



**The Summit**  
Green Campus of Canton Baptist Temple

# **Resources for Your Life**

The Gospel of Mark  
40 Sessions

[www.thesummitgreen.com](http://www.thesummitgreen.com)  
[tomhogsed@gmail.com](mailto:tomhogsed@gmail.com)

## Resource Guide

This resource was compiled from the personal Bible study and blog entries created by Tom Hogsed, pastor of the Summit in Green. You can find the original blog entries at [www.tomhogsed.com](http://www.tomhogsed.com).

The **introduction** to this book has been written so the reader has a better understanding of the Biblical author, his purpose in writing, and important points to understand before reading.

Following the introduction, each new page represents a **verse by verse overview** of the Scripture passage. The best way to study is to first read the Scripture verses from your Bible relying on the Holy Spirit to provide understanding and then to support your understanding with the commentary written below.

At the end of each Scripture commentary, there is a short **prayer** written so the reader can personally apply what has been discovered; however, it is suggested that you also pray from your heart in response to God's Word.

Feel free to make your own personal notes in your Bible, on this page, or even in a journal.

If this resource has helped you or you have further questions, please send an e-mail to [tomhogsed@gmail.com](mailto:tomhogsed@gmail.com).

## **Introduction to Mark**

This gospel was obviously written by the person whose name it bears. Although Mark, also known as John Mark, was not one of Jesus' twelve disciples he received a firsthand account of Jesus' ministry from the Apostle Peter. We learn much of what we know about Mark through reading the book of Acts. Luke, the writer of Acts, reveals that John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but somewhere along the way deserted them. John Mark's actions caused a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas which resulted in the two separating as ministry partners. Through time, John Mark matured and restored his relationship with Paul, once again becoming useful in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). It was probably due to his connection with Peter which brought spiritual maturity to John Mark.

History teaches us that it is likely that John Mark wrote his gospel from Italy sometime in the early 50's possibly making it the earliest gospel. Mark's audience seems to be mainly Roman or Gentile believers. He focused on presenting Jesus as the suffering Servant and centered much of his writing on Jesus' acts of service and sacrifice. Most of his gospel focuses on the ministry of Jesus with an emphasis on the human side. Mark reveals a Jesus who experienced feelings such as compassion, grief, and disappointment while also exposing His limitations (4:38; 11:12; 13:32). Probably one of the key verses in the gospel of Mark is found in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom [price paid to free slaves] for many." Mark's emphasis on Jesus' servanthood should cause us to evaluate our own lives in service to others. If the very Son of Man committed His life to others, than we also should devote our time to humble service.

## **Mark 1:1-11**

It had been 400 years since a prophecy had taken place (Malachi 1:1-4:6) or any events had been recorded in the Old Testament (Nehemiah 13:4-30). Some call these years (approximately 424-26 BC) the four hundred silent years because no one heard from God, but we can be assured that He was still in control of all which was happening. Those four centuries of silence were broken when John the Baptist stepped on the scene (around 26 BC) preparing people for the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is really the last prophet of the Old Testament and the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He brings the Old Testament and the New Testament together.

It was customary in this time for kings to send a messenger ahead to make sure the roads were clear ahead of him and announce the soon coming of the king to the people, who would prepare themselves for the king's arrival. Although Jesus was not a typical king, John the Baptist was used by God as a messenger to preach repentance to the people so that they would prepare their hearts for the arrival of the Messiah. Quoting from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, Mark records the prophecy about this messenger, "Behold, I send a messenger before your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.'" Of course this four hundred year old prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist. Mark also details that "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission [forgiveness] of sins" (1:4). John's ministry was one calling Israel to repentance for their sin and disobedience of God. Some have understood that John the Baptist taught water baptism as a necessity for salvation; however, Scripture clearly teaches that no work is necessary for salvation to take place. How do we reconcile this? I believe in ancient times and even into the early church era, repentance of sin and baptism went hand in hand. In other words, when a person recognized their sinfulness before God they immediately confessed their sin and were baptized in water to symbolize the washing away of sin. The act of baptism does not bring salvation but should be the natural result of those who have confessed their sin before a holy God. Mark details that the people responded to John's message of repentance and writes, "Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (1:5). Confession of sin is simply an agreement with God that a person's sin is against Him and causes separation from God. Without that acknowledgment, a person cannot be restored to God. Since Jesus had not yet died for the sins of all mankind, the people were repenting of sin and looked forward in faith to the promised One, whom they did not know at this point. Salvation has always been by faith.

John's message to his listeners is recorded here by Mark, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (1:7-8). At some point in John's ministry, Jesus shows up and John baptizes Him (1:9). Although Jesus did not need to be baptized, He set an example for mankind and identified Himself with sinners. His baptism was symbolic of His future death, burial, and resurrection. John's baptism probably had its foundation in Old Testament cleansing rituals whereas Christian baptism identifies the person with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection for our sins. Immediately following Jesus' baptism, God the Father proclaimed pleasure with His Son's actions and sent a dove (Holy Spirit) symbolizing His empowerment for ministry. People often overlook baptism as a necessary part of their Christian life, but it is healthy for us to remember that Jesus Himself was baptized evidencing His submission to the Father's will. Although baptism is not required for salvation, I believe it is the first step in spiritual growth. When we are baptized, we are identifying ourselves with the sufferings of Christ for our sin, but also His resurrection power which enables us to be effective in ministry for Him.

*Dear God, help me to see the significance of baptism in a fresh, new way. Thank You for setting an example for us to follow.*

## **Mark 1:12-20**

After Jesus' baptism by John, He was immediately whisked off by the Holy Spirit to the wilderness where Mark says that He is "tempted by Satan" for the next forty days. What a way to begin your public ministry! Mark does not digest much information about the temptation (see Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13 for further details). Mark does add that Jesus was completely alone only accompanied by wild beasts; however, Mark does reveal that the angels ministered to Him during this time. Following His resistance of temptation, Jesus begins preaching that the "kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15). The kingdom of God is fulfilled in two aspects - His rule over the hearts of men and a future literal reign on earth for 1,000 years. When Jesus commands people to repent and believe we must be reminded that these two things must be the reaction to God's gift of salvation.

Jesus has been baptized, tempted, and is now beginning His public ministry. His next step is to call out men to assist Him in ministry. Mark records here that Jesus approached Simon and Andrew and then James and John. All of these men were fishermen, but Jesus told them He was going to change what they were fishing for if they chose to follow Him. Instead of fishing for fish they would become "fishers of men" (1:17). This term describes that they would now be involved in pulling men out of the bondage of sin through sharing the gospel - repentance and faith lead to forgiveness. This must have been a pretty big life change for them - they were used to spending all their time on the water, but now they would be interacting with Jesus and many people. The gospel writers don't seem to indicate that there was much hesitation in their response to Jesus' calling them to be disciples. They were obviously convinced that He would do something extraordinary, but I'm sure nothing could have prepared them for what lied ahead.

As Jesus called each of these men to follow Him, we also are called to know Him (through His word) and tell others about repentance and faith, which are necessary for salvation. Our lives are full of schedules, plans, and dreams but God desires to use us for His benefit. As we begin to understand His heart (through prayer, reading His word, and church) we should follow Him in our daily life. Instead of being selfish, we should commit to doing God's will. Being "fishers of men" is not just a call put out to a couple guys 2,000 years ago; the command goes out to us. Bring men to repentance and faith and then help them become worshippers of God.

*Dear God, make me a fisher of men. Use me to bring others to You and may I exemplify a life which would give pleasure to You.*

## **Mark 1:21-35**

Jesus enters Capernaum, a town on the Sea of Galilee, and heads straight for the synagogue (Jewish place of worship) to teach. Mark records that those listening were amazed because of Jesus' sense of authority when He taught (1:22). Instead of teaching as the scribes (interpreters of Old Testament Scriptures), Jesus taught as One who was experienced and authoritative yet compassionate and personal. The scribes only vocalized that which they had heard from other rabbis, but Jesus was God therefore making Him the ultimate source of knowledge and truth. Of course this situation of amazement was short-lived as a demon possessed man disrupts Jesus' teaching, but He quickly casts out the evil spirit (1:23-26). Those who witnessed this power were astonished and from this point on His "fame" began spreading throughout the region" (1:27-28). Moving from this scenario, Jesus goes to Simon Peter's house where He finds his mother-in-law sick (1:29-30). Jesus quickly intervenes and heals her (1:31). After a long day, people had been hearing about what Jesus had done so they brought all the sick and demon possessed of the region to be healed by Jesus (1:32-33). All of those who came with sickness and infirmities were healed through the power of Jesus (1:34). If you are keeping score, Jesus prevailed over the demons and physical sickness which was plaguing many people. When Jesus' work was done in Capernaum, Mark writes that the next morning, "having risen a long while before daylight, he went out and departed to a solitary [deserted] place; and there He prayed" (1:35). I wish I knew what Jesus was praying about. Some scholars have suggested that He was praying in response to the people's superficial commitment to Him. In other words, people were only seeking Him for what He could do for them physically, not what He could do for them spiritually. I'm not sure we can be certain about His specific prayer, but the fact that He prayed is significant. I'm convinced that Jesus did not have to pray, after all, He was God. But we must also remember that Jesus was also man. In His humanity, Jesus recognized His need for God's strength to accomplish His mission.

I believe prayer is a lost form of worship in modern Christianity. I'm saying this as one who is at times guilty of ignoring the example of Christ who prayed. At the core of prayer is the admission of our need for God's power and strength to accomplish His will, which brings Him all glory and fame which He alone deserves. Yes...prayer is being thankful, confessing sin, asking God for help on behalf of others, but prayer is ultimately an admission of need. Not the need for more money, more physical health, more happiness or more stuff. Prayer is simply our verbalization of need for God Himself. If Jesus needed to pray, so do we. Jesus submitted Himself to do the will of His Father and obviously depended on God's power and strength to enable Him to fulfill God the Father's purpose. Again, if He needed to do that, so do I. Withdraw to a solitary place today and confess your need for God's power and strength to help you accomplish His will knowing that obedience to God will bring the most glory to Him.

*Dear God, make me a person of prayer.*

## **Mark 1:36-2:12**

After a long day of healing and meeting the physical needs of others, Jesus rested and then rose up early the next morning to pray. Mark records that He found a solitary place, probably away from the crowds of the city so that He could be alone (1:35). However, Jesus' time of prayer was interrupted when Peter (and a group of others) found Him and revealed that everyone was looking for Him (1:36-37). Capernaum was most likely buzzing with excitement over the previous night's miracles. Instead of going back to Capernaum, Jesus suggested that they "go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth" (1:38). He was well aware that the crowds would swell, but that He needed to move on in order to continue preaching salvation through faith and repentance. So, Jesus continues preaching throughout Galilee and doing many miraculous works (1:39). Mark specifically mentions Jesus' encounter with a leper who came begging to be healed. The leper declared in faith, "If You are willing, You can make me clean" (1:40). Observing the faith of the leper, Jesus is "moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed'" (1:41). Mark documents Jesus' emotional connection with the leper as He saw his helpless condition. No one wanted to touch lepers for fear of becoming ceremonially unclean, but Jesus touched him. The leper is healed (1:42) and Jesus commands him not to tell anyone what had happened so that overwhelming multitudes would not hinder His ministry (1:43-44). "However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction" (1:45).

After several days outside the crowds of Capernaum, Jesus returns and many hear that He is back (2:1). Jesus is preaching the word (gospel) to those who have gathered in Peter's house and Mark records a miraculous event which took place. Four guys carry in a man, probably on a stretcher, who is paralyzed. Trying to make their way through the crowd proved impossible so they went to the roof of the house and broke through the ceiling in order to let down this man down (2:3-4). "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you'" (2:5). In this society, sickness or disease was usually viewed as punishment for sins, although it always was not the case. This man most likely confessed his sin prior to being healed. Ultimately, Jesus released him from physical and spiritual bondage. The scribes (interpreters of the Old Testament) were standing by while all this was happening and viewed Jesus' actions as blasphemous because only God has the power to forgive sin (2:6-7). They were correct in knowing that God alone had the power to forgive sin, but they did not believe Jesus was God. Jesus quickly picked up on their thinking, so He responds by asking some questions, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" (2:8-10). Jesus' healing of this man proved that His power was from God. God had not only given Jesus the power to bring physical healing, He had also given Him power to forgive sin. Jesus turns to the paralytic and commands him to "take up your [his] bed, and go to your house" (2:11). The man does as Jesus says and all those who were present were "amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" Jesus is seen in this passage as the compassionate Christ who has truly been given the power to heal, forgive, and bring glory to His Father. May we also see Christ as our healer, forgiver, and ultimately the One to whom all glory is due.

*Dear God, help me to experience Your compassion today and may I see Your ability to heal and forgive in my own life.*

## **Mark 2:13-17**

Jesus returns to the shores of the sea of Galilee where he is met by a multitude of people (2:13). He spends some time teaching them and then passes by a tax office where he sees Levi (also known as Matthew). Jesus asks Matthew to follow Him to which Matthew responds by obeying Jesus. The word *follow* indicates that Jesus is asking Matthew to become His disciple or accompany Him on His mission. This would be a huge change for Matthew since he was a tax collector. Also known as publicans, tax collectors were Jews who were responsible for making people pay taxes to the Roman government. They would often charge a little extra because the Roman officials permitted them to keep the additional money. These publicans were despised by the people and basically made their living by dishonest means. In essence, tax collectors were outcasts in society as well as in the religious community. So when Jesus called Matthew to follow Him, he abandoned his old life in order to embrace the new. In his actions, Matthew evidenced his conversion (faith and repentance).

After choosing to follow Christ, Matthew held a dinner in appreciation for Jesus and he invited many of his fellow publicans. Mark also records that Jesus and His disciples ate with *sinners*. These people would have been those who had little respect for Jewish traditions and therefore were considered filth by the Jews. So here is Jesus eating with the outcasts of society and enjoying fellowship with them, when the "scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners" (2:16). They cornered Jesus' disciples and said, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" (2:16). Jesus overhears the scribes and Pharisees so He reacts by saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (2:17). The scribes and Pharisees thought they were above everyone else and depended on their good behavior to gain them favor with God. Ultimately, they refused to see themselves as sinners and therefore did not recognize their need for a savior, someone who could pay their sin debt. Instead of accepting Jesus as their Savior, they rejected His ways because His teachings were different than theirs. They were depending on their good works for a relationship with God, while Jesus taught a message of faith and repentance. At the heart of salvation is the fact that a person must see their sinfulness before God before they can accept His mercy. One who is sick realizes they will not get better until they see a doctor. Jesus used this to illustrate the way a person must approach Him in order to receive spiritual healing. Salvation from the bondage of sin is available to all those who are willing to admit their sin and turn in faith to Jesus' payment for sin on the cross.

*Dear God, I know I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. Please accept the payment of Your Son, Jesus Christ, as my payment for sin. Thank You for allowing Him to take my place and for giving me eternal life.*

## **Mark 2:18-22**

Mark records another encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees. Remember, the Pharisees were those "religious people" who thought their good works gained them favor with God. They found security in following a list of rules instead of recognizing their sinfulness and repenting before a holy God. In the previous story, Mark documented the Pharisees' disgust with Jesus and His disciples for eating with publicans (tax collectors) and sinners. Instead of seeing Jesus' compassion for the outcasts, the religious people scorned Him for not practicing their form of spirituality. In this particular passage, the disciples of John (the ones who chose not to follow Jesus) and the Pharisees were fasting. Fasting was prescribed in the Old Testament, but only on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31). Of course these people had created their own list of rules for spirituality and it is possible that they fasted twice a week. Most of them did this out of duty, not out of a love for God. They were interested in proving their "spirituality" to others instead of humbling themselves before God. If you look at Jesus' sermon in Matthew 6:1-18, you'll see that the Pharisees only cared about flashing their good works in front of others. While these two groups of people are fasting they approach Jesus and ask Him why His disciples did not fast (2:18). Jesus responds with these words, "Can the friends of a bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and they will fast in those days." Jesus is the bridegroom and those who follow Him are the bride. Since Jesus was with His disciples on the earth, there was no need for them to be sorrowful. Jesus' first advent should have been a joyful occasion just like a wedding. There was no need for mourning because Jesus was joined with those who had given themselves over to faith and repentance. However, Jesus was quick to say that soon there would be a time when He would not be on earth (prophecy of His coming death) and at that time His disciples would fast.

Jesus then begins to cut away at the Pharisees false belief system. He speaks in two parables saying, "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins." The religious people of Jesus' day were trying to use the rituals and rules of the Old Testament law (as well as man-made rules) to bring salvation, but Jesus was declaring that it is not possible to obtain righteousness by practicing self-denial. The ceremonies, sacrifices, and rituals set forth in the law were to set God's people apart from the paganism around them but were never intended to bring salvation from sin. Jesus Christ would soon die for the sins of mankind and repentance and faith in His work would bring a release from the penalty of sin (death). The Old Testament law only exposed the impossibility of keeping all of God's commands, which should have driven everyone to an attitude of helplessness. The attitude of helplessness should result in repentance of sin and faith in God's promised Savior.

Instead of believing in man-made rules and regulations, we should trust that God has provided all that we need through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sin. Following repentance and faith we should not return to a system of "works spirituality." God does not love us based on our performance, but He loves us no matter what. Knowing that he loves us unconditionally should drive us to follow His ways because we know that they are best and meant to bring satisfaction to daily life.

*Dear God, help me never view a relationship with You as a list of rules; however, may my growing love for You and Your word cause me to be passionate about following Your ways.*

## **Mark 2:23-3:12**

Have you ever felt as if someone was following you and watching your every move? If so, you'll be able to relate with Mark's record of two encounters Jesus had with the Pharisees. Just as a reminder, the Pharisees were the supposed religious people of Jesus' day who took pride in obeying a list of man-made, burdensome rules. Many of the rules they followed were created out of a prideful heart which coveted attention from others. There was not really a desire to please God through their actions, but an overwhelming obsession with impressing others. I want to be clear, rules are not bad. God has many rules, but they always center on protecting us from harm, providing a good quality of living, and bringing pleasure to God. In this passage, Jesus' first encounter with the Pharisees happened when He and His disciples were walking through a grainfield on the Sabbath (the seventh day of the week which God declared a day of rest, also part of Ten Commandments). Over the years, many people had added rules to God's command to rest on the Sabbath and keep it holy. The Mosaic law did not permit working for profit on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21), but it never said that a person could not pick grain to satisfy their hunger. So, when the disciples plucked some heads of grain to eat because they were hungry the Pharisees were there to call them out. Jesus responds by using an Old Testament story of David eating showbread from the temple which was only permissible for the priests to eat. God does not condemn David for eating because he was hungry. Furthermore, Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (2:27-28). God created the Sabbath in order that man would have a day of rest from all his work. The Pharisees had simply converted the Sabbath into a burdensome day where people had to be careful in everything they did. This is not what God intended.

Next, Mark documents the Pharisees' controversy over Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-5). Jesus' response is simple, yet profound: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" Jesus was pointing out the heart of the matter. The Pharisees were more concerned with rules than the well-being of people. May we never create rules which God did not clearly outline in His word. If God has clearly defined a command, we should obey it with our whole heart because we love Him. Where God has been silent, may we grant freedom for the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth. We should never judge someone else's spirituality based on a man-made list of rules, but only on the basis of what God has clearly revealed. On the other hand, may we not worship the freedom we have in Christ more than worshipping Him.

After this encounter with the Pharisees they began plotting how they could destroy Jesus (3:6). Jesus withdrew Himself to the Sea of Galilee and continued His ministry of healing and preaching (3:7-12). He refused to be limited by the rules of the Pharisees. May we conduct our lives in obedience to God's ways and refuse to allow man to create our system of worship.

*Dear God, may I have a commitment to obey and love You above all else. Help me not to give in to a system of pride and man-made rules. Guide me through Your Holy Spirit and word into all truth.*

## **Mark 3:13-35**

Within these verses there are several story lines happening. First of all, Mark records Jesus' selection of His twelve apostles (3:13-19). These were "appointed...that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons" (3:14-15). The twelve were Jesus' closest followers and in reality the future foundation of the church. Luke adds that Jesus "continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He named apostles [sent ones]..." (Luke 6:12-13). There were many who were Jesus' disciples, but only twelve became entrusted with representing His ministry and His name.

The next instance Mark records was that the multitudes became so great that Jesus and His apostles could not eat bread. It appears the crowd had received word of Jesus' miracles and they came from all over to receive physical healing. Jesus' family and closest friends became concerned about the popularity of His ministry and the demands it had placed on Him. Mark says that "they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said 'He is out of His mind'" (3:21). His family and friends attempted to rescue Him from the pressures, but Jesus knew He had been called of God to carry out His mission. They did not fully understand His calling.

Mark also details another of Jesus' encounters (3:22-30) with the scribes (interpreters of the Old Testament law). They came down from Jerusalem and accused Jesus of casting out demons using the power of Satan (3:22). This "religious group" believed in their heart that Jesus represented Satan. Jesus responded by asking, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" You think this would be obvious to the scribes. Speaking in a parable, Jesus makes a claim to His power over Satan: "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house" (3:27). Jesus was simply saying that it takes someone stronger than Satan to enter his house (the world), bind him (defeat him), and plunder his house (release people from his bondage). Jesus was that man. I'm sure the scribes did not know how to react to this truth, but Jesus' next statement was even more alarming. Jesus says, "all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation..." (3:28-29). In his study bible, John MacArthur explains Jesus' words. "Those who know His (Jesus') claims are true and reject Him anyway sin against the Holy Spirit because it is the Holy Spirit who testifies of Christ and makes His truth known to us." Unbelief in Jesus Christ is the unpardonable sin He is referring to here. Those who reject the conviction of the Holy Spirit and fail to respond with repentance and faith cannot be forgiven.

Lastly, Mark writes about the new relationship we can have with God. Jesus' earthly family comes calling for Him so others alerted Jesus that His family was looking for Him. He used this situation to teach a lesson. "'Who is My mother, or My brothers?' And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and My mother'" (3:33-35). Those who repented of sin and evidenced faith in Jesus became His family. This spiritual relationship was more powerful than earthly relationships. The fact that Jesus is welcoming people into His family is very comforting. Knowing He cares for us provides the strength to go on each day.

*Dear God, thank You for these words. May I apply them to my life in order to become a more devoted follower of You.*

## **Mark 4:1-20**

Mark records four parables in chapter 4. In this reading we will only cover one of those which have often been referred to as the "parable of the soils." A parable was a Jewish form of teaching where the truth was illustrated in a real-life scenario. Jesus further explains why He teaches in parables: "To you [his disciples] it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside [those who reject Christ], all things come in parables..." (4:11). The spiritual meaning of parables is hidden from those who fail to repent of sin and evidence no faith in God; however, those who repent and believe will understand the significance of Jesus' teachings. This particular parable is being taught by Jesus while he is sitting on a boat and his listeners are on the shore (4:1). His teaching is found in Mark 4:3-9 and the explanation is detailed in Mark 4:10-20. Jesus tells the story of a sower who went out to sow seed. The seed fell on three types of ground: stony ground, thorny ground, and good ground. In brief, the sower is God, the seed is the gospel, and the ground represents the heart of the hearer of the gospel. The seed which fell on stony ground illustrates one who hears the gospel, but it never grows because "Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts" (4:15). Many hear the gospel, but choose not to believe in it because they have been deceived by Satan.

The seed which falls on thorny ground represents those who hear the gospel but "the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (4:19). Jesus further says that these people externally accept the gospel but "they have no root in themselves, and so endure for a time. Afterward, when tribulation and persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble" (4:17). This person is consumed with the things of the world and really has no interest in following Christ. Over time this person proves that their heart was never captured by the gospel and therefore they have never been genuinely converted.

The last type of soil which the seed falls on is the good ground. This person embraces the truth about Jesus Christ and continually demonstrates his love for God through his actions. Jesus says that the seed "sown on good ground [are] those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (4:20). Out of all three types of soil, this one alone represents a genuine believer of the gospel. God changes their heart and they begin to do good for Him. Everyone does a different work for Him, but the issue is not necessarily the amount of the deeds but the commitment to Jesus Christ.

So, which type of soil describes your heart?

*Dear God, may the gospel fall on good ground in my heart. Help it to grow that I might continually do good for Your glory.*

## **Mark 4:21-34**

There are three remaining parables in Mark 4: parable of the lamp (4:21-25), parable of the growing seed (4:26-29), and the parable of the mustard seed (4:30-32). Each of them is a brief teaching where Jesus used earthly objects to teach a spiritual lesson to His followers. In the parable of the lamp, Jesus begins by asking two questions, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?" The lamp seems to represent the teachings of Jesus. Since Jesus' teachings are truth, they were not meant to be hidden but to be visible to all who would hear and receive (4:23). As a person receives and obeys the truth, they will be entrusted with more (4:25). Obedience to Jesus' teachings will result in more spiritual fruit.

The parable of the growing seed is only mentioned by Mark. It is very similar to the parable of the soil which is recorded earlier in Mark 4:1-20; however, this parable focuses on the result of the seed which falls on good ground. The seed is the gospel and the ground represents the heart. When people receive the gospel through repentance and faith, it will grow into spiritual fruit. Jesus' teaching here also seems to imply that the gospel sometimes takes time to work in the heart of a man. Mark writes, "For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (4:29).

The final parable in Mark 4 is Jesus' description of the kingdom of God. "It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade" (4:21-32). As people accept the truth, it begins to grow from a small influence to a very large influence upon others, which provides protection and blessings upon many.

Each of these parables holds a simple truth which needs to be taken to heart and applied in our daily lives. The parable of the lamp challenges us to consistently apply the truth of Jesus. The parable of the growing seed reveals the results of a heart which is sensitive to truth. Lastly, the parable of the mustard seed teaches us that even a small influence of good can grow to affect many.

*Dear God, help me to apply the truth I have learned today.*

## **Mark 4:35-5:43**

Although this is a long passage of Scripture, I believe we can look beyond the miracles Jesus performed so we can understand more about who He is. There are four particular displays of Jesus' power in these verses: the calming of the sea (4:35-41), demons being cast out of a man into a herd of swine (5:1-20), a twelve year old girl being raised from the dead (5:21-24, 35-43), and a woman with a fatal disease is cured (5:25-34). Instead of examining every detail of each miracle, we will dig a little deeper and see what each one teaches us about God.

In the first miracle of this passage, Jesus and His disciples needed to escape the crowds so they took a boat across the Sea of Galilee. As they were on their way "a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling" (4:37). The disciples were petrified, but Jesus was sleeping (4:38). Jesus awakes and says, "Peace, be still" (4:39). Immediately the sea calms and they are safe. This miracle demonstrates that God has **power over the natural world**.

Mark documents Jesus' next miracle by telling of a man who was possessed by numerous demons (5:9). This man appeared to be uncontrollable, very strong, and harmful to himself (5:3-5). When Jesus approached the man, the demons recognized His deity (5:6-7) and begged Him to have mercy on them (5:10). Jesus casts the evil spirits from the man into a herd of pigs and they fall off a cliff and die (5:11-13). This miracle demonstrates Jesus' **power over the spiritual world**.

In Mark 5:21-24 and 5:35-43, he writes about a man named Jarius (one of the rulers of the synagogue) whose daughter is near death (5:21-23). Jarius comes to Jesus to ask if He will heal his daughter and He immediately leaves to go to his home (5:24). While Jesus is on His way to Jarius' house, He performs another miracle which we will return to later. Jesus finally arrives at his home only to find that Jarius' daughter has already died (5:35). Jesus calms the situation down by saying, "Do not be afraid; only believe" (5:36). Jesus enters the house with Peter, James, and John (5:37) where he finds the girl dead (5:40). Jesus "takes the child by the hand, and said to her... 'Little girl, I say to you, arise'" (5:41). "Immediately the girl arose and walked.... And they were overcome with great amazement" (5:42). This miracle demonstrates Jesus' **power over life and death**.

The final miracle of this passage happens while Jesus is on His way to heal Jarius' daughter. A woman who has a fatal disease (5:25-26) heard that Jesus was coming through her town so she thought that "if only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well" (5:28). She did get close enough to Him and touched His clothes and she was healed (5:29). Ultimately, her faith in Jesus' ability to heal was rewarded (5:30-34). This miracle demonstrates Jesus' **power over the physical world**.

Jesus' demonstration of His power over the natural world, spiritual world, and physical world as well as His power over life and death proves that He is able to handle any situation. These real-life happenings give me confidence that God is always in control and is able to rescue us from hopeless circumstances. Instead of seeing the miracles, see the character of the God behind them.

*Dear God, demonstrate Your power to do the impossible in my life.*

## **Mark 6:1-13, 30-31**

In the first six verses of Mark 6, Jesus and His disciples return to His hometown of Nazareth where He begins teaching on the Sabbath (6:1-2a). Those who heard Him teach were "astonished" and said, "Where did this man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" It is evident by the people's reaction that they did not view Jesus as the Son of God and Mark even records that "they were offended at Him" (6:3). The fact that they were offended carries the idea of repelling or rejecting Jesus' message. They viewed Jesus as no more than a carpenter's Son, who did not have an extravagant education or a religious title. Jesus knew that "He could do no mighty work there, except He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them" (6:5). Mark then records that Jesus "marveled because of their unbelief." Being rejected by your own people is a discouraging thing, but we find Jesus continuing His ministry going "about the villages in a circuit, teaching" (6:6). Jesus had every right to quit; after all, no one in His own town wanted to hear what He said. However, He knew His mission and He was determined to finish the will of His Father, even though He experienced opposition.

Jesus calls His disciples and sends them out "two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits" (6:7). He commanded the disciples to only take what they needed for the journey and provided instructions for their ministry in each town (6:8-11). "So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" (6:12-13). Eventually the disciples returned and "told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught" (6:30). Jesus then told them to take some time to rest (6:31).

There are many obstacles we face in everyday life and some of them cause thoughts of quitting to come into our minds. In the passage we examined today, Jesus was our example of someone who continued His ministry, even when it was not popular. He was confident of what His Father wanted Him to do, so He willingly carried it out in the face of opposition. That same determination should characterize our lives as we surrender ourselves to accomplish the will of God. One of Jesus' final commands to His disciples after His resurrection was that they were to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:18-20). We have been given this same commission and even in the face of opposition we should be determined to continue in God's will.

*Dear God, may I not allow opposition to stop me from doing Your will.*

## **Mark 6:14-29**

King Herod had heard about the miraculous works of Jesus throughout the region and believed that John the Baptist, the one who called people to repentance and faith before Jesus' arrival, may have risen from the grave and was who the people were really talking about (6:14-16). Herod, the King of Israel, had beheaded John the Baptist and here Mark recounts the details of his death. It seems that Herod actually respected and even feared John the Baptist (6:20), but had sentenced him to prison for his own protection. John had apparently confronted Herod about the incestuous relationship he was involved in with his brother's wife, Herodias. Herod had married Herodias and John told him that "it is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (6:18). Herodias became angry and "held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not...(6:19). Again, Herod knew that John was "a just and holy man" so he protected him by throwing him into prison.

Mark then documents what happened following John's imprisonment: "then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast...and when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, 'Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you'" (6:21-22). Salome, Herodias' daughter, returned to her mother to ask her what she should receive from King Herod. Herodias immediately responded by asking for John the Baptist to be beheaded (6:24-25). Salome returned to Herod and told him her request and he sorrowfully granted it to be done (6:26-29).

I believe this story is very applicable to our lives. Those with whom we associate with can sometimes cause us to do things which are evil. From all of the gospel accounts of John's beheading, it seems as if Herod did not want to kill him. It was only because of his associations with wicked people that he was pressured into doing wrong. Ultimately the choice was still his, but the demands of others caused him to act in a way contrary to what I believe he really wanted to do - protect John the Baptist. We must guard our friendships and associations so that we do not open ourselves up to possible sin. I am not implying that we shut ourselves off from the outside world, but that we should diligently use wisdom in who influences us. Take some time today to examine your friendships or relationships.

*Dear God, help me to be influenced by those who love and obey You. May I not get distracted by people who seek the hurt of others.*

## **Mark 6:32-44**

This particular story of the feeding of the five thousand is recorded in all four gospel accounts and in my opinion makes it significant. If all four writers thought this scenario was important to include in their writing, how much more should we also search for its relevance in our lives? Mark account begins by revealing that Jesus and His disciples "departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him" (6:32-33). When Jesus got out of the boat, He saw all these people who had run ahead of him (probably about 8 miles). Instead of being annoyed with the constant attention, Jesus "was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things" (6:34). I believe Jesus' reaction to the multitudes should be the focus of this particular incident. Sure, Jesus goes on to do something miraculous by using five loaves of bread and two fish to feed approximately 20,000 people (including women and children). It is mind-boggling to think about the tremendous miracle of Jesus multiplying the small amount of food in order to be enough to feed everyone (6:35-44), but the real issue is why Jesus did this miracle. The issue is not the physical feeding, although Jesus thought that was important, but the spiritual feeding. When Mark writes that Jesus was "moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd" he is insinuating that Jesus is extremely concerned about their spiritual condition. As He looked at the multitude, He saw many who needed the forgiveness of sin and spiritual guidance. Jesus knew that His forthcoming death on the cross and resurrection would free mankind from the bondage of sin. He alone desired to be the Shepherd who would guide the lost and hopeless out of their darkness into His light. He desired that everyone would be able to have a relationship with God through His sacrifice on the cross.

I believe it is imperative that we also evidence the same compassion for those who are lost, hopeless, and in need of God. We must point them to Jesus Christ whom the Apostle Paul says is able bring those "who were once far off...near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). Sometimes we can all get frustrated by the constant needs of the people around us, but we must remember the example of Jesus. He saw beyond their physical needs in order to meet the real need - a change of heart through repentance and faith.

*Dear God, help me to stop and take time to see the spiritual needs of people. May I not "brush them aside" but reveal to them the forgiveness and mercy You have offered through Jesus Christ.*

## **Mark 6:45-56**

Immediately following His feeding of the five thousand men (approximately 20,000 people total), Jesus sends His disciples away to Bethsaida by boat. Jesus stays behind to pray (6:46). When evening came, the disciples encountered a storm on the Sea of Galilee and they were having a hard time rowing because the "wind was against them" (6:48) and Matthew adds that their boat was being tossed by the waves (Matthew 14:24). Mark indicates that the wind had carried the disciples' boat to the middle of the sea while Jesus was still on land (6:47). I have no doubt that they were fearing for their lives at this point. A turn of events happens when Jesus "saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night [3-6am] He came to them, walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled" (6:48-50). Jesus recognizes their fear and says, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid" (6:50). It is hard to blame the disciples for their fear, but they should have understood that Jesus possessed power over all things since He was truly God. As He had just feed thousands of people with only five loaves of bread and two fish (6:32-44), Jesus also had control over nature. In essence, Jesus was testing the faith of His closest followers. Did they believe He could deliver them out of any trial or difficulty? Jesus steps from the raging sea into the boat of the disciples and the wind ceases (6:51). The disciples "were greatly amazed in themselves and marveled" (6:51b). But then Mark adds these words to the commentary about the disciples' reaction: "For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened" (6:52).

In reading this story we are quick to criticize the disciples' lack of faith in Jesus, but we are also very guilty of failing to see the potential power of God in various circumstances of life. We doubt, question, and contemplate whether Jesus is who He says He is when difficulty comes our way. The key in understanding this passage is to look beyond the miracle itself to see the character of the One behind the supernatural. If God has power over all things, He is capable of handling all adversity. This does not mean He will always remove the hardship, but He will provide the strength to handle it. We often find ourselves in the boat of life getting tossed around from every side, but Jesus is never too far away to whisper over the sound of the waves, "Be of good cheer! it is I; do not be afraid."

*Dear God, help me to see that You have power over all things and may I practice faith in Your everlasting control.*

## **Mark 7:1-23**

Jesus has yet another encounter with the scribes and Pharisees, who were the so-called religious people of His day. They were more concerned about the external actions of a person rather than the true condition of the heart. These groups added their own man-made traditions to Scripture and in many cases their rules took precedence over God's word. In this particular showdown, the scribes and Pharisees "saw some of His [Jesus'] disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, [and] they found fault. For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders" (7:2-3). The "tradition of the elders" was a source outside of Scripture which men had created and used as the highest authority in Judaism. Oftentimes it took priority over God's revealed commandments. The problem lies in the fact that God had not commanded these practices of the scribes and Pharisees, yet they were holding Jesus' disciples accountable for following them. These people began to question Jesus about His disciples' failure to obey the ritual (7:5) to which He responded with the words of Isaiah the prophet, "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (7:6). They believed adhering to their list of rules gained them favor with God when in reality it only drove them further from the truth. Jesus goes on to reveal that the scribes and Pharisees "reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (7:9). He then exposes their failure to obey God's commands and replacing it with their own interpretation (7:9-13). The root problem of the scribes and Pharisees was that they depended on obedience to their made up rules in order to "worship" God. Jesus came to expose the impossibility of finding forgiveness through good works. He taught that a man must recognize his inability to find God on his own and therefore humble himself asking for grace. Although the scribes and Pharisees may have appeared "spiritual" on the outside, their hearts were still evil and defiled (7:17-23).

A relationship with God does not come through following a list of rules or regulations, but is granted when a person truly recognizes the sinfulness of their heart and turns to Him for mercy. Mercy and grace are always granted to those who admit their need. All of us must be careful about finding security in a man-made list of rules, even after we receive the forgiveness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I believe that God's word is very clear about what He expects from us, so we should spend our time obeying what He has already revealed, not what we think He is saying. Quit making up rules so that you can find comfort in a system which may be contrary to what God is requiring.

*Dear God, help me to obey Your word first and foremost. May I not allow my own interpretations to cloud my relationship with You.*

## **Mark 7:24-37**

Jesus was under a lot of pressure from the multitudes and much scrutiny by the scribes and Pharisees. This predicament must have been difficult, humanly speaking, because He was always in demand wherever He went. There was almost no time to rest. It may be for this reason Jesus departed from Gennesaret and took retreat in the region a Tyre and Sidon. "He entered a house and wanted know one to know it, but He could not be hidden. For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter" (7:24-26). Mark obviously makes a big deal about her nationality - she was not a Jew, but a Gentile (Greek). Matthew refers to her as "a woman of Canaan" (Matthew 15:22). Instead reacting in a manner which we have come to expect with Jesus, Matthew reveals that "He answered her not a word" (Matthew 15:23a). Although Mark does not document it, it appears that this woman went to Jesus' disciples after He did not respond to her request and they begged Jesus to tell her to go away (Matthew 15:23b). Following a period of silence Jesus says to the woman, "Let the children [Israel] be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread [blessings] and throw it to the little dogs [Gentiles, non-Jews]" (7:27). Matthew adds Jesus' words spoken prior to Mark's statement, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). I am certain Jesus was not being unkind to this woman, but simply communicating His mission and maybe also testing her faith. Paul reveals in Romans 1:16 that the gospel was intended to be preached to "the Jew first and also for the Greek." This is not a rejection of the Gentiles, but only the process God chose to spread His message of faith and repentance. Some people see this as favoritism, but who are we to question God. I believe this is one of those things we cannot try to figure out, but simply trust that God knows best.

This woman whose daughter is demon-possessed is very persistent and evidences a great faith in Jesus' ability to heal. She speaks to Him and says, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs" (7:28). Her view was that everyone would benefit from the blessings given to the Jews. God had promised Abraham that through His descendents, "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). She obviously believed in this promise given thousands of years ago and knew in her heart that Jesus was the promised One sent from God the Father. Because of her faith and humility, Jesus granted her request and her daughter was delivered of the demon (7:29-30). This is a wonderful example of persistence and faith in God's ability to do the impossible.

*Dear God, teach me what it means to be persistent in prayer. When I believe You have the ability to accomplish something, may I not quit asking until the answer has come.*

## **Mark 8:1-21**

In Mark 6:32-44 we read about Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 men (probably 20,000 people total) and how He took five loaves and two small fish and miraculously provided food for all. Again, we find Jesus in the same predicament but now He is speaking to a crowd of approximately 15,000 people (4,000 men) who have been without food for three days (8:2). Jesus calls His disciples to Him and kind of hints at the dilemma. They were present when Jesus had fed the other multitude, so you might think one of them would speak up and declare that Jesus can perform another miracle. Instead, they answer Jesus by asking, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?" They still didn't get that Jesus was God and He could do anything. This time Jesus grabs seven loaves of bread and a couple fish and asks the people to be seated. "He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set then before the multitude...so they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments" (8:6-8). Not only did Jesus provide food for the multitude, but He also had some left over. He could do the impossible!

Jesus and the disciples then go by boat to the region of Dalmanutha where Jesus encounters the negativity of the Pharisees. They wanted Him to do bigger miracles to prove He was truly sent from God, but Jesus would not meet their demands (8:11-12). Ultimately, His resurrection would be the greatest miracle, but they still would not believe. So, Jesus and His disciples hop into the boat again and go toward the region of Bethsaida. On their way, the disciples discovered that they were almost out of bread. Jesus took this opportunity to teach them about the false teaching and hypocritical nature of the Pharisees, but the disciples thought He was getting on their case about their lack of bread (8:14-16). Then Jesus decides to confront them about the unbelief which was not only in the Pharisees, but also in their own hearts. He reminds them about His feeding of the five thousand and the fact that there were twelve baskets of fragments left over (8:19). Next, Jesus points out the miracle He had just performed in feeding the four thousand and the seven extra baskets of food remaining (8:20). Jesus reacts by asking them a pointed question, "How is it you do not understand?" The disciples had hardened hearts and failed to believe that Jesus could provide for their every need. They had personally observed the miraculous, but did not personally believe He could do the same for them.

You and I worship the same God of the disciples and we must see His ability to provide for us. When times of trouble come, we must trust that He can evidence His control over the situation. Our God can do what seems impossible to us!

*Dear God, help me to trust that You can and will provide my every need.*

## **Mark 8:22-33**

Following Jesus' feeding of the four thousand (8:1-10) and His candid conversation with the disciples (8:14-21), Jesus comes to Bethsaida where Mark recounts the healing of a blind man (8:22-26). They leave Bethsaida and journey toward Caesarea Philippi. On their way, Jesus asks His disciples a profound question, "Who do men say that I am?" Of course, the answer to this question is something all of us must answer, but at the heart of this question was whether or not people thought Jesus was the One truly sent from God to deliver the people. Although most Jews pictured a political and military deliverer, Jesus was neither of those. Instead, His ultimate mission was to suffer death for the sins of all men and deliver them from eternal separation from God. Back to the disciples' answer to the question, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets" (8:28). Then, Jesus makes this question personal and asks, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter is quick to speak up by answering, "You are the Christ" (8:29). This statement was their confession of belief that Jesus was the Messiah, the chosen One of God. Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (8:31). Peter did not like the fact that Jesus was saying that He was going to die, but Jesus rebukes him and explains that He is doing the will of God the Father (8:32-33). It truly was difficult for the disciples to understand God's plan and that Jesus must suffer death. They could not fathom being without Him; however, they also failed to acknowledge Jesus' promise to come back from the grave three days after His death. We have the fortunate opportunity to look back and see all of the pieces, but the disciples were hearing this for the first time. The disciples had a great love for Jesus and did not want to lose Him. They were just confused.

This account of Mark should encourage us to evaluate our hearts in regards to the identity of Jesus. Is He the Son of God or is He just another prophet sent from God? Ultimately your answer to that question will determine the foundation of your life. If Jesus is the Messiah, you must by faith repent of sin and turn your life over to Him? If you do not believe Jesus was the chosen One of God, you are rejecting His claims and placing your trust in your own system of beliefs. Which will it be?

*Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus to die for the sins of all mankind. Help me to trust Him with my life.*

## **Mark 8:34-38**

Matthew and Luke also record this particular saying of Jesus, so we must view it as something which was a very common thread in His ministry. Here Jesus calls the people to Himself and begins teaching them what it means to truly follow Him. Jesus says, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (8:34). In His statement here, Jesus is asking two things from those who want to walk in His ways: denial of self and submission to God's will. When Jesus says that a person must "deny himself," He is commanding that a person rid themselves of self-centeredness and all efforts that cause their life to revolve around their own passions. He is not stripping people of their personality and possessions, but rather a selfish heart which makes every decision based on personal gain. Jesus also commands that a person "take up his cross." This phrase would evoke vivid images in the heart of Jews living under Roman rule. Carrying one's cross "brought to mind the sight of a condemned man who was forced to demonstrate his submission to Rome by carrying part of his cross through the city to his place of execution. Thus...was to demonstrate publicly one's submission/obedience to the authority against which he had previously rebelled" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, p. 141) In essence, Jesus was seeking the surrender of self to the authority of God. Instead of pursuing their own plans, they would now follow the commands of God and build their life around His ways.

Jesus continues His teaching saying, "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (8:35-36) The person who pursues his own interests will ultimately lose his soul and all the world's money will not be able to buy his soul from eternal destruction. However, the one who chooses to lose his life for the pursuit of Christ and the gospel will be saved (eternal reward). Which will you choose?

*Dear God, I desire to pursue Your ways over my ways. Give me a passion to be filled with obedience and love for You.*

## **Mark 9:1-13**

After speaking about the cost of following Him, Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "There are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power" (9:1). Jesus was referring to an event which has been termed the "transfiguration." Although many have interpreted Jesus' words here in various ways, the best way is to understand it is that He is referencing what is about to happen to Peter, James, and John on the mountain. Of His twelve disciples, Jesus takes three with Him to the mountain to experience the kingdom of God prior to its establishment. The kingdom of God will finally be established in the future and begins when Jesus Christ returns to earth following the seven-year tribulation period (also known as the second coming of Christ). All believers will be taken from the earth prior to the seven years of judgment which is unleashed on all those who reject God. Immediately after this judgment, Jesus will establish His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years and those who have believed will reign with Him. His kingdom will be one of righteousness, goodness, and holiness. Peter, James, and John were receiving a glimpse of Jesus' rule on earth.

With all these things in mind, let's return to the event. When Jesus and His three disciples arrive on the mountain, Jesus is "transfigured before them" (9:2). This phrase means that He was changed in form. Mark goes on to write, "His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (9:3). They were able to see Jesus in His divine glory, as He would be during the millennial reign on earth. Elijah (an Old Testament prophet) and Moses (the recipient of God's law) appear with Jesus, Peter, James, and John (9:4). The appearance of Elijah and Moses with Jesus implies their acceptance of Him being the Messiah. Both God's law and the prophets pointed to a coming Messiah. Peter finally speaks up and asks if they should build tabernacles for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses (9:5). Mark records that Peter said this because he didn't know what to say, but it probably implies that he thought Jesus' rule would be established right away (9:6). A cloud then comes over them and God the Father says, "This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!" "Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves" (9:8). They began their descent down the mountain and Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone until He had risen from the dead, even though they did not fully understand what He meant by coming back from the dead (9:9-10).

This event was a confirmation of a future kingdom being established and that Jesus would rule over it. All believers can look forward to this future kingdom knowing that God will return for His own and establish a righteous kingdom.

*Dear God, I look forward to Your future rule on earth. May I prepare my heart now in anticipation of what is to come.*

## **Mark 9:14-29**

Jesus returns from the mountain with Peter, James, and John and they meet up with the other nine disciples who had been left behind (9:14). A group of people had gathered around the nine disciples who were engaged in a dispute with the scribes. The conflict had probably arisen because the disciples had been unable to heal a boy who had been demon-possessed since birth. When the multitude who was gathered saw Jesus, they ran to greet Him and He asked the scribes the nature of the discussion with His disciples (9:16). A man from the crowd speaks up and tells the story of bringing his demon possessed son to be healed by the disciples, but they had not been able to cast out the evil spirit (9:17-18). A bit frustrated, Jesus responds by saying "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear [put up] with you?" Jesus' words seem to indicate that he was disappointed by their lack of faith in the power of God to heal. Even Jesus' disciples had failed to heal this boy, maybe because their faith was in their own power instead of God's. So, the boy is brought to Jesus and He converses with the boy's father about the son's possession (9:20-22a). The father says to Jesus, "But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (9:22b). Jesus responds by saying, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (9:23). The father quickly admits his lack of faith and desperately cries out for Jesus to help his faith be strong (9:24). Obviously Jesus provides faith to those whose faith is weak because He heals the boy of this demon which had tormented him since his birth (9:25-27). Jesus possessed all power over the supernatural realm. Mark continues to write about the happenings following this healing, "And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' So He said to them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting'" (9:28-29). The emphasis of this account is not the healing by Jesus, but the lack of faith by the disciples. They may have become secure in their ability to heal and failed to have faith in the One who was able to give them power. Whenever we do something in the name of Jesus, our faith must be in His power alone. We must never become arrogant and think our talents or abilities are what make God's work happen. It is only through the strength of God that we are able to carry out His work. Jesus indicates that the most important way to receive power is through prayer. By design, prayer is an act where we admit our helplessness without God. When we pray, we are admitting that we need God and cannot do anything without Him. Notice Jesus told the father of the boy that "if you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." The object of faith is not in ourselves, but in God. He is able to do that which we cannot!

*Dear God, strengthen my lack of faith through prayer and help me see You do great things in Your power.*

## **Mark 9:30-50**

Jesus and His disciples now begin making the long trek to Jerusalem where Jesus would eventually be crucified. It seems Jesus is taking more chances to be alone in order to prepare His disciples for the events which would transpire in a few months. While they are traveling, Jesus taught His disciples that He would be "betrayed into the hands of men and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day" (9:30-31). The disciples didn't say anything because they lacked understanding and were "afraid to ask Him" (9:32). The group arrives in Capernaum and Jesus asks them what they were arguing about on the road. Although Mark does not specifically mention the argument, but he does reference Jesus' inquiry and that the disciples were in a dispute about "who would be the greatest" (9:33-34). They were ashamed of their argument and therefore did not answer Jesus' question. So, Jesus sits them down to teach a lesson and says, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). In contrast to the examples of leadership around them, Jesus taught that true greatness is found in serving others first. There is a child nearby and Jesus takes the child in His arms and says, "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him [God the Father] who sent me" (9:36-37). This child represented the very least respected person in the culture of their day where age and maturity were honored, but youth was ignored. Showing kindness to this little child was Jesus way of telling the disciples that everyone should be loved equally, regardless of their status or respectability. When they love and serve others, they are loving and serving God.

John speaks up and asks Jesus about a man who was casting out demons in His name. The disciples had apparently confronted him and informed him he could not do the work they were doing. Since this man was casting out demons, he was probably a believer in Jesus Christ but not one of Jesus' twelve. The disciples thought they were better than everyone else because of their close association with Jesus. Jesus answers John's question by saying, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side" (9:39-40). Jesus declares that anyone who does a good work in His name is, in essence, doing the work to Christ and will receive reward in the kingdom (9:41). Jesus then warns anyone who would contribute to a person's unbelief or their turning away from God. The disciples were not to discourage people, whether an exorcist or little child, in their work for Jesus Christ but rather encourage it (9:42).

Jesus ends this teaching session with a command for His followers to guard themselves from sin. The illustrations He uses are graphic but remind the believer of the importance of keeping sin out of their life at any cost. Following Christ meant forsaking earthly desires so that we may pursue holiness and walk in God's ways. Anything that would distract from this pursuit must be removed (9:43-50). "It is better to be a disciple and to enter eternal life maimed, minus earthly possessions that have been renounced, than to be an unbeliever. An unbeliever retains his allegiance to this world, refuses eternal life with God on His terms, and so will be thrown into hell" (The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck, p. 147).

*Dear God, help me to be a servant to all and guard against sin in my life that I may be a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.*

## **Mark 10:1-31**

Jesus comes to the region of Judea and He begins to teach the people who have gathered (10:1). Of course the Pharisees show up and try to get Jesus to say something which would render His ministry questionable. "The Pharisees came and asked Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' testing Him" (10:3). Basically, the Pharisees were trying to get Jesus to say something contrary to their teachings on divorce. Some believed divorce was acceptable on any grounds while others believed it was permitted in the case of adultery. Jesus' answer to this question would alienate one group and ultimately make them upset with Jesus. In a way only Jesus can, He declares that God never intended for anyone to be divorced and only because of "the hardness of your heart he [Moses] wrote a certificate of divorce" (10:3-9). The Pharisees had misinterpreted the law given in Deuteronomy 24 to mean that as long as a certificate of divorce was offered, permission was granted and remarriage was appropriate. When the disciples return to the house, they continued to ask Jesus about His teaching on divorce and He further explained it to them (10:10-12). The Bible seems to indicate only two acceptable scenarios for divorce: adultery (Matthew 19:9) and when an unbelieving spouse leaves her believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:14-17).

While the disciples and Jesus are in this heavy discussion, people bring little children to see Jesus "that he might touch them;" however, the disciples "rebuked those who brought them" (10:13). My guess is that they were so involved in this discussion that they lost sight of what was really important - people. Jesus commands that the children be allowed to come to Him and He says, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (10:15). What was Jesus teaching here? He was saying that no one can be a part of His kingdom unless he comes in humility and dependence as a little child. Those who seek a relationship with God must admit their need and approach Him in humbleness. This teaching is perfectly illustrated in Jesus encounter with a rich young ruler. This man comes to Jesus and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life (10:17). Jesus responds by listing six of the ten commandments that he must keep (10:18-19). The ruler arrogantly declares that he has kept all of these commandments (10:20). "The Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me'" (10:22). The ruler was disappointed at Jesus' demands so he "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (10:22). Ultimately, this man loved riches more than he loved God. Jesus was not teaching a works based salvation (keep the commandments, sell possessions), He was actually trying to expose the impossibility of attaining salvation through works. The disciples get very concerned and ask Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" The response of the disciples was correct and should have been the response of the rich young ruler. Jesus gave the disciples assurance that those who recognize their inability to attain salvation have the right heart attitude to receive it. Jesus declares, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (10:27). The teaching is very clear - man cannot receive redemption through his own works, but only through the sufficient work of Jesus.

*Dear God, make me humble before You. May I never in pride think I can do anything without You.*

## **Mark 10:32-52**

After His encounter with the rich man, Jesus and His disciples continued their journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. I believe the disciples were confused because of Jesus' determination to get to Jerusalem where He would eventually die. Jesus had already instructed His disciples twice that He would soon be killed (Mark 8:31; 9:31). Mark writes that "Jesus was going before them" but the disciples "were afraid" (10:32). If Jesus would soon be put to death, what would this mean for them? They were afraid. Jesus took the twelve aside and for the last time told them that "the Son of Man will be betrayed...and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again" (10:33).

It seems like the disciples totally missed Jesus' teaching about humility and suffering because James and John asked Him for places of prominence in the future kingdom (10:35-40). When the other disciples catch word of James and John's request they become angry (10:41). Jesus calls all of them to gather together and He begins to teach them about true leadership and prominence. He instructs them that leadership is not found in exercising authority over others, but rather in serving (10:42-44). Using Himself as an example, Jesus tells them that even He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (10:45). Many people in our world think importance is achieved through climbing the ladder of success; however, Jesus says a person takes on recognition when they choose to be a helper of others.

Following this teaching about servanthood, Jesus and His disciples are in Jericho, about 15 miles outside Jerusalem. Mark specifically mentions a blind man named Bartimaeus who is sitting by the city gate begging. Most people with physical problems became beggars and were outcasts in society. When the blind man heard Jesus was nearby, he began crying out for healing because he had probably been told about the miraculous works of Jesus (10:46-47). Some people did not think this man was worthy of Jesus' time so they tried to silence his cries for help, but Jesus calls the blind man and restores his sight (10:48-52). Jesus evidenced true servanthood by taking time for a person whom others thought was insignificant. This should be a vivid example for us to follow. Every individual is important to God and we are called to serve them in love. Jesus was the perfect example in this and we should follow in His steps. Do not judge a person's worthiness to be served - serve everyone as you are a representative of Jesus Christ.

*Dear God, help me to be a servant of all. May I see all people through Your eyes and serve them with a joyful heart.*

## **Mark 11:1-11, 15-19**

As Jesus and His disciples near Jerusalem, He commands them to "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it" (11:2). The disciples go out to find a colt and bring it back to Jesus (11:4-6). When they return with the colt, they "threw their clothes on it and He sat on it. And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road" (11:7-8). Spreading their clothes on the street was customary for greeting a new king and placing palm branches on it was an act of celebration for the coming king. The actions of the people in this instance was not just the welcoming of any king, but the promised Messiah who cast out demons, healed the sick, and brought to life the dead. The crowd cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Their shouts indicated that they believed Jesus was the One sent from God who would establish the kingdom promised to David's Son.

Jesus finally arrives in Jerusalem where He enters the temple and "began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares [containers filled with products to sell] through the temple" (11:15-16). Jesus then rebuked them for using a place of worship as a "den of thieves" (11:17). The money changers were in the temple "court to exchange Greek and Roman coins for Jewish or Tyrian coins which pilgrims had to use for the annual half-shekel payment for temple religious services. A fee as high as 10 or 12 percent was assessed for this exchange service" (MacArthur Study Bible, p.1486). The temple had become a place of profit instead of providing a refuge for worship and praise to God. Jesus demanded that these actions cease so the temple could return to its rightful use. The scribes and Pharisees witnessed Jesus actions so from that time forward they devised a plan to put Him to death. The actions of Jesus in the temple should really challenge us about the reverence and respect which is due to God alone. Jesus was calling for a radical cleansing of those whose hearts were far from Him. Our approach to God in worship is very important and any obstacles which distract must be confessed and forsaken.

*Dear God, I pray that I would worship You with a pure heart and never allow anything to take the place of true reverence which You deserve. Keep Your church purified so that we might be holy worshipers of You.*

### **Mark 11:12-14, 20-33**

As Jesus and His disciples went outside the city of Bethany, Jesus was hungry and desired something to eat (11:12). He sees a fig tree in the distance so He approaches it only to find no fruit (11:13). From every appearance, this tree should have had fruit but its leaves gave a false impression. Jesus reacts to this disappointing finding and says, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again" (11:14). Even though it was not the "season for figs" the tree should have been bearing some fruit - the season was only a month away. This situation goes a little deeper than just fig trees. In the Old Testament, fig trees were often symbolic of the nation of Israel. He may have been using this tree as an illustration of Israel's failure to obey God although they attempted to appear as if they loved Him.

The next morning as the disciples passed by the fig tree they noticed it had dried up (11:20), so Peter points this out to Jesus (11:21) who then uses their observation to teach a lesson about faith in God (11:22). He says, "whoever says to this mountain, 'be removed and be cast into the sea' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says" (11:23). I am assuming that the disciples did not understand Jesus' words as literal (i.e. they could really move mountains) otherwise we would have some type of manifestation of this miracle. However, Jesus was instructing them that faith in God alone will enable them to see Him do many wonderful works; in other words, God's power is accessible to those who evidence full dependence on God. Jesus goes on to say, "whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them" (11:24). The key here is that faith cannot be in self or other things. Our trust must be in God's ability to make the impossible happen and through us He will accomplish great things. Jesus is not speaking of selfish requests, but asking for those things which really count for His glory.

*Dear God, may I be a person of faith who trusts You to do the impossible. As a result of my faith in You, may You receive the honor and glory which You deserve.*

## **Mark 12:1-12**

After Jesus' encounter with the scribes and Pharisees in Mark 11:27-33, He gives them the parable of the vineyard owner. A man (represents God) plants a vineyard (represents Israel) and leased it to vine dressers (represents Jewish leadership). When the grapes were ready for harvest, the man sent his servant (represents Old Testament prophets) to gather some fruit of the vineyard (12:2). The servant was beaten and sent away with nothing (12:3). So the vineyard owner sent another servant and they stoned him and sent him away also (12:4). The man sent many more servants but each one was rejected (12:5). After all the servants had been turned away, the vineyard owner decided to send his only son (represents Jesus Christ) thinking they would respect his authority (12:6). However, the vine dressers killed the man's son also (12:7-8). Jesus then asks the scribes and Pharisees, "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do?" Quickly answering His own question Jesus says, "He will come and destroy the vine dressers, and give the vineyard to others" (12:9). In essence, Jesus was explaining that God had entrusted His message to the nation of Israel using prophets to proclaim it; however, over and over the nation of Israel rejected His message spoken through the prophets. Finally God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the ultimate manifestation of His message of faith and repentance but the Jewish leaders were about to kill Him also.

Referencing Psalm 118:22-23, Jesus details that the Jewish religious leaders had rejected Him as the chosen One sent from God. Jesus' parable angered the Jewish religious leaders because they knew He was referring to them. "And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude.... So they left Him and went away" (12:12). Instead of recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and repenting of their sinful ways, they rejected the Son of God and from this time forward looked for a way to destroy Him. Jesus dealings with the Jewish leaders should cause us to think about who Jesus really is? If we believe He is not the Son of God, then we are siding with the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day. But if Jesus is truly the promised One of God sent to deliver us from sin, we must repent and follow His ways. Every person must make a choice regarding the identity of Jesus Christ - was He a liar or was He the Son of God?

*Dear God, help those reading to see Jesus Christ as the true Son of God. May we all chose to worship Him not only with our lips, but with our lives.*

## **Mark 12:13-17**

After Jesus cleansed the temple of all the thieves (Mark 11:15-19), the religious people became angry and sought a way to destroy Jesus (Mark 11:18). Since they did not agree with Jesus' teachings and He often exposed their erroneous doctrines, they kept asking Him questions to try to get Him to say something out of place. Mainly, the religious leaders were waiting for Jesus to claim His authority from God so they could accuse Him of blasphemy. The Pharisees and Herodians asked Jesus a series of questions hoping "to catch Him in His words" (12:14). Their first question was "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" Rome taxed the people heavily and the Jewish people despised it. Since they were under Roman rule, the question asked was supposed to be a lose-lose situation. If Jesus answered "yes" the religious crowd would accuse Jesus of dishonoring the Jewish nation because they were only under obligation to God. If he said "no" they would accuse Him of rebellion against Rome. Jesus responds by saying, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (12:17). Jesus eloquently answered declaring that citizens should obey the laws of the land, but should also obey God when it comes to matters of spirituality and morality. Some Christians believe they can avoid any authority because they are first loyal to God; however, Christians have an obligation to be good citizens and follow laws established by government. Obedience to government evidences a humble spirit. As citizens of this great country, we should submit to the authority placed over us while also remembering the moral and spiritual obligations we have to God.

*Dear God, help me to submit to the laws of my country. Remind me that obeying government authority reflects my obedience to You.*

## **Mark 12:18-34**

After the Pharisees had asked Jesus a question about loyalty to God and loyalty to government, the Sadducees come along attempting to catch Jesus saying something out of place. The Sadducees were Jews who only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as important. One of the things which defined their belief system was that they did not believe in any type of resurrection. In a direct attempt to try to trip Jesus up on His words, they posed a question to Him regarding levirate marriage which Moses wrote about in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. This practice said that the brother of a man who died without a child could marry the widow. Doing this would ensure an heir and that the family name would continue. Obviously this was forbidden if the brother was already married. So presenting this scenario to Jesus, the Sadducees asked Jesus that if there was truly a resurrection, who would this woman be married to in eternity. Jesus answers, "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (12:25). Relationships will change in heaven and believers will exist in a completely new environment. Jesus then exposes their false view of the resurrection by taking them back to the first five books of the Old Testament and pointing to God's conversation with Moses at the burning bush (12:26). He said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob." All three of these men were dead at the time of God speaking with Moses, but His very words implied His everlasting fellowship with them in heaven (12:27).

Following a little discussion on Jesus' answer, a scribe steps forward and asks Jesus, "which is the first commandment of all?" Again, the intention was to get Jesus to say something contrary to their belief system. Since the religious leaders had decided that there were more than 600 commandments in the Old Testament law, this question seemed impossible for Jesus to answer. However, Jesus stated that the entire law was based on one great commandment - love for God (12:29-30). Love for God would lead to obedience. Taking it one step further Jesus revealed that the second great commandment was to love others; in other words, love for God results in love for others (12:31). The scribe was impressed with Jesus' answer and verbalizes his belief in what He has said (12:32-33). Jesus says to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (12:34). His expression of belief with his mouth should have lead him to belief in his heart as well as obedience to God's laws. May we all see beyond the commandments in order to see that obedience to God is the evidence of our love for Him.

*Dear God, teach me to love You first.*

## **Mark 12:35-44**

The scribes and Pharisees had fired a number of questions at Jesus, but now Jesus decided to pose a question to them. He asked, "How is it that scribes say that the Christ [Messiah] is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The LORD [God's covenant name, Yahweh] said to my Lord [title for God and here refers to the Messiah], sit at my right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' Therefore David calls him Lord; how is He then his Son?" Jesus was revealing that the promised Messiah was not only man, but also God...and Jesus Christ was that Messiah.

Offering further condemnation to the religious leaders, Jesus exposes them because they "desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers" (12:40). Everything the scribes and Pharisees did was for recognition. Their hearts were far from Him. We must be careful that our motivation for doing religious acts is not to attract attention to ourselves or for selfish gain. Our service to God must flow from a life which has humbled itself before Him and is motivated by a genuine love for God.

As a timely illustration, Jesus was sitting near the treasury at the temple where people gave money (12:41). Those who were rich put in much, but a poor widow gave two mites which was equivalent to a penny in our day. Looking for an opportunity to teach His disciples, Jesus called them to Himself and said, "this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (12:44). Her motivation was purely out of love for God and His work while the religious rich just wanted to be recognized so that others thought they were spiritual. It was not the amount of money given which mattered, but the motivation behind the gift.

*Dear God, help me to always do Your work out of humble heart. Forgive me for the times I have done things simply for notoriety.*

## **Mark 13:1-37**

Following His confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew gives a comprehensive teaching to His followers about the hypocritical character of the Pharisees (Matthew 23). At the conclusion of this teaching Jesus mourns over Israel's rejection of Him as the Messiah and their refusal to repent of sin. His words recorded here mark the end of His public teaching. As He is departing from the temple Jesus declares that "your house if left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:38). With these words Jesus was declaring that His presence was being removed from the temple. Upon exiting His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and buildings are here!" They were simply recognizing the beauty of the temple and other buildings in Jerusalem, but Jesus quickly revealed that "not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (13:2). He was referring to the soon destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans which would occur in 70AD. This event would occur some 40 years later leaving over a million Jews dead and their temple destroyed. Thinking that this event would usher in the kingdom of God on earth, the disciples began to question Jesus as to the timing of this occurrence as well as the signs leading up to it (13:3-4). Answering their questions in reverse order, Jesus first describes the signs leading up to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (Mark 13:5-23). Without going into extreme detail, Jesus would soon die on the cross, resurrect from the dead, and ascend into heaven. Following His ascension (Acts 1) there would be the age of the church will last for an undisclosed amount of time. Whenever God decides that the church age should end, He will take all believers out of the earth into heaven (known as the rapture). A seven year tribulation period will then happen on earth where God will pour out His wrath upon all those who have rejected His Son, Jesus Christ. Immediately following the seven year tribulation period, Jesus will return to earth with all believers and at that time He will set up His kingdom (Revelation 20:1-6). So, the signs which Jesus details in Mark 13:5-23 take place at the conclusion of the seven year tribulation period. Then in Mark 13:24-27 he records the timing of the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth and warns the generation living during that time to be watchful (13:28-37). Jesus' words here should remind us of His promised return, but also should serve as a warning to all those who reject Jesus as Savior.

*Dear God, thank You for the reminder that one day You will return to set up Your earthly kingdom for 1,000 years. Until that time help me to be faithful and point others to the truth about Jesus Christ.*

## **Mark 14:1-11**

In the final three chapters of Mark he documents Jesus' final days on earth before He was crucified on the cross. Mark 14 begins by bringing the readers to the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover celebrated Israel's deliverance from the death of the firstborn when they were under Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12-13). Following this plague God had sent upon the Egyptians, the Israelites were released by Pharaoh and every generation of Israel celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a remembrance of their escape. Both of these feasts were recognized every year thereafter and people would return to Jerusalem to be a part of reflecting on God's goodness to the nation of Israel. Jesus and many of His followers had returned to Jerusalem to commemorate these feasts, but Mark says that the chief priests and scribes were still plotting how they could kill Jesus (14:1). They decided to wait until after the feast to pursue Jesus because there were large crowds gathered in Jerusalem and the religious leaders feared a riot (14:2).

In Mark 14:3-9 he reflects back to an incident which took place the previous Saturday. He writes that Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper (14:3). As He is sitting at a table a woman named Mary (John 12:3), who is the sister of Martha and Lazarus, breaks a flask of expensive oil pouring out its contents onto the head of Jesus. This action was a sign of her love and commitment to the Lord. Some of the disciples (John reveals Judas as the culprit) became angry that she had wasted this costly oil on Jesus because it could have been sold and the money given to the poor (14:4-5). But Jesus speaks up and says, "Let her alone...She has done a good work for me...She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial (14:6-8). Although Mary probably was not aware of the symbolism her anointing carried, her act of worship came to represent the soon death and burial of Jesus Christ.

Following on an act of worship, Mark records an act of deceit. "Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him" (14:10-11). In essence, Judas was looking for a time when Jesus was away from the crowds so he could betray Him into the hands of the so-called religious people of Jesus' day.

There is a very identifiable contrast between Mary and Judas. One loved Jesus with all her heart, but the other was only close with Him for what he could gain...in this case, money. Judas claimed to be a follower, but his actions demonstrated something different. How about you? Are your actions worship or betrayal?

*Dear God, help me to be like Mary who loved You with all her heart and demonstrated it through her actions. Guard me from being like Judas who walked with You, but really did not know You.*

## **Mark 14:12-25**

The disciples and Jesus were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was an eight day event. In preparation for the Passover, Jesus commanded two of the disciples to go and prepare the place where they would celebrate the Passover (14:12-15). The two disciples found the place which was located in the upper room of a guest house and later in the evening Jesus and the rest of the disciples joined them (14:16-17). As they were eating, Jesus said "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me" (14:18). All the disciples became "sorrowful" and began to inquire who this person would be (14:19). Jesus answers, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish" (14:20). Judas was probably sitting close to Jesus dipping his bread in the same dish. Jesus goes on to warn this person who would soon betray Him, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born" (14:21). Following this stern warning, Jesus takes the bread, blesses and breaks it saying, "Take, eat; this is my body" (14:22). Then Jesus takes the cup, gives it to them, and they each drink from it (14:23). Jesus proclaims, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" (14:24). In this moment, Jesus transformed the meaning of the Passover Feast. In the time of Moses and the Israelites, the innocent lamb was slain in each home so that the firstborn would be saved from death. Jesus was now claiming that He was the innocent lamb of God which would be slain for mankind's deliverance from sin. His death would bring us life. In this moment, Jesus was declaring this the final Passover meal and that He would not drink with them again until the beginning of the millennial kingdom. Until this time, they were now to celebrate the Lord's Supper (or Communion) as a remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross which brought all those who would believe forgiveness of sin and eternal life (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Today take some time to thank God for providing His Son, Jesus Christ, as the Deliverer from our sin.

*Dear God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to offer forgiveness to all those who will believe in Him. Remind me often of His sacrifice.*

## **Mark 14:26-42**

Jesus had just revealed that one of His disciples would betray Him (Mark 14:17-21) and now things turn more sorrowful as Jesus also prophesies that all of His disciples will abandon Him (14:27). Peter is quick to speak up and declares, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be" (14:29). I believe Peter really thought he could withstand any opposition, but Jesus knew otherwise and Jesus said to Peter, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times" (14:30). Becoming more adamant about his loyalty to Jesus, Peter declared "If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" All of the disciples agreed with Peter and confessed their wholehearted commitment to Christ (14:31). Little did they know that in just a few short hours, Jesus words would become true.

The disciples and Jesus arrive at the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus enters in to pray. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him inside the garden where "He began to be troubled and deeply distressed" (14:33). Jesus walks a little further into the garden, falls down, and "prayed that if were possible, the hour might pass from Him." Jesus goes on to pray, "Abba [means daddy], Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (14:36). Jesus knew that His death was required to satisfy the wrath of God upon sin. But, He also felt the tremendous weight of all of man's sin upon Himself and was asking God if there was any other way to forgive sin. Although this mission was a heavy one to bear, Jesus prayed that God's will would be accomplished even if that meant He had to die.

After feeling this burden, Jesus finds Peter, James, and John sleeping so He calls out and warns them to stay alert (14:37). The disciples did not understand what was about to happen and were not aware of the spiritual attack which was getting ready to take place. Instead of sleeping, they should have been praying for strength. Jesus goes away again to pray but when He returns the disciples are asleep (14:39-40). A third time Jesus goes to pray and returns to find them asleep (14:41). This time Jesus says, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand" (14:41-42). This event should be a warning to every believer who feels strong enough to withstand the spiritual battles which take place around us each day. Like the disciples, we feel as if we would do anything for the sake of Christ; however, most of us are too weak without even knowing it. We need God's power upon our lives in order to stand up against the forces of evil and prayer is the weapon which provides the strength to endure these times of temptation and trial. May God help all of us to seek His strength through prayer so we can accomplish His will for daily life.

*Dear God, give me Your strength today. I cannot do life without You.*

## **Mark 14:43-72**

As Jesus was speaking to Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas appears with "a great multitude with swords and clubs...from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders" (14:43). Judas proceeded to kiss Jesus singling Him out as the one and they immediately took Him captive (14:44-48). It was at this time that Mark also records that all of Jesus' disciples abandoned Him as He had said in 14:27. The mob leads Jesus away to the home of the high priest and Peter follows at a distance (14:53-54). The council begins to question Jesus looking for some reason to put Him to death, but they found none (14:55-60). The high priest finally asked Jesus directly, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus responded by saying, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (14:61-62). The high priest became upset and accused Jesus of blasphemy because He claimed to be the promised Messiah. All those who were listening agreed that He should be put to death and they began spitting on Him and beating Him (14:64-65). Mark switches back to Peter, who is watching all this take place from afar, where people begin to question his association with Jesus. Three times someone accused him of being one of Jesus' followers, but each time he denied it more vehemently (14:66-71). On his third denial, the rooster crowed and Peter remembered Jesus words to Him in Mark 14:30. When Peter thought about this, the Bible says that he wept (14:72). I know all those who follow Christ can identify with Peter in this circumstance. I truly believed Peter loved Jesus with all his heart, but overestimated how far he would go for the sake of Christ. Many of us feel committed to do the work of God in our daily lives, but when serving Him results in persecution there is some hesitation on our part. We should be honest with ourselves and guard against overconfidence in our own spiritual strength. Jesus told His disciples that the key to spiritual strength was through prayer and I believe we must throw our dependence on God each day by confessing our need for Him.

*Dear God, I need Your strength today as trials and persecutions may come my way. Help me to withstand each with Your power and that my confidence would be in You, not myself.*

## **Mark 15:1-23**

The morning following Jesus being taken captive, Pilate (governor of Judea) questioned Him as a favor to the accusing council (15:1). Pilate inquired whether He was the King of the Jews to which Jesus responded "it is as you say" (15:2). "The chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, 'Do you answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!' But Jesus still answered nothing so that Pilate marveled" (15:3-5). Luke reveals that Pilate found no wrongdoing in Jesus, but ultimately gave into the pressure of the crowd (Luke 23:13-25). In a last effort, Pilate attempted to release Jesus on a customary act during the Passover. Luke writes, "Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested" (15:6). Thinking they would cry for the release of Jesus, Pilate set forth a murderer and thief named Barabbas against Jesus (15:7); however, the crowd cried louder to crucify the King of the Jews (15:8-14). Pilate gave in to the demands of the crowds, who had been incited by the chief priests (15:11), and freed Barabbas while sending Jesus to be crucified (15:15). In this scenario, it is amazing how a person of leadership can be swayed by the opinion of the crowd. Even though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of the charges brought against Him, he still could not resist the pressure of the mob which had gathered in Jerusalem. The soldiers led Jesus off to be crucified. Luke writes that they "clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head...then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him" (15:16-23). Why did Jesus endure all of this? He suffered punishment and eventually death for you and for me. His one mission was to die for the sins of mankind and offer forgiveness to all those who by faith accept His sacrifice. We should never forget the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us so that we could be free from sin and eternal destruction.

*Dear God, thank You for being willing to go all the way to the cross for me.*

## **Mark 15:24-47**

Jesus was led off to be crucified, hung to die on a cross, between two thieves. Above His cross they placed a sign which read "THE KING OF THE JEWS" and those who passed by mocked Him saying, "save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" The religious people also talked amongst themselves saying, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe" (15:31-32). Mark writes that even the two thieves on either side of Jesus mocked Him (15:32b). Jesus suffered tremendous ridicule while He hung dying on the cross. At any time, God the Father could have decided to stop everything which was happening to His Son but because he loved mankind so much, he allowed His only Son to be killed so sinners could be freed.

At noon, darkness came over Palestine and at 3:00pm Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Luke writes that Jesus followed this cry with His last words, "into Your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus takes His last breath and dies there on that cruel cross. He willingly laid down His life and shed His blood to become the perfect sacrifice for sin. Death was the only thing which could satisfy the wrath of God upon sin. Paul writes this in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "For He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us [mankind], that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." John MacArthur makes this observation about this verse, "As Christ was not a sinner, but was treated as if He were, so believers who have not yet been made righteous are treated as if they were righteous. He bore their sins so that they could bear His righteousness. God treated Him as if He committed believers' sins, and treats believers as if they did only the righteous deeds of the sinless Son of God" (MacArthur Study Bible, p.1772).

At the time of Jesus' death, the veil of the temple was miraculously torn from top to bottom (15:38) signifying that the way now into God's presence was no longer through a priest, but through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. When the evening came Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (15:42-44). When Pilate was certain that Jesus was dead, he released His body to Joseph and "he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb" (15:46). Jesus had been crucified and now buried. What was next?

*Dear God, thank You for Your Son, Jesus, who willingly offered up His life for me on the cross.*

## **Mark 16:1-20**

In this final chapter of Mark we find Jesus lying in a tomb having been put to death by the religious Jews who hated Him. The Sabbath day had past and it had already been three days since Jesus' death so "Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, that they might come and anoint Him" (16:1). Anointing the body was a Jewish custom which helped cover the smell of the decaying body and also an expression of love for the deceased. "Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen" (16:2). On their journey to Jesus burial place, the women were discussing who would roll away the heavy stone which had been placed at the mouth of Jesus' tomb (16:3). Upon arriving at the tomb, they saw that the stone had been rolled away and when they entered the tomb they discovered an angel sitting there (16:4-5). Calming their fears, the angel told them not to be afraid but to rejoice because Jesus had risen from the dead (16:6). The angel commanded the women to "go, tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you" (16:7). I find it very significant that the angel specifically mentions Peter to the women. Just a few days earlier Peter had confessed his undying love for Christ, but ended up denying Him three times. Peter was distraught over his denial of Jesus, but Jesus wanted Peter to know that He still loved him. I believe Jesus understands our weaknesses and forgives us when we fail Him.

Jesus' resurrection was being noised across the region, but many were receiving the news with unbelief (16:9-13). At a later time Jesus appeared to the eleven disciples and gives them some instructions for their future ministry (16:14-18). Finally, Mark briefly records Jesus' ascension into heaven to sit at the right hand of God (16:19). Following this encounter with the resurrected Christ, the disciples "went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs" (16:20).

As we have had the chance to journey through the gospel of Mark, may we be careful to follow the example of Jesus Christ. May we live lives of faith and conviction as a result of knowing more about our living God!

*Dear God, help me to remember what You have taught me through reading the gospel of Mark.*