude. Jesus told him he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed the next morning. Peter takes a stand against the word of Jesus and says: "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."

Peter boldly declares that Jesus was wrong. What Jesus proclaimed as fact; Peter denied. Such was the pride of Peter. He stated that he knew better than Jesus, his master. Possibly

spurred on by Peter, notice that the other disciples proclaimed that they would rather die than deny Him. Before the night was over, however, they would all fail their Lord.

Verse 32

Mark tells us that after His conversation with the disciples and declaration that they would abandon Him, Jesus went down the mountain to Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane means “oil press” and may have been where they pressed the olives harvested on the hilltop to make oil.

This location provided some privacy for Jesus as He intended to pray. Needing time with His Father, Jesus asked the disciples to stay in a certain location while He found a private location to pray.

Verse 33

As the hour of His arrest drew near, Jesus needed time alone with His Father to pray. In verse 32, He told His disciples to remain in a certain location and went off to pray. Note, however, that while Jesus left eight of them, He took Peter, James and John with Him. We learn from verse 34 that He had a specific task for them. That task had to do with His troubled spirit. Mark tells us that Jesus began to be “greatly distressed and troubled.”

The word translated, greatly distressed, is ἐκθαμβέω (ekthambéō). It speaks of astonishment or amazement. It can refer to something positive or negative. In this case, Jesus is astonished or amazed at the burden He will shortly bear. The weight of what He is about to do is overwhelming His human mind.

The second word used in the verse is ἀδημονέω (adēmonéō). It is translated as troubled. It means to faint or be overwhelmed with a burden.

Both words indicate that Jesus experienced deep mental anguish at the thought of what was ahead. While Jesus perfectly trusted the Father, He still experienced mental agony. Mental anxiety, stress and feeling overwhelmed are normal human experiences. Feeling them in times of deep stress does not indicate that we do not trust the Lord. Those who trust the Lord will push forward despite the anxiety and fear. They will not allow their mental anguish to keep them from walking in obedience.

Verse 34

We discover here why Jesus asked Peter, James and John to go with Him as He went to pray. He tells these three

men that His soul was very sorrowful, even to death. The word sorrowful in the original language is περίλυπος (perílupos). It is derived from περί, meaning about and λύπῃ, meaning sorrow. Together, they carry the sense of being surrounded by grief and mental anguish. The addition of the phrase “even to death” indicates just how deeply Jesus was feeling overwhelmed by sorrow and grief. It was enough to make Him want to die to escape that pain.

Notice that after sharing personally with these three closest disciples the depth of His emotional agony, Jesus has a request for them. He asks them to remain there and watch. The word translated, watch, is γρηγορέω (grēgoreúō). It means to refrain from sleep. The idea is to be attentive and alert, watching for danger. This involves praying and diligence in one’s spiritual walk.

In combination with the confession of Jesus about His mental anguish, the word seems to imply that Jesus is looking for their prayerful support. He is about to endure a great trial and affliction and needs His brothers to pray with Him, pleading with the Father to strengthen and support Him in His hour of need.

Jesus believed in prayer. He knew it would make a difference in the agony before Him.

He enlists Peter, James and John as His supporters in this need.

Verse 35

Leaving Peter, James and John alone, Jesus moved a distance from them and fell to the ground. This act of falling to the ground is likely an indication of the depth of grief He felt.

Notice the prayer of Jesus here. He asked the Father that the hour might pass from Him. Jesus knew what that hour would bring. It would bring betrayal and arrest. This, in turn, would lead to great injustice, physical and mental abuse and ultimately to death. He did not look forward to this. He found no delight in what would happen to His body and mind in the coming hours. This grieved Him deeply, and His spirit was in terrible agony. Observe some important details here.

First, Jesus brought what He was feeling to the Father. He wanted this hour to pass from Him. He told the Father what He was feeling and asked Him about it. He shows us that we can express our honest feelings to God in prayer.

Second, note that Jesus prefaces what He says here with the words "if it were possible." Some people believe that by

adding such phrases to our prayers, we demonstrate a lack of faith. This is not the case for Jesus. Jesus is willing to share what He is feeling with the Father but demonstrates here by this phrase that His greater desire is to do His will.

Jesus agonized over the will of the Father but chose to walk in obedience and submission even when it was hard to do so. He prayed that the hour pass, but His greater priority was to be in the centre of His Father's will, no matter how difficult that was.

Verse 36

After asking the Father for the hour He was about to endure to pass from Him, Jesus intensified His request by asking that the cup He was about to drink be removed.

Note Jesus' reference to the cup. The cup Jesus is referring to here is His death. This is evident by what Jesus told His disciples at the Last Supper:

(24) He told them, "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many. – Mark 14:24 ESV

Taking the cup that evening, Jesus told them that it represented His blood that would be shed to seal a new covenant between God and humanity.

When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter responded by pulling out his sword to fight them off. Notice the words of Jesus to Peter that night:

(11) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" – John 18:11 ESV

Jesus refers to His arrest and the death that would follow as the cup the Father gave

Him. Jesus prays here and asks the Father to spare Him from death.

Notice also here that Jesus adds the words, "Yet not what I will, but what you will," to His prayer. He wanted to be spared death but was committed to doing the will of the Father.

This is a lesson we all must learn. There are things I don't understand in Scripture, and if it were up to me, I would do things differently, but the reality is that it is not up to me, and I am bound to obey whether I like God's way or not. There will always be a battle between our flesh and the will of the Father. Our flesh does not want to suffer, but there are times when we must. Jesus was willing to drink the cup set before Him, as bitter as it was.

Observe next the words of Jesus, "All things are possible for you." Jesus knew that God could do all things. Nothing was impossible for a sovereign and almighty God. By adding the phrase, "not what I will, but what you will," Jesus is, at the same time, recognizing that God can do all He would ask Him, but He had a specific purpose and plan for His life. It was Christ's greatest desire to be in that purpose.

Finally, note the words, "Abba, Father. The word Abba is an Aramaic word meaning father. The use of Aramaic here shows an intimacy with the Father. Jesus expressed the fatherhood of God in the language of His heart. By addressing God as "Abba, Father," Jesus expresses His confidence in His care and purpose.

Verse 37

After praying to the Father, Jesus returned to His disciples and found them sleeping.

Note that He speaks particularly to Peter and rebukes him for not watching.

While all three disciples were asleep, Peter was of deepest concern for Jesus. He knew that Satan had him in his sights. Before the rooster crowed early the next morning, the enemy arrow would have penetrated deeply into his soul.

Verse 38

Speaking particularly to Peter, Jesus tells him to awake from his sleep, watch and pray. Jesus explains why this was so important in the words, "That you may not enter into temptation."

Satan is always watching for a moment of weakness. He will strike

us when we least expect it. For this reason, we must always be on our guard, watching for enemy activity and praying to God for strength and wisdom to deal with it.

God is indeed our Shepherd and Protector, but Jesus shows Peter here that it was his responsibility to be watchful and pray. Notice how Jesus went on to tell him that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

There is a spiritual battle raging in our lives. The flesh wages war with the spirit. Our sinful flesh is weak not only physically and emotionally but also prone to sin and rebellion against God. We need to be constantly on guard against the natural tendencies of that flesh to lure and entice us to sin. Satan will take advantage of any unguarded territory.

Verse 39

After waking Peter and telling him to watch and pray, Jesus withdrew to pray again. Mark tells us that on this occasion, Jesus prayed the same words. These words are somewhat perplexing. They do, however, teach us something about prayer.

Note what is happening here. In verse 35, Jesus prayed that "the hour might pass from him." In verse 36, He prayed, "Remove this cup from me." Finally, in verse 39, Mark tells us that He prayed these words again. Jesus asked His Father three times to remove the suffering He was about to endure. Note two details in these words.

First, Jesus does not hesitate to repeat His request. Some believe that by constantly repeating a request, we are demonstrating a lack of faith. Jesus rebukes those who "heap up empty phrases:"

(7) "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words. – Matthew 6:7 ESV

The King James Version translates "heaping up empty phrases" as "use not vain repetitions." Those guilty of this sin "think they will be heard for their many words." That is to say, they believe that the only way God will hear them is if they bombard His ears to the point of disturbance, forcing Him to respond even when it isn't in His interest to do so. We cannot manipulate God.

Jesus is not seeking to manipulate the Father by His repetition here. He is simply pouring out the grief and pain of His heart to someone who will listen and do what is right. There is a manipulative form of repetition, and

there is a repetition that comes from a grieving heart.

Note second that the Father did not let that hour pass from His Son, nor did He take away His cup of suffering. Now, admittedly, Jesus did pray that the will of the Father be done, but there is a sense in which His request to remove the pain was denied. Jesus understood what it was like not to have prayers answered as His flesh desired.

Who among us has had every prayer answered as they wanted? God is not our servant, and He is not obligated to do whatever we want Him to do. There will be many times when we will not have our prayers answered as we wish. Understand, however, that God still wants us to come to Him with those requests, just as His Son did. He will hear us, and though not obligated to answer as we want, He will do what is right and for our good.

Verse 40

After completing His prayer, Jesus returned to His disciples and found them all sleeping. Mark seems to describe two reasons for the disciple's sleep here.

First, the disciples' eyes were heavy. The day had been long for these men. The Passover meal took them into the evening, and then they made the trip to the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane. These men were simply tired after a long day.

Second, Mark tells us that the disciples did not know how to answer Jesus. Consider what Jesus had been telling these men. He told them that Judas would betray them (Mark 14:18). He then went on to say that He was going to die (Mark 14:24) and that He would not drink with them again until they entered the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25). Arriving at the Mount of Olives,

Jesus declared that every one of them would fall away from Him (Mark 14:27). Then He told Peter that he in particular would deny even knowing Him three times before the rooster crowed in the morning (Mark 14:30). These were very heavy thoughts to address that late at night. The world as they knew it would change overnight, and they didn't know what to say or believe. Sleep was the only relief from this confusion of mind and heart.

Verse 41

When Jesus came to His disciples, He recognized the fact that they were sleeping and taking their rest. Remember that He had charged them to stay awake and be watchful. They had failed to obey, not so much out of a rebellious spirit, but from a weakened flesh and mind.

Note the words, "It is enough." Jesus appears to be telling them that they had enough sleep, and now it was time to wake up for the hour of his betrayal had come. Jesus was fully aware of the hour of His betrayal, even before He saw it with His physical eyes.

Verse 42

Jesus now calls on His disciples to wake from their sleep and follow Him because His betrayer was at hand. Note the words, "Let us be going." If you knew that the betrayer was at hand and was coming to arrest you falsely, what would those words mean to you? If it were me, the words "Let us be going" would imply escape and running as fast as I could to avoid being falsely arrested. This, however, is not what happens. Jesus rises, gathers His disciples and meets those who had

come to arrest Him. His prayers to the Father were being answered, and He knew the strength He needed to face this hour and drink the cup prepared by the Father for Him.

Verse 43

Just as Jesus woke His disciples from sleep, Judas arrived on the scene with a crowd armed with swords and clubs. Mark tells us that while Judas led them to where Jesus was, this armed crowd was from the chief priests, scribes and elders. They were ready to take Jesus by force if necessary. It is interesting to note that these were not Roman soldiers, but a group of citizens armed with whatever they had. The arrest was made at night, using individuals not licensed by the government as law enforcement officers.

Verse 44

Mark informs us that “the betrayer” (Judas) had given the crowd a sign. That sign was a kiss. Judas told them that the one he kissed would be the man they were to take by force and lead away under guard. The kiss was a sign of affection, but, in this case, Judas used it to betray Jesus.

This kiss could not be mistaken. It was an act of betrayal. Jesus had already told His disciples about Judas’ betrayal. Arriving with a band of armed citizens intent on arresting Jesus was a clear sign that this was about to take place. Was there any affection in that kiss? We don’t know the betrayer’s heart, but Judas had determined, before leading the crowd to Jesus, that this kiss would be an act of betrayal resulting in the arrest and ultimate crucifixion of Jesus. That is not the motivation behind a kiss of affection.

Verse 45

Arriving at the scene, Judas found Jesus and approached Him. The betrayer addressed Jesus as Rabbi and greeted Him with a kiss.

The word ῥαββί (rhabbí) is taken from the Hebrew language and refers to a teacher, or master. It was a term of respect demonstrating a special bond between a student and teacher. There is a level of hypocrisy here in this statement coming from a student who was about to betray his Master to death.

Verse 46

The crowd watched Judas. When they saw him greet Jesus with the sign of the kiss, they seized Him. The word translated, seized, is κρατέω (kratéō). It means taking hold of, having power over or dominating an individual.

There is a strange paradox here. The One from whom demons fled in fear is now seized by mere human force. This crowd outnumbered Him but remember that Jesus had just prayed and told the Father that He was seeking to do His will. What allowed the crowd to overpower Jesus was His commitment to the will of the Father in this matter. He trusted Him to unfold His purpose without offering any resistance.

Verse 47

While Jesus trusted the purpose of the Father in His arrest and offered no resistance, this was not the case for someone who stood alongside Him. Mark tells us that this individual drew a sword and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear.

John identifies that individual when he says:

(10) Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) – John 18:10 ESV

On the one hand, we cannot fault Peter for his willingness to defend his Master. On the other hand, however, he struggles intensely to understand and walk in the will of the Lord. Jesus told the disciples that He needed to die, but Peter fought against that death. He was willing to defend his understanding of how things should be with all His might, but he was not fighting the right battle. He was fighting against God and not for Him.

Many people stand firm for their ideas, as sincere as those ideas may be, however, they are not walking in the will of God. Peter was sincerely deceived and misled by his ideas and agendas.

Verse 48

The crowd that came with Judas has seized Jesus, and He is now in their hands. Notice the question He asks them here.

Observe that Jesus accuses them of coming against Him as if He were a robber. The idea here is that they treated Him like a criminal, yet He had been charged with no crime.

Note also that Jesus questions why they would have to arm themselves with swords and clubs to capture Him. He was not running away from them. He had offered no resistance but surrendered to them freely.

Verse 49

Jesus has been speaking to the crowd that had come to arrest him. In verse 48, He reminded them they were

arresting a man who had committed no crime. They also threateningly approached a man with swords and clubs who willingly surrendered and offered no resistance. Note here that Jesus questions the motivation behind the arrest at this time and place. He reminds the crowd that He had freely taught in the temple and circulated among them, but they did not arrest Him when people were around to see it. Instead, they waited until no one could see what they were doing. There was something suspect in their actions here.

Jesus ends with the words, "But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." Consider the prophecy of Isaiah in this regard:

*(8) By oppression and judgment,
he was taken away; and as for his
generation, who considered that he
was cut off out of the land of the
living, stricken for the transgression*

of my people? (9) And they made his grave with the wicked and a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. – Isaiah 53:8-9 ESV

Isaiah speaks here about how the Messiah would be taken away by oppression and cut off from the land of the living, even though He had done no violence.

Verse 50

The Lord ends with the statement, "They all left him and fled." This, too, was a fulfilment of prophecy. Zechariah spoke of a time when a sword would be raised against the shepherd, and the sheep would be scattered:

(7) "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who

stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. – Zechariah 13:7 ESV

Jesus quoted this prophecy in Mark 14:27 and told His disciples that they would all fall away that very night in fulfilment of this prophetic word. Mark is telling us here that, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah, the disciples all fled from the scene of the arrest.

Verse 51

We saw in verse 50 that the disciples fled the scene of the arrest, leaving Jesus alone. Mark mentions particularly one of those who fled here. He does not mention his name but calls him a young man.

This young man, according to Mark, was naked except for a linen cloth he used to wrap around his body. It may be that he had been sleeping naked with this cloth over him. Being awakened by the crowd that arrived to arrest Jesus, he rose and covered himself with the linen cloth.

Mark tells us that the crowd seized him and hindered his escape momentarily. We are not given the identity of this individual. Mark seems to be the only gospel writer to mention this young man.

Verse 52

While the crowd did seize this young man, he was able to escape by leaving the linen cloth that covered him in their hands. He ran from them naked.

Verse 53

The crowd that arrested Jesus led Him to the high priest. Understand here that this was either very late at night or early in the morning. The rooster had not yet crowed announcing Peter's three-fold denial. Mark tells us that all the chief priests, the elders and the scribes gathered together on that occasion. This appears to be a special council meeting at an unusual hour of the day. They did not want to waste time holding Jesus until it was convenient for them to meet. There is urgency here. They seem to be rushing this trial to avoid a scene should the people discover what they were doing.

Verse 54

The disciples fled when Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest. Peter, however, followed behind at a distance to avoid detection.

While Peter did keep his distance, he was bold enough to enter the courtyard and even warmed his hands with the guards at the fire.

Verse 55

Those who judged Jesus had already made up their mind. We see this in the words, "The chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death." Their objective was clear. This was not an impartial trial. The chief priests and council were merely seeking to find a way of justifying a death sentence.

Mark tells us that though they heard testimonies, no accusation made against Him justified a sentence of death.

Verse 56

Mark tells us three things about the trial of Jesus.

First, note the word “many.” The implication is that numerous people were brought before the council to testify against Jesus.

Second, the witnesses who testified against Jesus were false witnesses. We are not sure why they spoke lies about our Lord. Remember, however, that the religious leaders present that day had paid Judas to betray Jesus. They may have also paid false witnesses, so the council would be forced to pronounce the predetermined death sentence.

Third, observe that the testimonies of these false witnesses did not agree. Any objective judge would see the inconsistencies in the testimonies spoken against Jesus. These inconsistencies proved that the witnesses were not telling the truth.

Verse 57

We can only imagine the frustration of those trying to sentence Jesus to death when the witnesses brought to testify against Him did not agree. A breakthrough comes for them here in verse 57 when certain witnesses used something Jesus had said against Him.

Note here that while they may have honestly declared what Jesus said, they were still considered “false witnesses” by Mark. The falseness of their witness may have been in the way they twisted what Jesus said to mean something other than what He intended.

Verse 58

One of the witnesses who testified falsely against Jesus told the council that Jesus declared that He would destroy the temple and build another

one in three days. John recounts this event in John 2, where he says:

*(18) So the Jews said to him,
"What sign do you show us for
doing these things?" (19)*

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (20) The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (21) But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (22) When, therefore, he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. – John 2:18-22 ESV The context of these words of Jesus was the cleansing of temple. The Jewish leaders demanded Him to show them His authority for taking such action. Jesus told them that the proof that He had the authority to do this would be

found in His death and resurrection in three days. Jesus speaks of His body as a temple that would be destroyed by the council that tried Him now. He predicted, however, that within three days, the temple of His body would be raised from the dead.

The apostle Paul would use the same illustration when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19:

(19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own – 1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV

It may be important to note how the facts stated before the council differ from John's.

Note first that when asked for a sign of His authority, Jesus said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it." Those who testified before

the council, however, expand on this and add words not recorded by John.

Observe the addition of the words "that is made with hands."

(58) "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands.'"

The addition of these words would lead the council to assume that Jesus was speaking about the physical temple that was made with human hands. It is unlikely that Jesus spoke those words, for He would never have declared that His body was made by human hands. The additional words were false and misleading.

Note also that these false witnesses told the council that Jesus said He would "build another, not made with hands." The actual words of Jesus, according to John, were, "I will raise it." The difference between raising His

body from the dead and building a temple not made with hands in three days is significant. The words added here are false and not in line with Jesus' intention, as recorded in John's gospel. Those who testified here were false witnesses with evil intent. They twisted the truth to say what they wanted it to say.

Verse 59

Mark tells us that even in this matter of what Jesus said about destroying the temple and raising it in three days, there was no agreement among the witnesses. The sense we get here is that the witnesses disagreed with what Jesus said. This left the council with no solid or convincing evidence that would demand a death sentence.

Verse 60

As the trial progressed the high priest stood up and spoke to Jesus. His question is important and reveals two details about the procedure.

First, the words, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" show us the frustration of the high priest with how things were progressing. He interjects to express his frustration here.

Second, part of the high priest's frustration was in the fact that Jesus was silent throughout the process. Witnesses came and spoke obvious lies about Jesus, but He did not respond to them. There were no outbursts of anger or attempts to defend Himself. The high priest sought a fight, but Jesus wasn't taking the bait. His calm demeanour aggravated the high priest, and he expresses his exasperation here in his question.

Verse 61

When asked to defend Himself against false witnesses, Jesus chose to remain silent. Even when questioned by the high priest, He decided not to answer. Jesus remained undisturbed by these false accusations and would not reply to them. He left these matters in the Father's hands.

Our natural response to false accusations is to become angry and defensive. We treasure our reputation and will actively fight to defend it. Throughout His entire ministry, Jesus knew opposition. He was constantly under attack. How did He respond? He persevered in doing the will of the Father. The enemy can get us so tangled up in defending ourselves that we lose focus. Jesus refuses to engage in this battle.

Seeing that Jesus was not responding to the false witnesses and their

accusations, the high priest asked Him openly if He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed.

The title, Christ, means anointed. It was used to speak of the Messiah, prophesied by the prophets of the Old Testament. The high priest is asking Jesus if He was the Messiah.

The high priest also asked Jesus if He was the Son of the Blessed. The term "Blessed" is a clear reference to God the Father. The high priest asks our Lord here if He claimed to be the Son of God.

While there is a sense in Scripture that all those who belong to Christ are sons and daughters of God, this does not appear to be what the high priest is asking. He connects the word Messiah with the title Son of the Blessed. He seems to be asking Jesus if He claimed divine status.

Verse 62

The high priest has just asked Jesus if He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. While Jesus did not respond to those who hurled false accusations at Him, He did respond to this question.

Jesus affirms to the high priest that He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed. He elaborates on this by adding two more details.

First, Jesus told the high priest that as the Son of Man, He would take His seat at the right hand of Power. Notice how Jesus switches from the word Christ to Son of Man here. The term Christ referred to the anointed one who came from the Father as a Messiah. The title Son of Man refers to the same person. The prophet Daniel spoke of the Son of Man in Daniel 7 when he prophesied:

(13) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. (14) And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14 ESV

Daniel's Son of man was given dominion, glory and a kingdom. People from every language and nation would serve Him in a reign that would never end. Using this title, Jesus tells the high priest that He was the Christ, the Son of Man, prophesied by the prophet Daniel.

As the Christ and prophesied Son of Man, He would sit at the right hand of

Power. Jesus does not use this term to speak of a strong force but of a person. The Power referred to here is God Himself. The writer of Hebrews alludes to this when speaking of Jesus, he writes:

(2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (4) having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. – Hebrews 1:2-4 ESV

Jesus, as the radiance of the glory of God, sat down at the right hand of the

Majesty on high. In other words, Jesus took the place of honour beside the Heavenly Father in heaven.

The second truth Jesus spoke to the high priest that day was that the day was coming when, after being seated at the Father's right hand, He would return in the clouds of heaven. Once again, Jesus refers to the prophecy of Daniel here. Note what Daniel said about the Son of Man:

(13) "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Day and was presented before him. – Daniel 7:13 ESV

Daniel's Son of Man would come in the clouds to receive His kingdom and reign for all eternity. There can be no question here about what Jesus was saying. He was the Messiah, the Son

of God who would sit at the right hand of God in heaven and return to claim His kingdom.

It is interesting to note that while Jesus had no interest in the false accusations of the witnesses who testified against Him, He did respond powerfully to the truth of His Messiahship. If He were accused of anything, it would be the truth. If the high priest and the council were going to condemn Him, it would be because He was the Messiah, the Son of God. By condemning the Messiah to death, they would seal their own judgement.

Verse 63

Hearing Jesus' response to his question, the high priest tore his garments. This was a sign of grief and anger. Note his words here: "What further witnesses do we need?" In the high priest's mind, Jesus was claiming

to be God. This was all the council needed to condemn Him to death. It was blasphemous to claim to be God or equal to God in any way.

What is particularly interesting here is that Jesus condemns Himself. None of the false witnesses could bring any accusation against Him. The council had no power over Jesus until He gave it to them. Every witness they bought failed to convince the council. Every attempt they made to condemn Him failed. It was only when Jesus told them the truth about Himself that they found what they needed. Ultimately, however, while they killed Jesus, they condemned themselves by their rejection of the truth He revealed to them that day.

Verse 64

The high priest declares that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. While silent about

the false witnesses who accused Him, Jesus was not quiet about the truth. He openly, before everyone present, proclaimed Himself to be the Messiah, knowing that this would lead to His accusation and death. There may have been a very different outcome if Jesus had remained silent.

Our Lord knew the purpose of the Father and embraced that purpose by declaring the truth about who He was. The result of that declaration was that “they all condemned him as deserving death.” That sentence was not based on any crime they found in Him but for one thing only –He declared that He was the Son of God, a truth He proved repeatedly by His life, teaching and miraculous signs.

Verse 65

Notice what happened to our Lord when the council pronounced the

death sentence. Some in the meeting began to spit on Him in a sign of absolute contempt. Secondly, they covered His face, striking Him and asked Him to prophesy. Matthew explains what is happening more clearly when he writes:

(67) Then they spat in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, (68) saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?" – Matthew 26:67-68 ESV

The people were playing with Jesus here. They were playing a "guess who hit you" game by blindfolding Him and asking Him to prophesy the name of the person who struck Him that day. Mark tells us that when Jesus was handed over to the guards, they also mistreated Him by striking Him with blows.

Many years before these events took place, Isaiah the prophet wrote:

(6) I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. (7) But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. (8) He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. (9) Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. – Isaiah 50:6-9 ESV

We see how the Lord Jesus fulfils these prophetic words perfectly in what occurs here. Who would ultimately

declare Him guilty? The God who vindicated Him was near. Those who struck Him would wear out like a moth-eaten garment.

Verse 66

While Jesus' trial was taking place, Peter, who had followed from a distance, was in the courtyard. Mark 14:54 tells us that he was sitting with the guards, warming his hands at the fire.

While in the courtyard, Peter encounters a servant girl. She was in the service of the high priest.

Verse 67

We are not told what the servant girl was doing in the courtyard at this strange hour. However, she saw Peter warming his hands at the fire with the guards and recognized him.

Before the guards, she declared Peter to be “with the Nazarene, Jesus.” In other words, she called him out as a follower of Jesus.

Verse 68

Note Peter’s response to being called a follower of Jesus. He declares that he did not even know Jesus or understand what she was talking about. Peter denied his Lord and Master.

Observe how, after he denied Jesus, Mark tells us that Peter “went out.” He did not remain by the fire to be questioned further on this matter but left the courtyard and positioned himself at the gateway. As he did so, Mark tells us that the rooster crowed for the first time. Jesus’ prediction about Peter denying him before the rooster crowed three times was beginning to come to pass.

Verse 69

While Peter removed himself from the courtyard, the high priest's servant girl saw him again and persisted in her declaration that he was one of Jesus' disciples. She declared this to the bystanders at the gateway.

While Peter tried to escape her, the servant girl found him again. Peter is given a second opportunity to confess that he was a follower of the Lord Jesus

Verse 70

Peter responds to the high priest's servant once again by denying any association with Jesus. The words of that servant, however, brought attention to Peter, and bystanders began to listen to him. Mark tells us that it wasn't long before one of them

also began questioning Peter about his association with Jesus.

Note here that the bystanders observe that Peter was a Galilean. They knew Jesus and His disciples were from Galilee, and this was proof to them that Peter was a disciple of Jesus. One of those in the crowd, declared: "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

Matthew tells us that it was Peter's accent that betrayed his Galilean roots:

*(73) After a little while, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."
– Matthew 26:73 ESV*

The more Peter spoke, the more convinced the bystanders were that he was a follower of Jesus.

Verse 71

Peter is feeling trapped in his lie. This angers him, and Mark tells us that he invoked a

curse on himself and swore that he did not know the man Jesus.

We must understand what Peter is doing here. The swearing Peter does here is more serious than speaking vulgar words. Peter is taking an oath. He is swearing in a legal sense. Standing before the bystanders as witnesses to what he was about to say, Peter places himself under the curse of God if what he said about not knowing Jesus was a lie. He is saying something like this” “May God Himself curse me if I know this man Jesus.” These were serious words for which Peter would later come to regret. They were words, however, that would one day be pardoned by Jesus.

Verse 72

As soon as Peter solemnly swore before witnesses that he did not know Jesus, the rooster crowed again. The sound of the rooster crowing the second time broke Peter. He remembered the prediction of Jesus that before the rooster crowed twice, he would deny Jesus three times. I am also sure he remembered his bold denial of what Jesus predicted. The reality of what he did that day shattered Peter, and Mark tells us that he broke down and wept. His weakness had been revealed. He was not the man he thought he was. His commitment to Jesus was only skin deep. Peter needed to come to this point in his life. He needed to know His weakness before moving forward in his relationship with Christ. God allowed him to be broken so that he could be put together again anew.

MARK 15

Verse 1

Mark tells us that when it was morning, the chief priests “consulted” with the elders, scribes and the whole council. The trial had taken place late at night and early in the morning. Most people were asleep at this time. This may have been intentional as they did not to attract attention and disturb the people. The words “as soon as it was morning” indicate that they met first thing. They were wasting no time here.

Matthew tells us they met with the chief priests and elders to sentence Jesus.

(1) When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. – Matthew 27:1 ESV

The council had accused Jesus of blasphemy. Meeting now with the chief priests, elders and other council members, they would determine His sentence. That sentence, according to them, would be death. Having determined His punishment, they bound our Lord as a criminal and brought Him to Pilate, the Roman governor. Under Roman domination, the Jews did not have the authority to enforce this sentence upon Jesus. They needed Pilate's approval.

Verse 2

Mark tells us that Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of the Jews. This

shows us what the council told him. This council had determined that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah, equal to God. When they spoke to Pilate, however, they told Him that Jesus claimed to be King of the Jews. There is a political slant to this accusation before Pilate. They understood that the governor would not be interested in their religious debates, so they carefully worded their accusation to make it sound as if Jesus was a threat to Roman control.

When Pilate asked Jesus if He claimed to be King of the Jews, Jesus told him He was. This kingship, however, was not a political one that would threaten Rome. Jesus was king of a very different kind of kingdom.

Verse 3

Mark tells us that the chief priests accused Jesus of many things before

Pilate. These were the spiritual leaders of God's people. They had become so corrupt that they not only agreed to kill Jesus but also took an active role in ensuring that it was approved by Rome and carried out.

Verse 4

Pilate is surprised by two details here. First, by the number of charges the chief priests were bringing against Him — "See how many charges they bring against you."

The second thing that surprised Pilate is that Jesus did not respond to the multiple accusations. The governor was not used to this. Most criminals defended themselves. This would have been especially true for those sentenced to death.

Jesus has no interest in responding to the falsehoods brought against Him. He

understood that the chief priests would not listen to His defence. He determined to leave this to the Father. Jesus surrendered the outcome completely to the Father and His purpose. He would say or do nothing that would stand in His way.

Verse 5

Despite Pilate's invitation to defend Himself, Jesus remained silent. Mark tells us that

Pilate was amazed at this response. The word translated amazed here is θαυμάζω (thaumázō). It means to wonder, marvel, to admire or be astonished. There was something about the calm response of Jesus to these multiple accusations that baffled Pilate and made Him wonder about who He was. Jesus' silence spoke more powerfully to the governor than any

defence He could have made against His accusers.

Verse 6

It was during the Jewish Passover that Jesus was arrested and tried. Mark tells us that at this time of the year, the Romans would release one prisoner. Understand that the Romans were unwelcome conquerors. There were, as a result, many rebels against Rome in their prisons. Releasing one of these rebels would have been an act of charity on Rome's part and helped diffuse some of the tension with the Jews.

Verse 7

Among those who were in prison for rebellion against Roman authority was a man named Barabbas. He had been involved in an insurrection and had

been accused of murder. Understand here that while the crime of murder was a serious one, Barabbas was likely a political prisoner fighting for Jewish rights and would have in some ways been a hero to the Jewish cause.

Verse 8

Unrelated to the trial of Jesus, another crowd approached Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner, as was his custom during the Passover. This crowd approached the governor when he needed to decide what to do with Jesus. There are two groups before Pilate here. The first is comprised of chief priests who are seeking a death sentence for Jesus. The second is a group of Jews pleading for the release of a political prisoner.

Verse 9

Because Pilate was dealing with Jesus' case when the crowd came asking for the release of a prisoner, he suggested that he could release Jesus as his Passover gift to them. Notice that he calls Him "the King of the Jews." He did not see Jesus, however, as a political threat to the nation here.

Verse 10

Notice Pilate's motivation in suggesting that Jesus be released as his Passover gift to the Jews. Mark tells us that he perceived it was out of envy that the chief priests were seeking the death sentence. In other words, they were jealous of the attention Jesus was getting from the people.

Pilate does not find any reason to sentence Jesus to death. The religious motivations of the Jews did not interest him. Jesus posed no threat to Rome.

By suggesting that Jesus be released as his Passover gift, Pilate is seeking a way out. He wants to release Jesus but knows that if he does so on his own accord, he risks the wrath of the Jewish leaders. By passing this off to the crowd, he is seeking their support.

Verse 11

Pilate knew the reason the chief priests were seeking to kill Jesus was out of envy. He found no crime in him worthy of the death penalty. When a second group arrived at just the right time, requesting he release a Passover prisoner, Pilate suggested that he release Jesus. Note the response of the chief priests. They stirred up the crowd to have the governor release a man by the name of Barabbas instead. Verse 7 tells us that Barabbas was guilty of murder and insurrection against Rome.

Clearly these religious leaders are murderously intent on killing Jesus.

Verse 12

Notice how Pilate asked the crowd what they wanted him to do with Jesus, the man they called the King of the Jews. In doing this, the governor demonstrates his understanding that this crowd had seen Jesus as a deliverer. Just a few days earlier, Jesus entered the city on a donkey to the sound of cheering crowds declaring His coming kingdom:

(9) And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! (10) Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" – Mark 11:9-10 ESV

By asking the crowd what they wanted him to do with Jesus, Pilate clarifies that it was not just the religious leaders who turned their back on Jesus but also His people.

Verse 13

The decision of the crowd was very clear. They appear to cry out with one voice: "Crucify Him." While there was a trial to determine the fate of Jesus, this was not the only trial that day. The heavenly Father, judge of heaven and earth, watched as Pilate asked, "What shall

I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" Their answer was clear: "Crucify Him."

That answer sealed their fate. They had rejected the Saviour. They turned their back on the salvation and hope offered by the Father. The Father had

no choice but to pass His sentence on them.

Verse 14

Pilate appears surprised at the unanimous voice calling for the crucifixion of Jesus. He struggles with the decision to grant permission for Jesus' death without sufficient evidence of any crime worthy of such a sentence.

The governor demands grounds for the death penalty and calls the people to give Him a valid reason for sentencing Jesus to death. "What evil has he done?" Pilate asked.

The crowd provides no such reason. Instead, they shouted all the more, demanding His crucifixion. There is no logic or reason here. All we see is anger and fury being stoked by the

chief priests and the demonic forces of hell.

Verse 15

The crowd provided no valid reason for Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. Seeing their anger against Jesus, however, Pilate determined to release Barabbas, have Jesus beaten and delivered over to be crucified.

Pilate is also on trial here. The Father in heaven watches to see what he will do with His innocent Son. Pilate decided to please the crowd and turned his back on Jesus. In doing so, he willingly sentenced an innocent man to death and sealed his own sentence before the Father in heaven.

Verse 16

When Pilate released Jesus to be crucified, He was taken by the Roman

soldiers. Notice what Mark tells us here.

First, the Roman soldiers led Jesus inside the governor's headquarters. What would follow would be the abuse and ridicule of our Lord. This took place in Pilate's palace. Not only did Pilate permit the death sentence, but his palace would be used to prepare Jesus for crucifixion. We have no record of Pilate being in the hall when Jesus was beaten, but it was nonetheless in his headquarters that all this abuse took place.

Second, Mark tells us that the soldiers in charge of Jesus called the whole battalion to the hall where Jesus would be abused and prepared for His sentence. The word translated battalion in this verse is σπεῖρα (speíra), which refers to a troop or company of soldiers. The AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary has this to say about the word σπεῖρα (speíra):

"Spoken of Roman foot soldiers, probably a cohort (numbering between four hundred and six hundred), of which there were ten in every legion." AMG Complete Word Study Dictionary, General Editor: Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D., Managing Editor: Warren Baker, D.R.E., Associate Editor: Rev. George Hadjiantoniou, Ph.D. L A R I D I A N: Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Mark is clear when he tells us that the soldiers in charge of Jesus called together the "whole" battalion. The implication is that there could have been hundreds of soldiers present at Pilate's hall to witness and participate in the abuse of our Lord.

Verse 17

Note what took place in Pilate's hall. The battalion of Roman soldiers clothed

Jesus in a purple cloak, twisted thorns into a crown and placed it on His head. Purple was the colour of royalty. By dressing Him up this way, the soldiers made him look like an earthly king. Pilate had called him the King of the Jews. The people, however, denounced Him as their king. The soldiers now dress Him as royalty to mock Him.

Verse 18

When they had dressed Jesus up as an earthly king, the soldiers began to salute and address Him as the “King of the Jews.” In doing so, they openly ridicule Christ, the Son of the Living God. Remember that God the Father is watching all this unfold. Like the chief priests, Pilate, and the crowd, these soldiers turn their back on Jesus and seal their judgment.

Verse 19

Mark goes into further detail here about what the soldiers did to Jesus in Pilate's hall.

First, the soldiers struck Jesus' head with a reed. The Greek word used for reed is κάλαμος (kálamos) and refers to a flexible stalk or stem of a plant. Remember that the soldiers had placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' head. When they struck His head with that reed, it would drive those thorns into our Saviour's head, causing pain, breaking the skin, resulting in bleeding.

Second, the soldiers spit on our Saviour. This was probably the deepest insult they could bring to Jesus and demonstrated their contempt for Him and the Jewish people of the day.

Third, the soldiers kneeled to the one they beat and spat upon in false homage to Him. Understand here that this act is often repeated in our day. When we turn our backs on Jesus, in

action and word, and then come before His people and worship Him, we repeat the act described in this passage.

Verse 20

After mocking the Lord Jesus, the Roman soldiers stripped His purple cloak from Him and dressed Him back in His clothes. They would not take Him to the cross with a royal robe or crown. They would not grant Him the privilege of a fake crown and robe. He would go dressed in simple clothes, beaten and spat upon, stripped of any hint of royalty.

Verse 21

As they led Jesus off to be crucified, Mark tells us that they compelled a passerby named Simon of Cyrene to carry His cross. Notice a couple of details about Simon.

First, the name Simon means hearing. Usually, the criminal carried his cross to the crucifixion. In this case, Simon carried it. When he arrived at the crucifixion site, Simon, whose name means he has heard, would hand that cross over to Jesus. This is what Jesus has done for us, guilty sinners. We deserved that cross, but He listened to our cry and took our place.

Second, Simon was a passerby coming into the city from the country. He had no particular interest in this event. He was likely coming in to do business.

Third, we know nothing about Simon apart from what we read in this account of his life. He is identified with his sons, Alexander and Rufus. The opposite is usually the case. Sons are generally identified with reference⁸ to the father. Alexander and Rufus, however, appear to be more well-known than Simon, and so Simon is identified with them.

This unknown stranger has been chosen by God to bear the weight of the cross for our Saviour. Little did he know just how important that role would be.

Verse 22

The soldiers led Jesus to Golgotha. The word Golgotha is an Aramaic word meaning skull. The equivalent Greek word is Calvary. The word Calvary in Greek is κρανίον (kraníon) meaning skull. This name may have come from the fact that, from a distance, the hill looked like a skull, or from the fact that it was a place of execution for criminals.

Verse 23

When they arrived at Golgotha, the soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink. Myrrh would have

deadened the pain he was going to face in the coming hours. Notice, however, that Jesus refused to drink this concoction or relieve the pain He would face in any way. He would face the full force of agony with no shortcuts or relief for you and me.

Verse 24

When they crucified Jesus, the soldiers stripped Him of His clothes and cast lots to see who could keep them. There is a strange contrast here. As Jesus was dying on the cross, soldiers who had nailed him there, played a game to see who could have His garments. There may have even been a shout of joy and laughter as the lot went to a particular soldier. This was likely done before the grieving family and friends gathered to see their Lord die.

Verse 25

Mark tells us that it was the third hour of the day when they crucified Jesus. Most commentators agree that this was about 9 o'clock in the morning. This being the case, the chief priests wasted no time here. Their intention is to rush this through and avoid any opposition. He was tried in the early hours of the morning, convicted by Pilate, beaten by the soldiers, led to the cross and crucified by 9 am. This shows us the intensity of hatred the religious leaders had for Jesus. It also reveals how one sided this trial was.

Verse 26

An inscription on the cross read: "The King of the Jews." This is what Pilate called Jesus when He asked the crowd if he should release Him (see Mark 15:12). John tells us that it was Pilate himself who wrote this inscription and

insisted it be put on the cross, despite the criticism of the chief priests:

(19) Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (20) Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. (21) So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" (22) Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." – John 19:19-22 ESV

Verse 27

Jesus was not alone on the hill of Golgotha. Two criminals were crucified with Him at the same time – one on

His right hand and the other on His left. Both of these men were convicted thieves. Isaiah, the prophet, speaking of the Messiah to come, declared:

(9) And they made his grave with the wicked and a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. – Isaiah 53:9 ESV

Many years before this event, Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would die with the wicked, although he had done no wrong. This is what is happening here. Jesus died with wicked men on that cross, even though He was innocent of all crime. The thief crucified next to Jesus recognized this innocence when speaking to the other thief, he declared:

(40) ... "Do you not fear God since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41) And we

*indeed justly, for we are receiving
the due reward of our deeds, but
this man has done nothing wrong.”
– Luke 23:40-41 ESV*

Jesus, the innocent, identifies with the guilty in His death.

Verse 28

A note in the English Standard Version of the Bible indicates that this verse is not found in many of the early Greek manuscripts from which we get this text. This being the case, scholars are uncertain if it was included in Mark's original writing. Many translations of the Bible include it as a footnote.

That being the case, there is no questioning the truth of the verse. Scripture was indeed fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Reference is made here to the prophecy of Isaiah, which reads:

(12) Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. – Isaiah 53:12 ESV

The prophet Isaiah predicted the division of Christ's garments and that He would die with transgressors. Despite the cruelty and injustice of the trial and death of our Lord, none of this took our heavenly Father by surprise.

Verse 29

Though He was innocent of all crime, people passed by the cross and, "wagging their heads," mocked Jesus, declaring that He said He could

destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days.

The wagging of the head was a sign of contempt. They did so to indicate what they believed was dishonesty and hypocrisy in our Lord. They were saying, in essence, "You made bold claims, but look at you now."

Of course, what those who mocked Jesus did not understand is that in three days, the temple of His body would be destroyed and raised from the dead. They speak convincingly who speak too early, but time will reveal the foolishness and error of their words.

Verse 30

Those who passed by the cross, mocking Jesus told Him that if he was the Son of God, then He should save Himself and come down from the

cross. Worldly logic tells us that we are to protect ourselves and avoid suffering and death at all costs. This was not the purpose of God for Christ, however. God planned that the Lord Jesus both suffer and die. It would be by this means that our salvation would be secured.

We live in an age where the focus is on comfort, security and blessing. Anything that distracts from this is wrong in the eyes of the world. This is not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible makes it clear that there will be great pain in this sin-cursed world. Sacrifice and suffering will be required if we are going to advance the kingdom of God. The battle before us is fierce, and there will be casualties. God calls for men and women who will pick up their cross, not throw it down. Jesus demonstrates that victory must come at times through suffering and great hardship.

Verse 31

Notice how the chief priests and scribes, as religious leaders of the people, join in mocking the Lord Jesus on the cross. They reminded those present that He had saved others but, in their mind, could not save Himself. He healed many but could not heal Himself.

What these chief priests and scribes failed to understand is that the salvation of the nations would come through this very death they mocked. It was because Jesus did not save Himself that we can be saved. It was because He refused to come down from the cross that we can now know the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. What they declared as absolute defeat was, in reality, a great victory over sin and death. What they pronounced as failure was the salvation of the nations.

Verse 32

The chief priest and scribes demonstrate their lack of knowledge about God's purpose in Christ. They call for Jesus, the King of Israel, to come down from the cross so that they could see a demonstration of His power. They declare that if He did this, they would believe in Him. They say this mockingly, however, and not with any sincerity of heart. They did not think Jesus could come down from the cross, so they could afford to say they would believe. Those who crucified Jesus joined in the mockery.

We understand, however, that if Jesus came down from the cross, there would be no salvation or forgiveness of sin. The lamb needed to die for forgiveness to be accomplished.

We cannot help but see how much focus is on Jesus here. He is mocked

and ridiculed by the crowd, the religious leaders, and the Roman soldiers. He remained silent through this process and focused on the will and purpose of God. He does not defend Himself against their accusations. He does not feel the need to prove His innocence. He entrusts all matters into the hands of the Father and waits patiently on Him.

Verse 33

Mark 15:25 tells us that it was the third hour of the day (9 a.m.) that they crucified the Lord Jesus. It is now the sixth hour or about noon. Jesus has been on the cross for three agonizing hours. At noon, Mark tells us, darkness came over the land. He does not explain anything about this or why it became dark. This darkness, however, was from the sixth hour (noon) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.). It was an

exceptional occurrence seen as an act of God. In particular, those who witnessed the crucifixion would have seen this as a sign from God. God Himself was responding to the crucifixion and suffering of His Son on the cross.

Verse 34

Finally, at the ninth hour (3 p.m.), after being on the cross for six hours, Jesus cried out, speaking the following Aramaic words: “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” Mark translates the words for us here when he tells us that they mean: My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me.” They are quoted from Psalms 22:1:

(1) My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? – Psalms 22:1 ESV

The words show us that the Father has turned His back on the Son. Some lead us to believe that at that moment, the Father is repulsed by the Son, who was so full of our sin that He had to turn away. The forsaking of Jesus on the cross, however, seems to have more to do with allowing Him to die. Jesus is the perfect and well-pleasing Son of God. He never ceased to be perfect or completely please the Father, and all the more when He hung on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. It is not repulsion that caused God to turn from Jesus, but justice and love for His people.

Verse 35

Hearing the Aramaic words, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” some bystanders misinterpreted what Jesus was saying. They believed He was calling for Elijah.

The word Eloi sounded like the Hebrew word for Elijah to these bystanders. Word would have been passed on to those who witnessed the crucifixion that Jesus had called for Elijah, but he never came to His aid. This could have been used against Jesus. Mark may have felt compelled to explain what Jesus said to resolve any potential lie that may have been spread.

Verse 36

Notice the words of those who misinterpreted Jesus' words, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

"Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

This explains why Mark felt compelled to record the exact words Jesus spoke. These individuals had misinterpreted His words and were waiting for Elijah's

miraculous return to take Him down from the cross. When this did not happen, these individuals would assume that Jesus was an imposter. Mark feels compelled to rectify this by communicating His exact words.

Second, seeing Jesus cry out from the cross caused someone to fill a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and offer Him a drink to quench His thirst.

John gives us a little more detail about this event when he tells us that Jesus cried out, saying that He was thirsty and when the wine was handed to Him on a sponge, He drank the wine:

(28) After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." (29) A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. (30) When Jesus had received the sour wine, he

said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. – John 19:28-30 ESV

Verse 37

Upon drinking the sour wine, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, breathed His last breath and died. Mark does not tell us anything about that last cry of Jesus. John 19:30, however, does tell us that He spoke the words, "It is finished," just before bowing His head and dying.

Verse 38

When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, darkness came over the entire region. This was a sign from God. Mark tells us that another sign took place when Jesus finally died. The curtain in the temple was ripped from top to bottom.

This curtain separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple. Hebrews 9:35 explains what was behind that curtain:

(3) Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, (4) having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. (5) Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things, we cannot now speak in detail.

The high priest alone was permitted to enter this Most Holy Place:

(6) These preparations having thus been made, the priests regularly go into the first section, performing

their ritual duties, (7) but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and the unintentional sins of the people. – Hebrews 9:6-7 ESV

Hebrews 9:8 tells us that this closed curtain communicated a vital detail to all God's people:

(8) By this, the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing.

According to Hebrews 9:8, the way to the holy places where God dwelt was not open to His people. The curtain separated them from His holy presence.

When that curtain was ripped from top to bottom, that barrier between God

and His people was removed. God was telling His people that through the death of Jesus Christ, this wall of separation was broken down. The last sacrifice had been made, and now there was access to God through the work of His Son.

Note that the curtain was ripped from the top to the bottom. The idea here seems to be that this was initiated by God the Father.

Verse 39

Mark recounts the response of an unbelieving Roman centurion to the death of Jesus and the events surrounding His death.

First, note that this centurion stood facing Jesus. Likely, he had been assigned to guard the cross to ensure that no one interfered with the sentence until Jesus had died.

Second, the centurion saw how Jesus breathed His last breath. This man had likely seen many men die, but this was not an ordinary man, nor was it an ordinary death. I am sure that the darkness and report of the ripped temple curtain may have been part of the centurion's total experience of His death.

Seeing how Jesus died and the events that unfolded that day left that centurion convinced that this man was truly the Son of God. Unlike those who mocked Jesus to the end, the eyes of this centurion were opened to see what others could not see.

Verse 40

A group of women were present on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. Mark tells us that they looked on from a distance. That is to say, they were not permitted to be at that cross.

Among these women was Mary Magdalene. Luke tells us that she had seven demons cast out of her.

(2) and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out – Luke 8:2 ESV

She went to Jesus' tomb when He died:

(1) Now, after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. – Matthew 28:1 ESV

Jesus appeared to her after His resurrection and told her to announce His presence to the disciples:

(18) Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"—and that he had

*said these things to her. – John
20:18 ESV*

According to Luke 8:1-3, Mary Magdalene travelled with Jesus providing for them and ministering to their needs.

The second woman present at the crucifixion was Mary, the mother of James the Younger and Joses. Matthew describes her as mother of James and Joseph:

*(56) among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. – Matthew
27:56 ESV*

John tells us that she was the mother of Jesus:

(25) but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his

mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. – John 19:25 ESV

She and Mary Magdalene watched to see where they would bury Jesus and came later with spices to the tomb to anoint His body (Mark 15:47-16:1).

The final woman mentioned in this group was Salome. Writing about these same three women who watched from a distance, Matthew writes:

(55) There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, (56) among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. – Matthew 27:55-56 ESV

Matthew identifies Salome as Zebedee's wife. This would possibly make her the mother of James and John (see Matthew 4:21).

Verse 41

These three women had an important role to play in Jesus' ministry. When Jesus was in Galilee, they followed Him and His disciples wherever they went, ministering to their needs. They were among a group of women who followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

Verse 42

It was the day before the Sabbath when it would not be permitted for the Jews to prepare Jesus' body for burial. When evening came, it was important for them to get the body of Jesus down from the cross and prepare for burial so Sabbath preparations

could begin.

Verse 43

Mark introduces us here to a man named Joseph of Arimathea. Luke describes Arimathea as a Jewish town:

50 Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man – Lk 23:50

While we know that the town where Joseph lived was a Jewish town, its exact location is somewhat uncertain.

We learn from Luke 23:50, quoted above, that Joseph was a member of the council and, as such, was an influential member of Jewish society. He was also known as “a good and righteous man.”

Matthew tells us that Joseph was a “disciple of Jesus.” While not one of the twelve disciples, Joseph was a follower of Jesus.

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. – Mt 27:57

Mark tells us that Joseph “took courage” and went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. The idea here is that he took a risk. That risk was related to the fact that, as a Jewish council member, he was also revealing himself to be a follower of Jesus. He was, in essence, honouring the one the council had condemned to death. It is uncertain what this revelation would have meant for him socially.

Verse 44

Note how Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus had died so quickly. From historical accounts, it could take a couple of days for a crucified criminal to die. Jesus' death was quite speedy.

To assure himself that Jesus had died, Pilate made an official inquiry. It would only be after confirming that Jesus was indeed dead that he would grant Joseph's request.

Some believe that Jesus was not fully dead when they took Him down from the cross. They explain His resurrection on this basis. By making this official inquiry, Pilate removes all doubt about the death of our Lord on the cross and the miracle of the resurrection.

Verse 45

Joseph had to wait until word came from the centurion that Jesus was officially dead. It was only when Pilate

had this confirmation that he released the body of Jesus to Joseph.

Understand that none of Jesus' disciples or family had anticipated this sudden death. He was arrested late at night when most people were sleeping, and by nine o'clock in the morning, he was hanging on a cross.

As a council member, Joseph would have been aware of the proceedings. As a follower of Jesus and a man of influence and wealth, Joseph was in a place where he could do something about the body of Jesus.

Verse 46

Mark tells us that Joseph bought a linen shroud. This shroud was never used before and was purchased with Jesus' burial in mind.

Joseph then wrapped Jesus' body in that linen shroud and laid it in a tomb

that had been cut out of a rock.

Luke tells us that the tomb in which Jesus was laid was one in which no one had ever been laid.

52 This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 53 Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. – Lk 23:52-53

After wrapping Jesus' body in a new shroud and placing it in a new tomb, Joseph then rolled a stone against the entrance, closing it up and hindering any interference with the body of Jesus.

Verse 47

Remember that it was in the evening that Joseph laid the body of Jesus in

the tomb. Because the Sabbath was fast approaching, he did not have time to prepare Jesus' body properly. Jesus was wrapped in a shroud and laid in the tomb. Jesus' mother and her friend Mary Magdalene wanted to be sure that His body was properly cared for, so they watched to see where Joseph placed it. They would return after the Sabbath and properly prepare Jesus' body with spices and ointments.

MARK 16

Verse 1

Jesus' body was taken off the cross just before the Sabbath. The Sabbath regulations forbade preparing a body for burial on that day, so Jesus was laid in a tomb without the usual preparations. When the Sabbath was over, three women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with special spices and ointments. Those three women were Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother, and Salome.

Verse 2

Jesus had been crucified on a Friday. The next day was the Sabbath, when His body lay quietly in the grave. It was now Sunday morning. Mark tells us that the sun had just risen when Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother, and Salome went to the tomb. The matter of anointing Jesus' body was important to them. They wanted to ensure it was treated with the utmost respect.

Understand that by going to the tomb to anoint His body, these three women demonstrated that they did not understand His teaching about His resurrection. Jesus had told them several times that He would die but rise again on the third day. Consider the following examples:

(31) And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after

*three days rise again. – Mark 8:31
ESV*

(33), saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

(34) And they will mock him and spit on him and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise." – Mark 10:33-34 ESV

(58) "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" – Mark 14:58 ESV

By coming to anoint His dead body on that third day, these women reveal that they were not expecting Jesus to rise that day.

Verse 3

As they walked to the tomb, the three women began to wonder how they would gain access to the body of Jesus. A stone had been rolled over the entrance, and they would not be able to move it. While they did not have an answer to this question, it did not hinder their journey. They would go to the tomb and wait for the reply. There have been many times in my life when I have had to move forward without an answer. God reveals that answer in His time, but sometimes, we need to be in place to see it.

Verse 4

The answer to the women's question was very obvious when they arrived at the tomb. The stone they were worried about was already rolled away. Had they allowed human reason to prevail,

they would never have seen this answer. Imagine them heading to the tomb and realizing a huge stone was over it. Imagine that they stopped in their tracks and said: "We're not going to be able to get into that tomb to anoint the body of Jesus." Imagine that right then and there, they determined that it was useless to continue their journey. If they had done that, they would never have seen the miracle of the removed stone.

Notice what Mark tells us about the stone — "It was very large." When those women arrived, they knew they would never have been able to move it. It would take a few strong men to be able to move such a large object. The fact that it had been moved so early in the morning with no one around surprised these women.

Verse 5

Seeing the tomb opened, the women entered inside. Upon entering, they discovered a young man sitting on the right side. He was dressed in a white robe. This took them by surprise, and they were “alarmed.” The word translated, “alarmed” is ἐκθαμβέω (ekthambéō) and speaks of a deep astonishment that can come from terror or distress. The presence of this “young man” shocked them and caused them great distress and fear.

Verse 6

Seeing the reaction of these women to his presence, the “young man” told them that they had nothing to fear. He also had something about Jesus.

Note first that this young man knew that the women were seeking Jesus. “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified,” he told them. This

immediately placed them on the same page.

Second, as the women looked around them in the tomb, nobody was there. This would have caused great distress for them. The young man understood their concern and told them Jesus had risen from the dead. The proof was that His body was not where it had been laid.

The presence of a young man in the tomb was a fearful thing for these women. But we see the tender compassion of the Lord here as well. What would have been the response if these women went to the tomb and found it empty if this young man was not present? Surely, this would have been even more distressing. God placed His messenger in the tomb to explain to these women what had happened.

The fact that this messenger was alone shows us that something miraculous had occurred. The stone that would normally have taken several men to roll away was moved, but there was no one but him present.

The man was also in the tomb, hidden from sight until the women entered. It was as if he had come for them alone. Only those who entered the tomb would find the answer to why it was empty. It was those who came seeking the Lord Jesus who would find the answer.

Verse 7

The “young man” told the women they were to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee. There are three points we need to make here.

First, consider the message that these women had received. The messenger of God told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. This explained the absence of a body in that tomb, but it did not, in their minds, mean that they would see Him again. When they were told, however, that He was going on to Galilee, that changed everything.

Second, note that the Lord was “going before” the disciples to Galilee.

Remember that these men were Galileans, and now, with the death of their master, they would likely have returned to their home region, their families and former trade. They would have had no sense of being able to continue as disciples with their Master dead. Jesus wanted to meet with them in Galilee, where He would commission them anew to continue as His disciples.

Finally, note the phrase, “Tell His disciples and Peter.” Peter is singled out here. Understand that Peter had denied

Jesus three times. He may not have felt worthy of being with the other disciples. He may have thought he had forfeited his right to be called a true disciple of Jesus Christ. The other disciples may have held his denial of Jesus against him.

Remember that the messenger in the tomb is speaking the message he had been given to proclaim. Jesus wanted Peter to know He expected Him to be present with the other disciples. There were issues they needed to address before He returned to the Father. By specifically mentioning Peter's name, Jesus permitted Peter to be among those who assembled in Galilee and stripped away any argument there may have been from the other disciples about him not being worthy to be with them.

Verse 8

Note the women's response to the encounter with the "young man" in the tomb. Mark tells us that they fled from the tomb. This flight happened because "trembling and astonishment had seized them." The word translated trembling is τρόμος (trómos) and refers to a trembling with terror, fear, respect or reverence. The encounter had left them deeply shaken.

Mark tells us that the women said nothing to anyone because they were afraid. Obviously, the women did obey the messenger and informed the disciples and Peter. When Mark tells us that the women "said nothing to anyone," he is telling us that they didn't stop to talk to people on the way to the disciples. This message was so important that they went directly to the disciples without interacting with anyone on the way.

Verse 9

The Bible we have today has been translated from the original language into English. It took about 1,300 years for the first English Bible translation to appear. The King James Version of the Bible appeared in 1611, about 1,600 years after it was originally written. By that time, the original scroll upon which Mark wrote his book had long disappeared. Scribes diligently copied that original scroll and passed on these copies to be reproduced by hand, but as hundreds of years passed, even those copies disappeared. Before the printing press, each copy needed to be written by hand, and it was a tedious process, with every copy being very valuable.

As hundreds of years passed, these handwritten copies of Scripture disappeared or were left in a very deteriorated form with many pages missing. What we have today, however, is thousands of these manuscripts,

some with only a few verses. These manuscripts have been copied at various times and preserved in one way or another.

Understand that when Scripture was written by hand, there was always the possibility of human error. There was also the temptation to add a comment or explanation to the text which was not in the original. This is where having multiple manuscripts available to us has been very helpful. If one manuscript includes text that does not appear in ten other manuscripts from different sources, then we have reason to question the addition of those words. The assumption is that they may have been added by the person copying the text and not written by the original author.

Another aspect considered by translators is the age of a manuscript. For example, the likelihood of a manuscript containing additions, errors,

or modifications increases or decreases with age. Consider, for instance, Mark 16:9-20. A note in the English Standard Version of the Bible tells us that some of the earliest manuscripts do not include these words. In other words, the earliest known copies of the book of Mark stop at Mark 16:8. It is only later copies that contain verses 9-20. Most Bible translators, however, include this section in the book but add a footnote indicating that it may or may not have been in the original copy written by Mark. This being the case, verses 9-20 completely agree with the account of the other gospel writers.

Verse 9 tells us that Jesus rose from the dead early on Sunday morning and appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. John 20:11-18 recounts how, after Peter and the other disciples had been informed of the resurrection of Jesus, Mary remained outside the tomb

weeping when Jesus appeared to her. She was the first person to see Him in His resurrected state.

Verse 10

After seeing Jesus, Mary told those who “had been with Him” what she saw. That is to say, she went to His disciples and informed them that she had seen the resurrected Jesus. According to the verse, these disciples greatly needed encouragement, for they were mourning and weeping. John’s account confirms this when it tells us:

(18) Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her. —John 20:18 ESV

Verse 11

Note the response of the disciples to the word of Mary. They did not believe her. This is confirmed by Luke when he writes:

(10) Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, (11) but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. – Luke 24:10-11 ESV

Even though Jesus had taught them that He would rise again, the disciples still could not believe it was true. These disciples were like many of us, struggling to believe, but they would be the instruments of God to change the world.

Verse 12

Mark tells us that after speaking with Mary Magdalene, Jesus appeared to two other disciples while walking in the country. Mark does not go into further detail about this, but we read the following from Luke's account:

(13) That very day, two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, (14) and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. (15) While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. (16) But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. – Luke 24:13-16 ESV

Luke recounts how after appearing to Mary, Jesus made His way to Emmaus and spoke with two disciples on the way.

Note a second similarity between these two accounts. Mark tells us that Jesus appeared in another form. In Luke's account, the two disciples walking with Jesus did not recognize Him (see Luke 24:16). We are not told what it was about Jesus that made Him unrecognizable, but as Jesus sat down at table with these two disciples and broke bread, their eyes were finally opened to the reality that they had been speaking with Jesus all this time.

(30) When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. (31) And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. – Luke 24:30-31 ESV

Luke tells us that when the disciples finally recognized Jesus, He vanished from their sight. As Mark tells us, Jesus

appeared after His resurrection in another form.

Verse 13

The men who had seen Jesus returned to Jerusalem to share with the disciples what they had seen. Luke goes into further detail when he says:

(33) And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, (34) saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (35) Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. – Luke 24:33-35 ESV

Mark tells us that when these two followers of Jesus told the disciples

what they had seen, they did not believe them. Once again, this corresponds with what took place in Luke 24:38-42. Listen to Luke's account:

(38) And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? (39) See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (40) And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. (41) And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" (42) They gave him a piece of broiled fish, (43) and he took it and ate before them. – Luke 24:38-43 ESV

Mark's account of the disciples' unbelief perfectly corresponds with

what Luke tells us in Luke 24.

Verse 14

Mark recounts the events recorded in Luke 24:36-42 here. After His appearance to the two men in Emmaus, Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples as they reclined at table to eat. On that occasion, He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they did not believe those who had testified to seeing Him alive.

The eleven disciples needed proof. Though they were His closest companions in life and heard Him teach about His resurrection, they needed to see Jesus before they would believe. Jesus rebuked this attitude.

There are many people like this today. They will not believe the witness of those who have been with Jesus. They

cannot accept what they cannot see or touch. The testimony of those who have seen, however, may be the only chance they have to open their heart to the salvation He came to offer.

Verse 15

To these “unbelieving and hard-hearted” disciples, the Lord Jesus brings this challenge: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” Notice two details here.

First, Jesus told the disciples to go into all the world. He is commissioning them to a worldwide ministry here. The task, however, was far beyond what they could do themselves. There was no way the disciples could physically go into the world. What was impossible with man, however, was possible with God. These disciples did not know that God would take their words into every

corner of the globe. God so blessed the message those disciples wrote about and proclaimed that it has not stopped spreading since they first proclaimed it in Jerusalem and Galilee. Men and women in every nation have heard that message and come to the Saviour. What Jesus commands, He also empowers.

Second, notice what the disciples were to take to the world. They were to “proclaim the gospel.” The word translated proclaim in the English Standard Version is κηρύσσω (kērússō), which means to preach, herald, or announce publicly. The word gospel is εὐαγγέλιον (euaggélion), which means good news. What is the good news? It is the truth these disciples failed to believe until Jesus appeared physically before them. It is the message that the Lord Jesus Christ died and rose again for the sins of the world. Jesus laid down His life in

payment for sin and rose victorious over its penalty so that all who believe may experience forgiveness of sin and eternal life in a right standing with the Father.

Verse 16

Notice the promise of Jesus here. He promised that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. The word believes, in the original language, is πιστεύω (pisteúō) and means to have faith or be firmly persuaded of something. The idea is to put full confidence and trust in the Lord and the salvation He came to offer. Jesus says that those who fully believe in His work will be saved from sin and eternal judgment.

Note also the reference to baptism here. Baptism is a sign of one's commitment to the Lord Jesus. You can be a believer without being baptized,

but in Scripture, baptism is a public sign of one's commitment to the Lord and His purpose. The idea is that we not only believe but also publicly commit ourselves to walk in His purpose for our lives. I like to see baptism as similar to a wedding and the vows we make to each other. It is a public statement of our commitment to God and to be faithful to Him for life.

Observe that those who believe and are baptized will be saved. Note, however, that it is only the one who does not believe who will be condemned. Though being baptized is the normal procedure for those who come to Christ, baptism does not save us. Nor does not being baptized condemn us to eternal punishment. Unbelief, however, on the other hand, will condemn us. Unbaptized believers will still be saved, but the unbeliever will be forever separated from God and His blessings.

Verse 17

According to Mark, Jesus told His disciples that as they proclaimed the gospel, they would be aware of His power with them. There would be signs accompanying those who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Understand that belief in Jesus Christ is not just an intellectual matter. This belief is accompanied by new life. The Spirit of Christ comes to live in the believer, empowering and enabling them to live the Christian life and serve the Saviour. The Christian life is not lived in human wisdom and strength. It is a life empowered and enabled by Christ through His Holy Spirit in us. Those who reduce the Christian life to a human effort to please God have missed the whole point of Jesus' teaching. It is a life that cannot be lived in the flesh. It can only be lived through the work of Christ, His

enabling and empowering. You cannot separate the Christian life from the person and power of Christ.

Mark tells us that those who believe would experience evidence of this powerful work and life of Christ in them. In this verse, Jesus tells us that those who believe would have power over demonic forces and speak in new tongues. Evidence of these new tongues is seen in Acts 2, where we read:

(1) When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. (2) And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, filling the entire house where they were sitting. (3) And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one. (4) And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the

*Spirit gave them utterance. – Acts
2:1-4 ESV*

Understand that Jesus is speaking in general terms here. He is not mandating that every believer cast out demons and speak in these new tongues. He is telling us, however, that we would see evidence of this in the church as believers came to know Him and experience His power in their lives.

Verse 18

Jesus taught that those who believed in His name would experience miraculous protection and empowerment. Note first the miraculous protection of God on those who believed in Him.

Jesus tells us that those who believed in Him would pick up serpents with their hands and drink deadly poison but would not be hurt. This is not an invitation to play with poisonous

snakes and drink poisonous drinks. Jesus is not telling us to do these things but reminding us that His hand of protection would be upon His people. We have an example of this protection from poisonous serpents in the book of Acts, where we read in Acts 28:

(3) When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. (4) When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." (5) He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. (6) They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and

*saw no misfortune come to him,
they changed their minds and said
that he was a god. – Acts 28:3-6
ESV*

In this case, Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper when picking up some sticks to put in the fire. God protected him from the poison and preserved his life to the awe and amazement of those who saw what took place. Jesus promises miraculous protection upon those who belong to Him. Again, understand that this is a general statement. Christians can die from poison just like the unbeliever. What Jesus is telling us, however, is that we will hear powerful testimonies of those who God has miraculously protected in many different ways.

Note second that those who believe in Jesus would lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover. Understand again that Jesus is not telling us that

everyone we touch will be healed. Death is a certainty in life, and it will come to every one of us. Not everyone will die of old age. Believers regularly die of cancer or sickness of one kind or another. God takes His people to Him by many different means. What we need to understand, however, is that while sickness will take the lives of our brothers and sisters, we will also see evidence of God's miraculous intervention as well. We will see people healed of their sickness and their lives extended because we prayed, and the power of God touched lives through our prayers.

I have laid hands on and prayed for many people in my life. I can testify that God has done miraculous things through those prayers. He has not always answered my prayers as I anticipated. I do not have the power of life and death in me. I can, however, still testify to the power of God through

prayer. Jesus is telling us that in the days following His ascension, we would hear many stories of His protection and healing power as His people stepped out to proclaim the good news of the gospel.

Verse 19

Mark tells us that when Jesus finished speaking to His disciples, He was taken up into heaven. Luke tells us the same thing when he writes:

(51) While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. – Luke 24:51 ESV

Luke describes this ascension in Acts 1:9 in more detail when he tells us that the Lord was lifted up and a cloud took Him out of their sight:

(9) And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he

was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. – Acts 1:9 ESV

The disciples were present when this event took place. Acts 1:10-11 makes this very clear when two angels appeared to them and confirmed that Jesus would return in the same way they saw Him ascend:

(10) And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, (11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." – Acts 1:10-11 ESV

These disciples, therefore, were witnesses to the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Mark goes on in the verse to say that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. When the high priest asked Jesus if He was the Christ, He responded:

(62) ... "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." – Mark 14:62 ESV

In saying this, Jesus confirms that He would ascend into heaven and sit at the right hand of God.

Verse 20

Mark concludes his record of the life of Jesus by telling his readers that after Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples preached the good news of the gospel as He had requested (see Mark 1:15). He also confirms

the promise of Jesus in Mark 16:17-18 which reads:

(17) And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; (18) they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” – Mark 16:17-18 ESV

Mark tells his readers as these disciples went out preaching the Gospel, that message was confirmed by “accompanying signs.” He is saying that the truth of the Gospel message could not be doubted. God confirmed their message through these miraculous signs. He concludes his book on this note of absolute certainty. The message he declared in the book was

the message preached by the apostles
and confirmed with signs from God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their



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