

A dramatic landscape featuring a mountain peak in the background, partially obscured by a sunset sky with warm, orange and red tones. The foreground is filled with dark, silhouetted trees and foliage, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

MARK

THE CHRIST REVEALED

M A R K

THE CHRIST REVEALED

Zack Flipse



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Bibliography

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SETTING THE STAGE

The Author

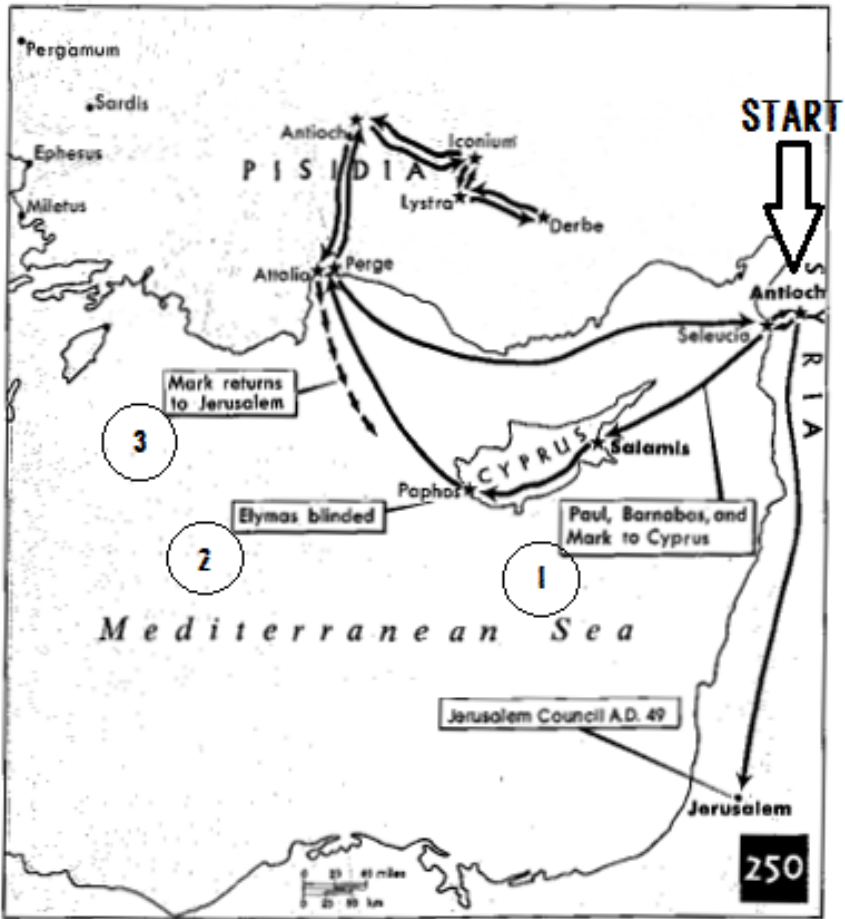
- Universal tradition attributes the Gospel of Mark to the John Mark mentioned several places in the New Testament. He lived in Jerusalem, the son of a wealthy woman named Mary (Acts 12:12), and the cousin of the evangelist Barnabas (Colossians 4:10).
- Mark's story is one of a young believer whose faith formation—successes and failures—develops very publically in the life of the early church.
- Mark comes from a believing family. His cousin Barnabas has a leadership role in the early church. The church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to investigate the faith of the Gentiles (Acts 11:22-23), and he spends a year mentoring the Apostle Paul (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas is described as, “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” (Acts 11:24).
- What's more, Mark's mother Mary seems to be an important supporter of the early church. It's been suggested that the “Upper Room” where the Last Supper was held and where the disciples stayed after Jesus' death was in Mary's house (see chapter 14 of this study guide). Peter—after his escape from prison in Jerusalem—goes straight for Mary's house, where believers had gathered to pray for him.

“When this had dawned on him, [Peter] went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.”

(Acts 12:12)

- Mark seems to have been a follower of Jesus from a young age, and likely watched the events of Jesus life and ministry take place before his very eyes. He probably attended Peter's Pentecost sermon in Jerusalem (Acts 2).
- Mark's faith in the Lord Jesus inspired him to take an active part in the ministry of the early church. He accompanied his cousin, Barnabas, and Paul on the first missionary journey to the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:4-5) in 46 A.D. However, Mark did not complete this journey with Barnabas and Paul, deserting them in Perge to return to his hometown of Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

“The two of them [Paul and Barnabas], sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John [Mark] was with them as their helper. They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos...From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.”
 (Acts 13:4-6, 13)



(adapted from *The Carta Bible Atlas*, 250)

- Scripture doesn't make Mark's reason for leaving expressly clear. Whatever the reason, Mark returned to Jerusalem where he would be reunited with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas for the Council of Jerusalem in 50 A.D. (Acts 15).

- Following this meeting, Paul prepared to set out on his second missionary journey. Barnabas insisted that Mark join them again, but Mark’s desertion had left a negative impression on Paul. So Paul took Silas with him, and Barnabas and Mark went back to the island of Cyprus.

“Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.’ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left...”
 (Acts 15:36-40)

- The account in Scripture follows Paul, so little is known about Mark, Barnabas (and Peter, for that matter) from 51-61A.D. Some early Christian scholars suggest that Mark went south to Alexandria in Egypt and planted the influential church there—though these accounts have been contested. *The Acts of Barnabas* claim that Mark stayed with Barnabas on Cyprus until Barnabas was martyred in 57 A.D.

“Mark is said to have been the first sent to Egypt to preach the Gospel that he had also written down and the first to found churches in Alexandria itself...In the eighth year of Nero’s reign, Annianus was the first after Mark the Evangelist to take charge of the parish of Alexandria.”
 (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 2.15, 24)

- It seems, from Scripture, that Mark had been restored in the eyes of Paul. Last we read, Paul would not agree to do ministry with Mark. Yet while Paul is imprisoned in Rome (Acts 28), we find him in the company of Mark!

“My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)
 (Colossians 4:10)

“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.”

(Philemon 1:24)

- Peter also includes Mark in the greeting of I Peter (63 A.D.). “Babylon” here is a euphemism for Rome. Paul requests Mark while writing II Timothy (67 A.D.), shortly before he and Peter are martyred in 68 A.D.

“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.”

(I Peter 5:13)

“Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

(II Timothy 4:11)

- If Eusebius’ account is to be believed, Mark was in Alexandria until 61 A.D. (the eighth year of Nero’s reign). This works nicely with his reappearance in Scriptural accounts. Paul’s prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) are typically dated 61 A.D. in Rome. So too, I Peter is dated 63 A.D. while Peter is *also* imprisoned in Rome.
- The work of the Holy Spirit over two decades has transformed Mark from a timid deserter into Paul’s sought after helper. While Paul awaits his martyrdom in Rome, it’s Mark he asks for.

“For some years Mark vanishes from history. Tradition has it that he went down to Egypt and founded the Church of Alexandria there. Whether or not this is true we do not know, but we do know that when Mark re-emerges it is in the most surprising way. We learn to our surprise that when Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians from prison in Rome Mark is there with him. In another prison letter, Philemon, Paul numbers Mark among his fellow-labourers. And, when Paul was waiting for death and very near to the end, he wrote to Timothy, his right-hand man, and said, ‘Take Mark and bring him with you; for he is a most useful servant to me.’ It is a far cry from the time when Paul contemptuously dismissed Mark as the quitter. Whatever had happened Mark and earned the title of ‘the man who had redeemed himself.’ The one man Paul wanted at the end was Mark.”

(Barclay, xvi)

The Setting

- Mark's Gospel is set in Judea, following the life and ministry of Jesus.
- As a resident of Jerusalem, and possibly a follower of Jesus, Mark was certainly an eye-witness to some of the events of Jesus' life. However, Mark's Gospel is not entirely his own account, but rather Mark's record of Peter's account.
- Peter, the disciple of Jesus, was certainly an eye-witness to the events of Jesus' life and ministry. Mark is called "the disciple and interpreter of Peter" by Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 3.1).

"Peter's hearers, not satisfied with a single hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine message, pleaded with Mark, whose Gospel we have, to leave them a written summary of the teaching given them verbally, since he was a follower of Peter. Nor did they cease until they persuaded him and so caused the writing of what was delighted at their enthusiasm and approved in the reading of the book in the churches. Clement quotes the story in *Outlines*, Book 6, and Bishop Papias of Hierapolis confirms it.

(Eusebius, 2.15)

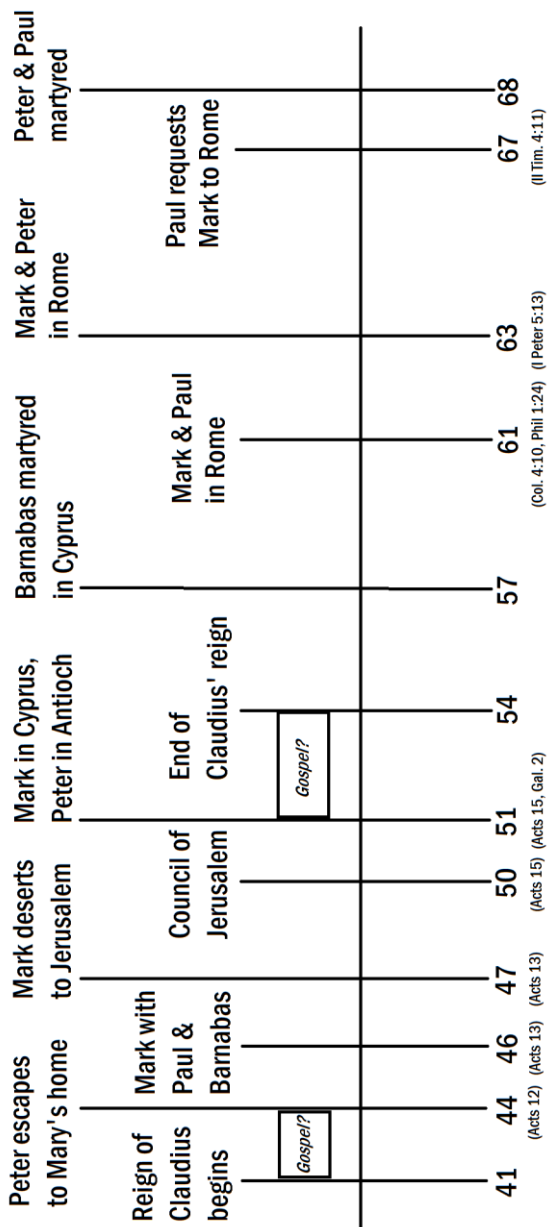
"A tradition which dates from Papias (A.D. 70-130) says that behind the record of Mark's Gospel there is in fact the preaching and authority of the apostle Peter...This tradition is confirmed by other patristic writers and 'is so sound', says Dr. Vincent Taylor, 'that if we did not possess it, we should be compelled to postulate something very much like it.'"

(Swift, 806)

- This gives Mark's Gospel the authority of an eye-witness testimony—if it wasn't already. It also gives considerable insight into passages unique to Mark and not included in the other Gospels, which we'll cover throughout the study guide.
- When examining the setting of Mark's writing, the *place* is much easier to pin down than the *time*.
- Ancient tradition agrees Mark wrote his Gospel from Rome. Further cementing this agreement, Mark frequently translates Hebrew expressions into Greek and uses proper names for well-known Roman people and places (the praetorium in 15:16, Rufus in 15:21).

“When, by the Spirit, Peter had publicly proclaimed the Gospel in Rome, his many hearers urged Mark, as one who had followed him for years and remembered what was said, to put it all in writing. This he did and gave copies to all who asked. When Peter learned of it he neither objected nor promoted it.
(Eusebius, 6.14)

- The *time* of Mark’s writing is much more difficult to say. We can narrow the window of time using several facts.
 - A fragment of Mark found near Qumran in “Cave #7” has been dated roughly 50 A.D. Some scholars use this and other manuscript evidence to date this Gospel as early as 39 A.D.
 - Such an early dating as 39 A.D. conflicts with some of the records from Eusebius. Eusebius’ testifies that Peter and Mark went to Rome—and composed the Gospel—after the confrontation with Simon Magus (Acts 8, 36 A.D.) and during the reign of Claudius. Claudius’ reigned from 41 to 54 A.D. A dating as early as 41-44 A.D. is possible.
 - While Acts recounts several stories of Peter during that time period, there is no mention of Peter (or Mark) in Rome that early.
 - Scripture does, however, say that after Peter’s escape in Jerusalem “he left for another place” (Acts 12:17). Herod was not able to find him after “a thorough search” (Acts 12:19). Mark, shortly after, returns to Jerusalem from Antioch (Acts 12:25), which is north of Jerusalem (in the direction of Rome). It is possible, however unlikely, that these two were in Rome during that stretch.
 - Following the Council of Jerusalem (50 A.D.), Barnabas and Mark head back to Cyprus (Acts 15:39) while Peter is close by in Syrian Antioch with Paul (Galatians 2:11). This placement, circa 51 A.D., is the last note on both Mark and Peter in Scripture until 61 A.D. and later.
 - We’ll suggest a dating of 51-54 A.D. This would occur during the lengthy stretch of time that Scripture follows Paul’s story and is silent on Mark and Peter. It satisfies Eusebius’ testimony and the manuscript data from Qumran Cave #7. If Eusebius and *The Acts of Barnabas* provide any reliable information, Mark would have his gospel “also written down” (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 2.15, 24) when he headed for Alexandria, Egypt circa 57 A.D.
- This study guide will assume a dating either between 41-44 A.D. or 51-54 A.D., with preference given to the later.



- Since Mark is typically assumed to have been written before Matthew, Luke and Acts, both of these date ranges give ample time for the other gospels to have been written in their authors' lifetimes. Considering Luke's presence with Paul and Mark in Rome (Philemon 1:24) and Mark's extensive travels

from Alexandria to Rome, it is possible—if not likely—that both Luke and Matthew made use of Mark in their writing. These writings share such a similarity that they have been called, “The Synoptic Gospels.”

The Theology

- Mark’s Gospel portrays Jesus as a conquering king. We follow His life and ministry as He exercises His power over one sphere after another: demons, teachers, priests, traditions, people, nature, etc.

“The general tone, depicting the Lord’s ceaseless activity and His power over demons, disease and death, is such as would appeal to Roman readers, whose interest was in deeds rather than words.”

(Swift, 806)

- Contrasted with this conquering king is Christ’s humanity. Mark mentions Jesus’ temptation, His prayer life, His escapes to solitude, and attempts to squelch stories of His divinity. The Son of God—so powerful and full of authority—is “a carefully guarded secret” (Swift, 807). This juxtaposition between Christ’s conquering authority and humble humanity create a tension unrelieved until the Cross and Grave.
- The testimonies of Jesus’ power and humanity are often told back-to-back, revealing the true nature of the Messiah as He prepares for the Cross. It feels at times as though you had whiplash as you jump with Mark from one extreme of Jesus’ nature to another.
- While Mark is by the far the shortest Gospel, this tension in Christ’s ministry tells a powerful story about who He is and what He accomplishes.

“According to this evangelist [Mark] the two natures, human and divine, are in perfect harmony. This is a fact which, in studying certain passages, one can hardly fail to detect. Mark’s aim is that men everywhere may accept his Jesus Christ, “Son of man” and “Son of God,” this conquering King, as their Savior and Lord.”

(Hendrikson, 18)

- This Christ—human and divine—is able to pay the ransom for guilty humanity with His death and the Cross, yet defeat death and grant immortality to His own.

“The last week of Jesus’ life was obviously of great importance to Mark. In a sense, all that goes before it can be seen as preparation. This tells us that Mark’s theology is a theology of the cross.”

(Cole, 949)

- Some commentators see Peter’s sermon in Acts 10:36-43 as an outline for Mark’s Gospel (Hendrikson, 26) :
 - This is the message of the Savior Jesus Christ.
 - *Begun*
 1. He was baptized by John with water and the Holy Spirit
 - *Continued*
 1. He did miracles and cast out demons
 2. He interacted with Jews and Jewish leaders
 - *Accomplished*
 1. He was crucified and raised from the dead on the third day
 2. He appeared to the disciples and others
 3. He commanded them to preach that He is the True and Living God

“It would not be unfair to call Mark the essential gospel. We will do well to study with loving care the earliest gospel we possess, the gospel where we hear again the preaching of Peter himself.”

(Barclay, xxi)

JESUS ENTERS

Mark 1:1-13

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

(Mark 1:1)

- Mark titles his book in verse 1: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” In this short description we gain considerable insight into Mark’s intentions.
 - This story is “good news” (“gospel”).
 - This story is about Jesus Christ. It’s not a history textbook, a guide to rebelling against tyrannical government, or a work of fiction. It’s the story of Jesus Christ.
 - Jesus Christ will be shown to be the Son of God. Mark, as we’ve stated, intends to keep Jesus’ divinity a secret as long as he can. Critics use this to demonstrate that the disciples *never* saw Jesus as Son of God. This cannot be true, as Mark says exactly so in the very first line.

“It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’ — ‘a voice of one calling in the desert, “prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’ And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: ‘After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’”

(Mark 1:4-8)

- Since Mark is writing primarily to a Roman audience, he skips the customary genealogy and the “fulfilling prophecy” sections that the other gospels include. There is no genealogy, no birth story, no trip to Egypt, and no magi.
- Yet, even when writing to this Roman audience Mark goes out of his way to include a few Old Testament quotations—as he does here with Malachi and Isaiah. It is impossible to separate the Good News of Jesus Christ from God’s revealed plan and will in the Old Testament.

“So, although Mark does not quote from the OT as much as other evangelists do, he believed just as firmly as they that the roots of the gospel were to be found in the Jewish Scriptures.”
(Cole, 950)

- Peter’s influence on this account is also present here. The story picks up with the ministry of John the Baptist. Peter and his brother Andrew were disciples of John the Baptist when they were first introduced to Jesus (John 1:35-42).

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”
(Mark 1:9)

- John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. So why would the sinless Savior need it? This was John’s own question in Matthew 3:14-15. Here is an instance of Mark portraying the mystery of Christ as *both* God and man.
 - In His divinity, Christ is without sin and without need for repentance.
 - In His humanity, Christ submits to the law of God and the ceremonies prescribed for men.

“In a sense, by means of baptism Jesus was fulfilling part of his tasks of laying down his life for his sheep. Moreover, apart from this voluntary self-surrender, symbolized by his baptism, would not all other baptisms have been meaningless? It was by means of the Savior’s sacrifice of himself that the basis was established for the forgiveness of sins, a forgiveness signified and sealed by baptism for all those who sincerely confess their unworthiness and intended to pursue their further journey ‘in newness of life.’”
(Hendrikson, 42)

- At His baptism, Christ is able to sympathize with us even in the act of repentance—though He had no sin of His own to repent of. He repented for *our* sins.
- God uses this great act of humility to demonstrate the authority of the Son by revealing Christ to be His very Son.

“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

(Mark 1:10-11)

- Mark articulates a doctrine of the Trinity, God in three persons, from circa 50 A.D. God is heard, distinct from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen manifest, distinct from the Father. And the Son is named in the Godhead along with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

“How filled with comfort this paragraph, comfort not only for the Son and for John, but for every child of God, for it indicates that not only the Son loves his followers enough to suffer the pangs of hell in their stead, but that also the Spirit fully co-operates by strengthening him for this very task, and that the Father, instead of frowning upon the One who undertakes it, is so very pleased with him that he must needs rend asunder the very heavens, that his voice of delightful approval may be heard on earth! All three are equally interested in our salvation, and the three are One.”

(Hendrikson, 45)

- Jesus is clearly identified as the Son of God. Together with the blessing of Father and Spirit, Jesus’ ministry is inaugurated.

“At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.”

(Mark 1:12-13)

- Following Jesus’ baptism, His authority is put to the test. He spends forty days in the wilderness with no food and no human company—only the

angels. He wars with the temptation of Satan. Curiously, Mark—unlike Matthew and Luke—does not resolve the conflict here.

- In the other Synoptic Gospels, Jesus commands Satan to leave Him, and Satan does so. Mark communicates this event differently. He may see this struggle between Christ and Satan as ongoing, even after the forty days in the wilderness. Over the course of the story, Jesus will defeat Satan in battle after battle, culminating in His victory on the Cross and in the grave. Mark's focus is on Jesus as the conquering King.

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’”
(Mark 1:14-15)

- John the Baptist had spoken out against King Herod's improper relationships with his sister-in-law. For this, he was imprisoned (Mark 6:17-18) east of the Dead Sea at Fort Machaerus (Josephus, Antiquities XVIII 5.2). Jesus heads in the very opposite direction and begins his ministry in the quiet countryside of Galilee.
- The summary statement of Jesus' ministry goes like this: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” The call to “repent” was nothing new. The priests and prophets had been doing that for centuries before. More recently, John the Baptist had been calling them to repent and be baptized: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 3:2).
- Jesus' message *is* new, though. It includes the call to “believe the good news.” Christ will demonstrate this “good news” with His life, death, and resurrection. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: sins are forgiven through the once-for-all sacrifice of the Son.

“By repentance we must lament and forsake our sins, and by faith we must receive the forgiveness of them. Both these must go together: we must not think either that reforming our lives will save us without trusting in the righteousness and grace of Christ, or that trusting in Christ will save us without the reformation of our hearts and lives. Christ has joined these two together, and let no man think to pull them apart.”

(Henry, 166)

- Jesus preaches His message in an unassuming place—the countryside of Galilee. However, He doesn't do it with unassuming people; these are fishermen He's met before. Far from John the Baptist's prison cell, Jesus finds Simon and Andrew—disciples of John the Baptist who, according to John 1:35-42, Jesus had met in the days after His baptism.
- We can learn from this the length to which Jesus will go to call His people to Himself, following these would-be disciples to a remote countryside. He certainly will pursue us in the same way.
- Upon calling the first full-time disciples, the group heads into Capernaum. Capernaum was a major trade center on the Sea of Galilee, and also home to Peter and his family.

“As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”

(Mark 1:16-22)

- We're reminded here of Mark's juxtaposition between the Christ as man and Christ as divine. So far, the start of Jesus' ministry has been rather familiar. He's baptized, He preaches good news, He makes disciples, and He heads to the synagogue to teach—these are rather ordinary tasks.
- This teaching is not ordinary, though. It carries with it supernatural authority. Jesus is not only human, but divine.

“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, ‘What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!’ ‘Be quiet!’ said Jesus sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits

and they obey him.’ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.”
(Mark 1:23-34)

- Mark gives us three quick snapshots of Jesus’ divine authority.
 - First, a demon possessed man in the synagogue recognizes Jesus and names Him as “the Holy One of God.” Jesus quiets the demon and exorcises it with a simple command.
 - Second, Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law instantly, without even a word.
 - Third, Jesus heals and exorcises demons as the people gather and word begins to spread.
- There is very little detail given in any of these encounters—much less than will be given in similar stories later. It’s almost as if Mark is saying, “...but this was no ordinary teaching, it had the authority to cast out many demons and heal many sick—but more on that later.” It’s like a movie that begins with a flash-forward action scene from later in the movie. The audience’s attention is captured, and they understand something really important about the main character—even if they still have many questions.
- We’re brought back to Jesus’ humanity.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
(Mark 1:32-35)

- “Very early in the morning” is rendered in other translations as “a great while before day” or “very much at night.”

“Here observe, first that the Saviour, though perfectly holy, regarded the duty of secret prayer as of great importance. Second that he sought a solitary place for it—far away from the world and even from his disciples. Third that it was

early in the morning—always the best time, and a time when it should not be omitted. Fourth if Jesus prayed, how much more important is it for us! If he did it in the morning, how much more important is it for us, before the world gets possession of our thoughts; before Satan fills us with unholy feelings; when we rise fresh from beds of repose, and while the world around us is still!”

(Barnes, 332)

- These moments where Jesus’ humanity is so plainly evident provide rich insights into the rhythms and patterns of Christian life. Jesus portrays for us a rich devotional and prayer life. God our Father provides for us everything we need; this is a truth made plain when we spend regular time mediating on Him and His Word.

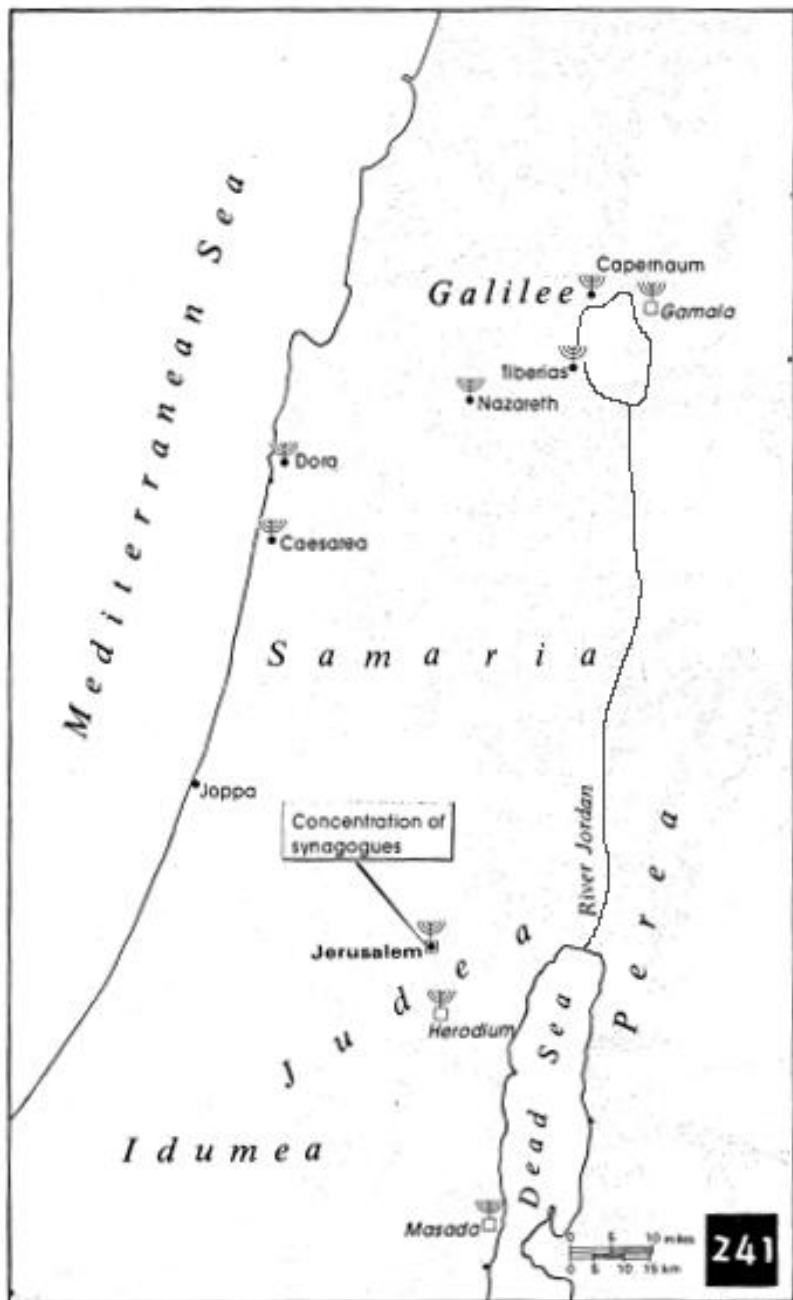
“Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’ Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.”

(Mark 1:36-39)

- The fact that Jesus first preached and made disciples *before* performing signs and miracles is important to catch. The purpose of this ministry, as Mark has already made abundantly clear, is to preach the good news of the forgiveness of sins in the person of Jesus Christ. The signs and miracles that follow *confirm* us in the preaching; in other words, Jesus is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do.

“This drawing of people into the kingdom of God was the whole purpose of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and that is why preaching the good news, not healing or driving out demons, lay at the heart of his ministry. Miracles of healing and exorcism are only signs of the kingdom; they are proofs of God’s power as well as of his love.”

(Cole, 952)



(map adapted from Carta Bible Atlas, 241—noting known synagogues)

SIGNS & WONDERS

Mark 1:40-3:35

- Jesus leaves Capernaum on a synagogue tour. During this time period, synagogues were common in cities all across Israel. They functioned very much like our churches today with Scripture readings, prayer, a message, and a blessing from the ruler of the Synagogue. To Jesus' benefit, there was a "freedom of the synagogue" (Hendrickson, 76) that allowed anyone present at the gathering to give the message. Jesus traveled throughout Galilee giving these messages and sharing His "good news."
- There is a long list of miracles and healings Jesus performs while on this synagogue tour. These signs and wonders, as we've stated, are meant to establish the message He preaches.
- The first account is of a man with leprosy. "Leprosy" could be used as a catch all term for a number of skin diseases. Leviticus 13-14 contains the rules for healing and ritual cleansing. Priests oversaw the health of the people, and by observation would pronounce people "clean" or "unclean."
- In the case of skin diseases, "unclean" people had to spend seven days in isolation before being seen again by the priest. Proper "leprosy" was not curable, and meant a lifetime of isolation. For less severe diseases, a person would visit the priest every seven days and, if the disease had subsided, could perform the ceremonial washings to be pronounced clean by a priest.

"A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere."

(Mark 1:40-45)

- Jesus demonstrates His authority over sickness, but also demonstrates His authority over the priests of Israel! He announces “Be clean!”, fulfilling the role of the priest.
- We should note, however, that Jesus doesn’t ignore the Mosaic Law altogether. Even though He is able to heal the man and pronounce Him clean, He encourages the man to participate in the customary ceremonies prescribed by Moses.
- Consistent with Mark’s portrayal of Jesus’ quiet divinity, Jesus tells the man to keep quiet about what has just happened. The man disobeys, and as a result “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly.” Like this man with leprosy, our obedience or disobedience has real impact on the work of God to reconcile His people today. We ought to obey the commands of God and live in such grateful obedience that His message of “good news” spreads. But, even our gravest disobedience cannot thwart the work of God, for “people still came to him from everywhere.”

“A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.”
(Mark 2:1)

- For the beginning of His earthly ministry, Capernaum functions as Jesus’ headquarters. It seems likely that they continued to stay at Peter’s home (Mark 1:29). That Capernaum is considered “coming home” in Mark might be the influence of Peter here, as Jesus’ hometown elsewhere is consistently Nazareth.

“So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, ‘Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Get up, take

your mat and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’”
(Mark 2:2-12)

- With the leper, Jesus demonstrated His authority as priest. Word had gotten out about this miracle, and the teachers of the law had come as skeptics to see what these claims were all about.
- Like the leper who believed “you can make me clean,” the four friends approach Jesus with great longing and great faith. They believe that Jesus has the ability to provide for their friend everything he needed. To their surprise, for their faith they receive not healing but forgiveness.

“Jesus, instead of healing at once, publicly forgave the man his sins. Imagine their disappointment. Jesus saw that this was what the man both desired and needed most.”
(Cole, 953)

- These men expected to receive a miracle of healing, but Jesus takes an opportunity to reiterate what we’ve been saying all along: Christ’s ministry on earth was to bring the “good news” of the forgiveness of sins through His shed blood.
- Upon pronouncing the man’s sins forgiven, the teachers of the law raise their skepticism to accusation. This Jesus has already demonstrated the authority of the priests, now He claims the authority of God?
- Jesus provokes them even further—by His divine knowledge He knows their thoughts and responds to them. Though He continues to only use the title *Son of Man* to describe Himself, there is a real claim to divine authority here.
- Perhaps here is the clearest expression of how signs and wonders are to be used and understood: “but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” These signs and wonders act as reinforcements of the message—“that you may know.”
- We should be satisfied with the man’s forgiveness of sins. Had the story ended without the healing, that paralyzed man would have had the riches of heaven waiting for him. Those who overemphasize the function of miracles

and healing are reminded that the message of the good news of the forgiveness of sins is the primary work of God in Christ for this age. Healing will come to all in the New Creation. Healings and miracles cannot become the focus of our ministry.

“Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the ‘sinners’ and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and “sinners”?’ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”
(Mark 2:13-17)

- In another sudden break from the miraculous, we’re given an account of the calling of Levi—elsewhere called Matthew—the tax collector. Tax collectors were notably despicable individuals. Their work meant they supported Roman efforts and thus were often considered to be anti-Jew.

“Publicans [or tax collectors] were men who had bought tax franchises from the Roman emperor and then extorted money from the people of Israel to feed the Roman coffers and to pad their own pockets. They often strong-armed money out of people with the use of thugs. Most were despicable, vile, unprincipled scoundrels.”
(Mac Arthur, 152)

- Mark’s shorthand way of writing is on display here. There are almost no details. Jesus is walking, notices Matthew, calls him to follow, and Matthew follows. Simple as that.
- In this simplicity is a beautiful testimony of God’s grace in saving sinners. Matthew didn’t press through the crowds to find Jesus. He didn’t demonstrate some righteousness that caught Jesus attention. They didn’t develop any sort of relationship beforehand. Jesus simply came to him and

made him a disciple. This is God's loving mercy: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

"He was the one the people saw and resented most. He was the worst of the worst. No self-respecting Jew in his right mind would ever choose to be a tax collector. He had effectively cut himself off not only from his own people, but also from his God. After all, since he was banned from the synagogue and forbidden to sacrifice and worship in the temple, he was in essence worse off religiously than a Gentile."

(MacArthur, 155)

- The Pharisees are unsurprisingly put off by the ease with which Jesus accepts these vile men. They no longer wonder in their heads, but wonder aloud; asking the disciples why their leader would empathize with such as these.
- Jesus responds, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." We know from Scripture that there is no one righteous (Romans 3:10-12), but the Pharisees were blinded by their pride. They counted themselves among the righteous, and so excluded themselves from the saving work of Christ. The regeneration of the believer begins with the knowledge of their sin.
- When we count ourselves among the righteous and look down on the sin of the outcast, we too deny God's grace for us in Christ. Matthew knew as well as anyone just how badly he needed Jesus.

"Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, 'How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?' Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined.

No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

(Mark 2:18-22)

- The Mosaic Law commanded one day of fasting each year, but as regulations and legalities increased among religious Jews, regular times of fasting were added. This was likely one of those man-made occasions.
- Jesus doesn't reject fasting—He's fasted in the wilderness already in this gospel. He does reject old forms and traditions of men that lose or stifle the message of good news.
- Jesus' examples of old and new things are important for understanding the continuity of the Old and New Covenant. He compares like to like (old cloth with new cloth, or old wineskins and new wine). We understand that the New Covenant in Christ is fresher, clearer, and improved; but it's not altogether different from the Old Testament. Rather, the same principles and obligations apply with new forms and functions to express them. It's not apples and oranges, it's old cloth and new cloth.
- We find here the first prediction of Christ's death. He says, "the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast." The word used for "taken from" (*aparthē*) implies violence and sometimes death.

"One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' He answered, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Stand up in front of everyone.' Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus."

(Mark 2:23-3:6)

- For the third time in this chapter, Jesus makes an appeal to the Mosaic Law.
 - He sent the man cured of leprosy to “offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded” (Mark 1:44). This was to be a testimony to the priests about what God had done in healing the man.
 - He compares the Old and New Covenants as old and new cloth; expressing newness, but with continuity.
 - Here, He appeals to the Old Covenant to support His new form of Sabbath. He cites the story of David in I Samuel 21 who, on the run from Saul, ate the consecrated bread. We get the idea from Jesus that the purpose of the old is useful and good; we need only a fresh and fuller understanding of those purposes in Christ.
- Jesus allows the disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath. This causes a stir, so the Pharisees challenge Jesus directly.
- Jesus does not *abolish* the Sabbath. Sabbath rest was created and ordained by God *for our benefit*. It is a practice that is healthy and good for us. When Sabbath practices become a burden, we’ve gotten God’s purpose for us wrong.
- The teachers of the law have gone from skepticism, to questions, to a burning desire to accuse Jesus. Jesus pushes them over the edge when He heals a man *in the synagogue* and *on the Sabbath*.

“They were using the sabbath with murderous intentions, plotting to kill Jesus. Which was more appropriate to the day, His healing or their plotting?”
(Swift, 812)

- This healing provoked the Pharisees beyond repair, and they began openly plotting with Herodians—supporters of Herod and Rome.

“Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was. Jesus went up on a

mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”
(Mark 3:7-19)

- People flock from all over—from the north (Tyre and Sidon) and south (Judea and Jerusalem), east (Idumea) and west (across the Jordan), from Phoenician towns and Israelite towns. But Jesus has in mind “those he wanted.”
- He designates twelve men to be His disciples. They’ll listen to Him teach and watch Him perform signs and wonders. He’ll equip them to do the same.
- In the list is Matthew (Levi), John, and Peter; perhaps three of the gospel writers we read today.

“It is very significant that Christianity began with a group. The Christian faith is something which from the beginning had to be discovered and lived out in a fellowship. The whole essence of the way of the Pharisees was that it separated men from their fellow men; the very name Pharisee means the separated one; the whole essence of Christianity was that it bound men to their fellow men, and presented them with the task of living with each other and for each other.”
(Barclay, 69)

- Together in this group were city folk like Judas and country folk like Peter and Andrew. Some had Jewish names and others Greek. Matthew was a Roman-sympathizing tax collector and Simon a Roman-assassinating zealot. Yet love for Christ bound them all together.

“We’re inclined to look at this group with all their weaknesses and wonder why Jesus did not simply pick a different group of men. Why would He single out men with no understanding, no humility, no faith, no commitment, and no power? Simply this: His strength is made perfect in weakness. Again we see how He chooses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. No one

could ever examine this group of men and conclude that they did what they did because of their own innate abilities. There is no human explanation for the influence of the apostles. The glory goes to God alone.”

(MacArthur, 27)

- Jesus chose “those he wanted” intentionally, and equipped them with the tools to preach and affirm His message throughout the entire world. The writings of Matthew and John and the sayings of Peter recorded by Mark are doing so to this day.

“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”

“And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.’”

(Mark 3:20-22)

- As He conquers sphere after sphere, there is mounting conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. There has already been a prediction of His death (Mark 2:20) and open plotting to kill Him (Mark 3:6). The stage has been set for the great work of Christ on the Cross, even as He establishes authority over priests, the law, sickness, demons, nature, Rome, and more.

“We can see a progression from silent accusation against Jesus (2:6-7) to a questioning of his disciples (2:16) to a questioning of Jesus himself by neutral people (2:18) to a questioning of him by his enemies (2:24) to a lying in wait for the purpose of accusing him (3:2) and finally to a plot to do away with him (3:6). The intensifying opposition does not merely prepare for Jesus’ coming crucifixion, however; it acts as a foil to the increasingly mighty exercise of his authority. The greater the opposition, the greater his mastery.”

(Gundry, 109)

PARABLES

Mark 3:23-4:34

- Mark records only a small selection of Jesus’ many parables. Parables are “earthly stories with heavenly meanings,” a rhetorical device that uses stories and scenarios familiar to the audience to communicate something very unfamiliar.
- Mark includes seven parables; six of them come consecutively here.
 - A Kingdom Divided (Mark 3:23-30)
 - The Family (Mark 3:31-35)
 - The Sower (Mark 4:1-20)
 - A Lamp on a Stand (Mark 4:21-25)
 - The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29)
 - The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)
 - Later: The Tenants (Mark 12:1-12)
- The first two parables aren’t always classified as such. Jesus is responding to charges by the teachers of the law and His own family that He is not filled with wisdom, but rather insane or even filled with demonic spirits. We’ll classify these as “parables” because of the introduction here in Mark 3:23, “Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables.”

“So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: ‘How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.’ He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an evil spirit.’”
 (Mark 3:23-30)

- The teachers of the law had just concluded, “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons” (Mark 3:22). Jesus answers this very spiritual accusation with a familiar scenario.
- Jesus asks them to picture a kingdom ruled by a prince. This prince has obedient servants all throughout the land who have expanded his kingdom in new places. But in an act of great folly, the prince sends out more of his army to defeat *his own* obedient servants and thus throw his kingdom into disarray.
- This must have brought up Roman occupation of Israel in the minds of the hearers—many of whom desiring strongly that Rome be thrown out of Israel. Would it be conceivable that Rome herself would throw Rome out of Israel? Of course not!
- This notable political tension is aggravated further when we remember Mark 3:6, “Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” The Herodians were Roman sympathizers who wanted Herod’s descendents to reclaim the throne. The fact that Jewish leaders and Herodians could work together must have been negative press for the Pharisees. Jesus’ story of the strong man binding up the owner of the home to rob his house may have suggested to the people that the Pharisees were—by association with the Herodians—actually *robbing* Israel.
- Included here is the “Unpardonable Sin,” the one sin that will “never be forgiven.” Jesus calls it blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

“Lastly, he gave a grave warning about the only unforgivable sin in the Bible, the sin against the Holy Spirit. This seems to mean the deliberate closing of the heart and mind to the witness of the Spirit to Jesus, something of which the teachers had just shown themselves to be guilty. Such a willful and deliberate twisting of truth makes repentance and salvation impossible, for it has shut the one gate to salvation that God has opened. It is not that God is unwilling to forgive, but that the person concerned is unwilling to receive his forgiveness. If we still fear that we might be guilty, it is a clear sign that we have not committed this ultimate sin and are in no danger of committing it. Indeed, as has often been said, the real emphasis is on the other side: the wonderful truth is that all other sins can be forgiven.”

(Cole, 956)

- After this refutation of the Pharisees' charges, Jesus turns His attention to his own mother, Mary, and his brothers. They had come to stop Jesus from teaching and knock some sense back into Him, saying, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21).

"Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'" (Mark 3:31-35)

- This short passage of Scripture is challenging for official Roman Catholic Marian dogma. The Roman Catholic Church believes four doctrines of Mary:
 - Divine Motherhood: She is the mother of the Divine, Jesus Christ.
 - Perpetual Virginity: She remained perpetually a virgin, before and after the birth of Christ. She did not have any other children.
 - Immaculate Conception: Mary herself was immaculately conceived, and so was kept from original sin and is considered "all-holy."
 - Assumption: She has the same body-spirit union as Christ *now*. Those of us who die in the Lord are with Him in spirit until the dead are raised on the last day. Mary, like Jesus, already has her resurrected body in Heaven.
- Here, Jesus destroys two of these dogmas and by extension a third. While we agree that Mary is the mother of the Divine Jesus Christ, we see in this passage and others an undoing of traditional Roman Catholic teaching.
 - Perpetual Virginity: Here (and in Matthew 12:46-47, Mark 6:3, Luke 8:19-20, John 2:12, John 7:3-10, and Acts 1:14) we get a clear reference to "brothers." The abundance of evidence in Scripture suggests that Mary and Joseph had other children after Jesus.
 - Immaculate Conception: The idea in the Immaculate Conception is that Mary was kept from sin, so as not to pass sin on to her Son. Yet, here we see in Mary an unbelief in the teaching and mission of Jesus. He is called "out of his mind" (Mark 3:21) by Mary and His brothers and they attempt to stop Him from teaching. Mary, like us, was given to doubt, worry, and the weaknesses of sin.

- Assumption: The Assumption of Mary depends on her as “the all-holy.” Without a working doctrine of Immaculate Conception, her Assumption is a stretch with no Scriptural or logical support.

“As to Mary, though her affectionate solicitude should be recognized, it must also be admitted that she erred...But just as [during the wedding in Cana] Mary quickly saw her mistake and was strengthened in her faith by the very word of tender and earnest reproof which Jesus addressed to her, may we not believe that also in the present instance the Savior’s word had the same wholesome effect on her? There is no reason to believe that Mary’s faith, which comes to beautiful expression in Luke 1:38, did not, by God’s grace, triumph over all temporary set-backs. That it was victorious is clear from Acts 1:14. Jesus’ brothers shared in this victory.”

(Hendrickson, 142)

- There are at least three things to learn from Jesus in this passage:
 - Our primary work is to do the will of God. Jesus chose to do the will of His Heavenly Father and neglect the warning of His mother. In Jesus’ humanity, we see a perfect example of how we ought to submit our wills to God’s Divine will. We do this imperfectly, and rely on the perfect work of Christ.
 - The bond of faith between brothers and sisters in Christ is closer than familial connection.
 - Jesus extends the request of “my mother and my brothers” to include “brother *and* sister and mother.” As image bearers of God, male and female have equal connection to God through Christ. We belong to God through faith in Christ’s atoning work on the Cross. No gender, marital status, child bearing, or other work is required.

“Now, as at other times, [Jesus] comparatively neglected his mother. He looked on those seated around him, and pronounced those of them who not only heard, but did, the will of God, to be to him as his brother, and sister, and mother; as much esteemed, loved, and cared for, as his nearest relations. This is a good reason why we should honour those who fear the Lord, that we may share with the saints in this honour.”

(Henry, 172)

“Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ‘Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.’ Then Jesus said, ‘He who has ears, let him hear.’”
(Mark 4:1-9)

- The Parable of the Sower marks the first of those typically grouped as “parables.” It seems to be something of a key for understanding parables.
 - It is the only parable in Mark that includes Jesus’ explanation.
 - It comes with the caution, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?” (Mark 4:13).

“When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, ‘The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”’”
(Mark 4:10-12)

- The disciples are confused by Jesus’ style of teaching, so they inquire of their Lord for the point of the message. Their desire to know the true message of the Messiah demonstrates what Christ already knew: these Twelve have been given the secret of the kingdom of God.
- In theological terms, “secret of the kingdom of God” might be called “illumination.” By human ability, we cannot understand or grasp the truth of Jesus and His Word. Only by the illumination of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and minds can we understand.

“The work of the Spirit in imparting this knowledge is called ‘illumination,’ or enlightening. It is not a giving of new revelation, but a work within us that enables us to grasp and to love the revelation that is there before us in the biblical text as heard and read, and as explained by teachers and writers. Sin in our mental and moral system clouds our minds and wills so that we miss and resist the force of Scripture. God seems to us remote to the point of unreality, and in the face of God’s truth we are dull and apathetic. The Spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and attunes our hearts so that we understand.”

(Packer, 155)

- Even before Jesus walked by the lake and called these men to follow, God had chosen them in love and the Spirit had illuminated their hearts and minds so they could receive the call of the Christ.
- By contrast, those who have no illumination miss the spiritual realities of the parables. Thomas Fuller describes parables “not unlike the pillar of cloud and fire, which gave light to the Israelites, but was a cloud of darkness to the Egyptians” (Fuller, 148). In this way, unbelievers can hear the message without understanding or see the power of God without perceiving.
- Jesus graciously explains the parable those who follow Him.

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.’”

(Mark 4:13-20)

- Here is the meaning of the parable: The word, or the message of salvation, is given to all people. This message is received in different measures.

- Eaten By Birds: Some never receive this word at all. It is rejected the moment it is spoken. These are those with hardened hearts, given over to Satan.
- Rocky Places: Some entertain the message of salvation for a time, but never truly let it take root in their heart. They have no root—no foundational knowledge or connection to the Christ of salvation. When persecution comes in any of its forms, they are quick to leave the message of salvation behind.
 - We should be mindful of this as we disciple new believers. Developing deep, strong roots by reading, prayer, and connection to a local body of believers is important to establishing true faith in Jesus Christ.
- Thorny Places: Perhaps the most tragic case, some hear the message of salvation and even attempt to put down roots. Tragically, our fleshly desires are easily swayed by circumstance, peer pressure, and stresses.
 - Too often, we don't make space or time for what really matters: our connection to Christ (the root of faith). Instead, we fill our time, our minds, and our bodies with the things of the world—choking out our faith.
- Good soil: Graciously, those of us illuminated by the Holy Spirit have had our hearts prepared like good soil. We hear the message of salvation and receive it, demonstrating the truth of our faith by the producing of good works of the Spirit.
- We may share a common confusion with the disciples: Who is this message of salvation for? On the one hand, the parables are used to conceal the message; but on the other hand, the seed was scattered *everywhere*—whether it took root or not. What is our responsibility with this message? Jesus answers this question with two more parables.

“He said to them, ‘Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear. Consider carefully what you hear,’ he continued. ‘With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.’ He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by

itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

(Mark 4:21-29)

- The disciples’ responsibility—and ours, too—is to disclose the truth of this message. Jesus compares this message to a lamp. If we take the message of salvation and put it under a bowl, do we have it at all? No, the light is snuffed out. But true faith takes this message “out into the open.”
- Though—like the sower—we scatter this message everywhere, we do not know where it will take root and produce fruit. This is the Spirit’s work. Our responsibility is *not* to discern where good soil is and sow the seed there only, but rather to sow the seed *everywhere* and let God prepare good soil where He wills.
- Note the progression of faith developing: “first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.” There is a sanctification by the Spirit that occurs in the life of the believer over time. We progress from milk to solid food (I Corinthians 3:2), from children to young men to fathers (II John 2:12-14).
- Mature believers produce spiritual fruit (love, joy, peace, self-control, generosity, etc) that benefits the Church of God and the Kingdom of God. One believer receives the blessing of generosity from His sister in Christ, just as a harvester reaps the benefit of the fruit of the seed.

“Again he said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.’”

(Mark 4:30-32)

- Christ’s message of salvation has explosive potential!
- There’s been noticeable continuity across this group of parables. “Seeds” have consistently represented the message of salvation; the “sower” has represented those who share that message; “fruit” or “growth” has meant the maturing of this faith in the life of an individual.
- If these symbols are meant to be interpreted consistently, these “birds” that can perch in the shade of spiritual fruit are the same “birds” Jesus called

“Satan” who “takes away the word that was sown” (Mark 4:15). Even the unbelieving world benefits from the fruit of Christian living. Christian people demonstrating Christian ethics benefit societies, stabilize families and nations, and promote health and stewardship in all areas of life.

“With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.”

(Mark 4:33-34)

“We are not surprised that this evangelist does not record nearly as many parables as do Matthew and Luke. As was pointed out earlier...Mark was writing for Romans, people who were interested in action, power, conquest. To them he pictures Jesus as an active, energetic, swiftly moving, conquering King, a Victor over the destructive forces of nature, over disease, demons, death, and moral-spiritual darkness, the One and only Deliverer. So, having related these three parables, Mark now turns quickly to an awe-inspiring action account.”

(Hendrickson, 174)

 MORE AUTHORITY

Mark 4:35-5:43

- After teaching His disciples through parables, Jesus decides to cross the Sea of Galilee to the region of the Gerasenes—the area of the Decapolis (Ten Cities) east of the Jordan River and largely inhabited by Greeks.
- The hills and mountain regions surrounding the lake made these waters notorious for wild weather changes.

“That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’

(Mark 4:35-41)

- This storm was so furious that even a group of experienced fishermen were unable to keep the boat afloat.
- Meanwhile, Jesus is curiously asleep. Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 1 reminds us that our “only comfort in life and in death” is that we “belong in body and soul, in life and in death to [our] faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.” The disciples, weakened in faith by the present danger, turn to their Savior for aid.
- A parallel could be made to Jonah, who slept in a ship amidst the waves of a treacherous storm. God sent this storm (Jonah 1:4) to fulfill His purpose in Jonah. Likewise, Jesus is presented with an opportunity to demonstrate His power over nature. Unlike Jonah, Jesus is the one with power to still the storm—the one even the wind and the waves obey.

“We behold in Him here exactly the reverse of Jonah; the fugitive prophet asleep in the midst of a like danger out of a dead conscience, the Saviour out of a pure conscience; Jonah by his presence making the danger, Jesus yielding the pledge and the assurance of deliverance from the danger.”

(Trench, 111)

- The one who made all things by a word with a word puts nature back in order. “In him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

“The chief lesson for us is Jesus’ rebuke to his disciples for their lack of trust in him. We must learn to trust completely, even if our obedience to him leads us into storms, whether persecution or anything else. (It was Jesus, not the disciples who had suggested crossing the lake; they were not out of his will.) Sometimes we assume that storms show disobedience, but this is not always so...Sometimes God saves us from trouble; sometimes he saves us in trouble; sometimes he saves us from death; and sometimes he uses our death to glorify his name.”

(Cole, 958-959)

- This display of power and authority terrified the disciples. The mysterious tension Mark is attempting to portray surrounding Jesus’ true nature is beginning to unravel.
- Fittingly, this unraveling begins when, for the first time, Jesus exercises power over the natural. Consider how the spirits all throughout Mark have recognized Him as the Christ. So far, the people in the natural world have been kept from this revelation. Now, as Christ demonstrates His power over all creation, they begin to consider the true nature of this Jesus.
- The word Jesus uses for “Be still!” (Mark 4:39) is the same as the first word of His first miracle, where He commanded a demon to “Be quiet!” (Mark 1:34). These miracles are performed by the same Man with the same authority.

“They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut

himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!’ For Jesus had said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you evil spirit!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.”
(Mark 5:1-10)

- When Jesus and the disciples reach their destination, they are greeted by a demon-possessed man so strong that “no one was strong enough to subdue him.” They hadn’t met Jesus!
- In Mark 3:23-30, Jesus had talked about the power of Satan, saying, “In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.” Now Jesus will demonstrate exactly that.
- The spiritual world must know the final result: judgment on evildoers. Revelation 20:7-14 prophecies the doom of Satan and those that belong to him, “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”
- These demons recognize Jesus as the one who will carry out this judgment, and beg to avoid it. Notable is the fact that Satan and his evil spirits *do not* know everything. These demons are completely unaware of how God will bring about His salvation. God will be patient with sinners for thousands of years more, but the demons seem to think the judgment has come then and now.

“A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, ‘Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.’ He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.”
(Mark 5:11-13)

- Curiously, the demons intend to “go into” pigs. This raises interesting questions about the relationships between the spiritual and the physical. Human beings are the only part of creation in God’s image and with His breath. We have souls/spirits that the rest of creation does not—including

animals. Since a pig has no spirit, there really isn't something for the demons to "go into."

- Still, this is exactly what happens. There's a lesson here about the interwoven spiritual and physical creation God created. We're reminded of Job, who's testing from Satan manifested in physical ways—sickness, fire, death. While demons are not talisman inhabiting magicians, they do have a manner of power to affect not only the spiritual world but the physical; in this case, a herd of pigs.

"Though demons can give trouble of many kinds to regenerate persons in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, they cannot finally thwart God's purpose of saving his elect any more than they can finally avoid their own eternal torment."
(Packer, 68)

- In yet another strange turn of events, the pigs rush over the steep cliff and are drowned. If the demons had, moments ago, requested to remain in the area by entering the pigs, why would this happen? Two solutions:
 - The pigs, being an easily spooked animal, were frightened by the demons presence and rushed over the cliff on their own accord.
 - The demons orchestrated the event to ruin Jesus' character in the eyes of the locals.
- No matter the solution we choose, we'll see that this was all for God's purpose and glory.
- Those tending to the pigs saw the whole event unfold, and share the story with the rest of the town. They find this man—whom many from the town had tried to help, bind, and subdue—in his right mind. We would imagine them to be thrilled at the release of the man from his torment!

"Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, the saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region."
(Mark 5:14-17)

- They fail to see Jesus as their rescuer and redeemer, instead viewing Him as a threat to their livelihood and material gain. The deliverance of their friend was not worth the loss of such a large herd. In a sense, they saw the pigs the same way the demons did: as some kind of equal counterpart to the man. The Christian worldview cannot allow this, for all men are soulful image bearers of God who rule over the rest of His creation.

“God recasts common law to reflect his own character and creational intentions, and so it has some quite distinctive elements. For example, while some law of that time valued property above people and made the punishment for stealing greater than that for murder, Israel’s law always places the value of people above that of mere property, for only people, of all God’s creations, have been fashioned in his own image.”

(Goheen, 68)

- The death of the pigs revealed a weakness in these people. Both their brokenness and the Christ who could rescue them had been revealed before their very eyes. Still, they chose to reject the Savior.
- At least the man who was delivered saw Jesus for who He was: his rescuer and redeemer. He, correctly, desires to be with Jesus.

“As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.”

(Mark 5:18-20)

- Though the demons wished to remain in the area, terrorizing the locals and swallowing the seeds of salvation sowed there, though they wished to destroy Jesus’ reputation and force Him away from the people, they are *still* unable to “thwart God’s purpose of saving His elect.”
- Like the once-demon-possessed man, we may be confused or saddened by what seem to be golden opportunities missed. But God’s purposes for us are good!

- There are some things to learn about evangelism from this:
 - God has you right where He wants you. You are in the exact right place to serve His kingdom and bring Him glory.
 - Missions starts with the people you know best. Jesus tells the man to tell his own family about God’s mercy.
 - Like we learned from the parable of the sower, it’s not up to us to determine who deserves to hear the message of salvation. This man is sent to the people who had just forced Jesus away, and yet upon hearing his testimony are *amazed* at the mercy of the Lord!
 - Like we learned from the parable of mustard seed, the message of salvation has explosive power.

“When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, ‘My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.’ So Jesus went with him.”

(Mark 5:21-24)

- Jesus and His disciples cross back over the Sea of Galilee, likely to Capernaum where their ministry has so far been based. They meet a synagogue ruler, perhaps from a synagogue that Jesus has spoken—or even done miracles—in.
- On His way to meet Jairus’ sick daughter, however, Jesus is side tracked.

“A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, ‘If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.’ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ ‘You see the people crowding against you,’ his disciples answered, ‘and yet you can ask, “Who touched me?”’ But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him

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

(Mark 5:24-34)

- Such a case of bleeding is described in Leviticus 15:25-30. This woman was considered ceremonially unclean, as was anyone who touched her. According to the law, Jesus should have become unclean. But a remarkable thing happens! She doesn't transfer her uncleanness to Jesus, but instead Jesus transfers His holiness to her and she is healed!
 - Holiness is from God. It is impossible for us to change God; we cannot make Him unclean.
 - Uncleanness will not persist in God's presence; it will necessarily be destroyed, for God is only holy.
- This healing is more than just a miracle, it's a statement: Jesus is a greater High Priest. While the high priest of the Old Covenant could only pronounce clean and unclean by what he observed in the natural, Christ has the ability to *make* clean what He alone can observe in *both* the natural and the spiritual. He heals diseases and forgives sin.

"While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher any more?' Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.' He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' But they laughed at him."

(Mark 5:35-40)

- The great faith of the woman is contrasted by the doubt in Jairus' household.
 - Their faith
 - The woman thinks, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."
 - The others think, "Why bother the teacher any more?"
 - Their attitude toward God
 - The woman "came and fell at his feet...trembling with fear" to confess.
 - The others, "they laughed at him."

“After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha koum!’ (which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, get up!’). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about his, and told them to give her something to eat.”

(Mark 5:40-43)

- We should pause to note the object and purpose of faith. We have met the paralyzed man, whose friends’ great faith (Mark 2:5) preceded Jesus’ response in power. We have met the bleeding woman, whose faith preceded Jesus’ response in power (Mark 5:34). Yet despite the disciples’ lack of faith, Jesus calmed the storm (Mark 4:40). Our faith does not lock or unlock the power of God.
- Consider Paul, who “three times pleaded with the Lord” for healing. Despite his faith and pleading, he did not receive the healing he longed for. We learn from these faithful believers and the miracles they experienced not that Jesus is at our disposal if we have enough faith, but that Jesus is worth having faith in. It’s in Jesus that we find forgiveness of sins (like the paralyzed man), it’s in Jesus we find healing and freedom (like the bleeding woman), and it’s in Jesus we find power over death.

 OLD FRIENDS

Mark 6

- It is vitally important theologically to remember our last point: faith is not a magical key to unlocking Jesus when, where, and how we want Him. Many have abused this next text of Scripture to prove exactly that point.

“Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. ‘Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, ‘Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.’ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”

(Mark 6:1-6)

- Jesus returns to Nazareth and shares the message with old friends and family. These people, familiar with Jesus’ human nature as he grew, are puzzled by this divine nature now being revealed in the same man.
- Many have argued that their lack of faith blocked Jesus from doing miracles that He otherwise wanted to do. “He could not do any miracles there” is the phrase in question.
- There are a few things to consider:
 - Lack of faith does not inhibit Jesus’ power. Despite the disciples lack of faith in Mark 4:40, He still calmed the storm.
 - From the start of His ministry, miracles have always meant to support and establish the *message* that came first. Since these people rejected the *message*, there was no need to establish it with miracles.
 - Jesus *did* do miracles in Nazareth. The people commented on them (“he even does miracles!”), and He healed the sick there. This is not a weak and

frail Jesus rendered powerless by the people, it's a sovereign Jesus who has *decided* how He will display his power.

“That he could there do no mighty work is one of the boldest statements in the Gospels, but it clearly shows that our Lord’s miracles were not mere magic; they were vitally related to the moral condition and faith of the people. Though He is omnipotent, God in His sovereignty will not act for blessing in the face of human rebellion.”

(Swift, 818)

- It might be helpful to treat the next section as Jesus’ explanation of how He chose to minister in Nazareth.

“Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: ‘Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.’ They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

(Mark 6:6-13)

- The parable of the sower set the tone for evangelism: this message of salvation is for everyone everywhere. Jesus sends out the disciples in six groups to take His message throughout the region.
 - From the same parable, we learn about the many hearts that will reject the message; some immediately, some at first persecution, others out of a desire for the flesh. The disciples are keenly aware of this reality, and Jesus preps them for how to handle it.
- We may see in Jesus’ handling of unwelcoming places an explanation of His behavior in Nazareth. Their unbelief and rejection of His message led Jesus to “shake the dust off” and leave. Again, His power was not *weakened* by their unbelief; rather, He chose in His sovereignty to withhold the fruit of believing that many others had received on account of their faith.

- In the Old Testament, anointing oil represented the presence of the Holy Spirit. Kings and priests were anointed with oil to symbolize God’s choosing and the Holy Spirit’s presence upon that person. It was made primarily of myrrh and cassia and also cinnamon, cane, and olive oil (Exodus 30:23-24).
- Exodus 30:32-33 says, “Do not pour it on men’s bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people.” Yet, the disciples use it for healing as do the elders in James 5:14.
- The use of oil on ordinary people (as opposed to priests and kings) may signify a redeeming of the “kingdom of priests” ordained by God in Exodus 19:6. Paul (Romans 15:16), Peter (1 Peter 2:9), and John (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) all pick up this theme.
- This oil is likely a similar symbol of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Such symbols are useful for establishing faith, provided their use refrains from idolatry, mysticism, and other distractions.
- The use of oil in healing is nowhere commanded in Scripture, and is only mentioned here and James 5:14 in the New Testament. 1 John 2:20 reminds us, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.” Our power and gifts are given to us through the indwelling of the One Holy Spirit.

“King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’ Others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.’”
 (Mark 6:14-15)

- John the Baptist was well-known. His teachings were popular and led many to question just who exactly John was. The Gospel of John records a series of questions posed to John the Baptist (John 1:21): 1) Are you the Christ? 2) Are you Elijah? 3) Are you the Prophet? The same line of questioning comes to Jesus. The similarities in their teaching—the inspiration of the same Spirit, the consistent call to repentance, the simple lifestyle—were recognizable.

“But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’ For Herod himself had given orders to have John

arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him."
(Mark 6:16-20)

- John the Baptist boldly preaches against the sin of the most powerful man in government, and is arrested and persecuted.
- Even though John has publically addressed Herod's sin, there is something in Herod that sympathizes with John.
 - He feared John, recognizing some authority and power about him.
 - He realized, despite his sin and unbelief, that John was righteous and holy.
 - Though he didn't understand John's teaching—and was actively rebuked by John—he "liked to listen to him."
- Romans 1-2 articulates that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, know God's law because it's written on our hearts. We were created for God's purposes and glory, and though original sin has tainted that purpose there is still a longing in our souls for that better way. Herod, sinful though he may be, knew the truth and suppressed it in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-20).
- Our preaching, then, should model the same boldness and commitment to God's decrees as John's preaching. Though the world may hate it and persecute it, there is a longing in the world for the message of God through Jesus Christ.

"Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, 'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.' And he promised her with an oath, 'Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' 'The head of John the Baptist,' she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: 'I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he

immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb."

(Mark 6:21-29)

- The ministry of John the Baptist was, as we would expect of any ministry blessed by the Spirit of God, enormously successful. He was there to prepare the way of the Lord. His message went as far as King Herod himself. He was known far and wide as an incredibly gifted preacher, so much so that many thought him to be the Christ. So many came to John to be baptized that he moved his ministry to a larger river (John 3:23).
- But despite his popularity and success, John never lost the vision for his ministry. He routinely denied any suggestions that he was divine (John 1:20) He constantly sent his own people to be with Jesus (John 3:30, Luke 7:20)—including Andrew (John 1:27, 40). Jesus said of John, "I tell you the truth, among those born of women there is no one greater than John..." (Luke 7:28).
- But lest we begin to focus on John, he would remind us, "Christ must become greater, I must become less. I am not worthy to even untie his dirty sandals. He is the lamb who takes away the sin of the world!"

"There can be no doubt about the fact, therefore, that John was, as had been predicted concerning him, a true way-preparer for Christ."

(Hendrikson, 242)

- Jesus' disciples, meanwhile, return from their mission trips.

"The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.'"

(Mark 6:30-32)

- As Jesus himself has modeled, there is need for rest after seasons of ministry.

“But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

So he began teaching them many things.”

(Mark 6:33-34)

- The scheduled rest was interrupted. Even though Christ has modeled this type of rest and encouraged it for the disciples, the interruption is not dismissed or discouraged. Rather, Jesus uses the opportunity to show compassion and care for the people and gave them His time and attention.
- Again, the parable of the sower reminds us of the fruit which mature faith in Christ bears. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, and self-control. Christ displays these attributes in amounts unfamiliar to us, who are easily angered, impatient, and selfish when our plans—especially for rest—are interrupted.

“Any ordinary man would have been intensely annoyed the rest Jesus so much desired and which He had so well earned was denied to Him. His privacy was invaded. Any ordinary man would have resented it all, but Jesus was moved with pity at the pathos of the crowd. He looked at them; they were so desperately in earnest; they wanted so much what He alone could give them; to Him they were like sheep who had no shepherd.”

(Barclay, 157)

- These sheep cannot find their way without a shepherd, so Jesus takes time to teach them that they might know The Way.
- The disciples to this point have not been bothered by this interruption. Far as we can tell, they went off for their scheduled relaxation. Unlike Jesus, they view the interruption as an annoyance to be dismissed.

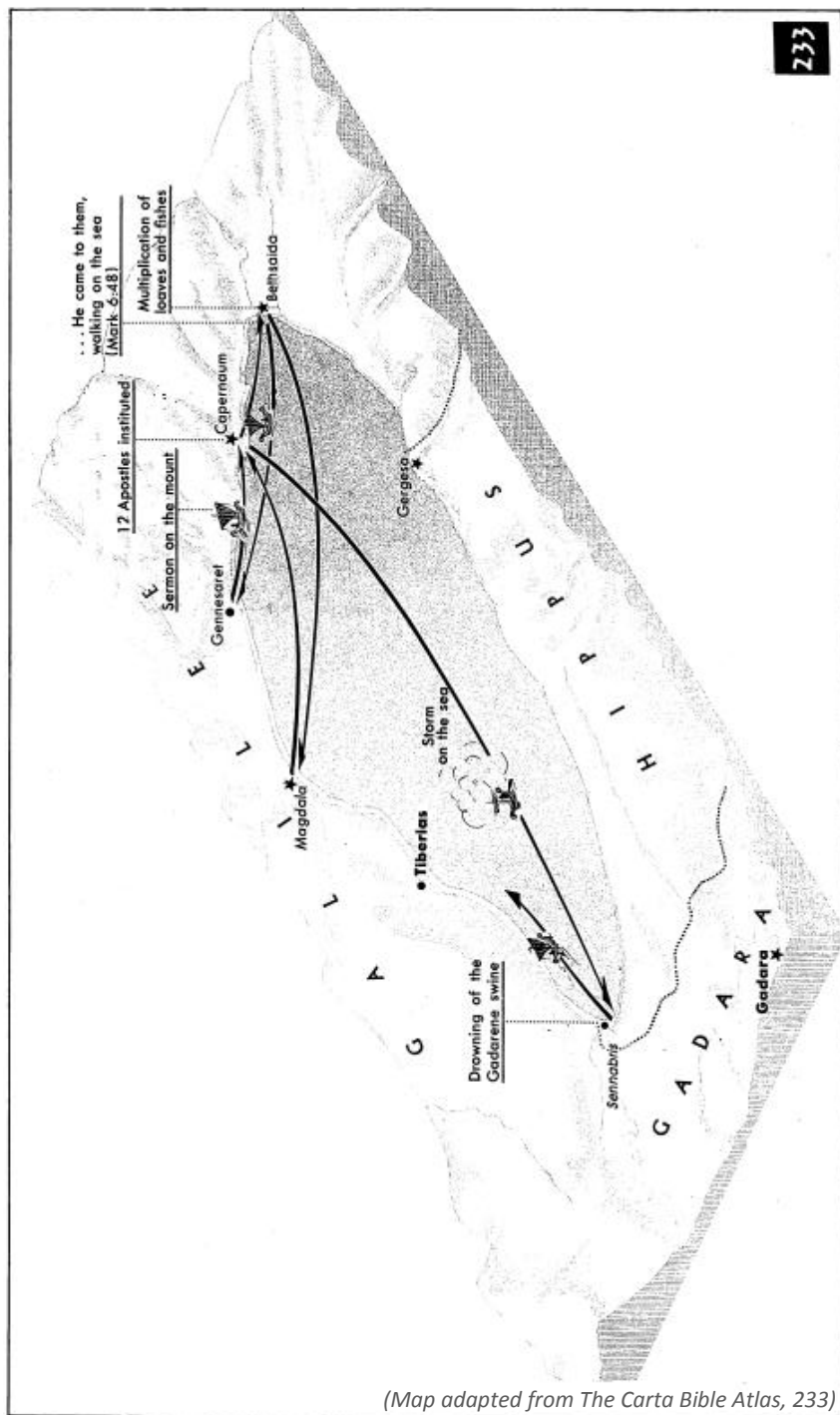
“By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. ‘This is a remote place,’ they said, ‘and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’ But he answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’ ‘How many loaves do you have?’ he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five—and

two fish.’ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.”
(Mark 6:35-44)

- Fresh off their first solo missionary journeys, Jesus intends to include the disciples in this miracle. Remember, they’ve just returned from driving out demons and healing the sick. They’ve experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus puts forward an opportunity: “*You* give them something to eat.”
- Maybe the disciples are still failing to grasp the true power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe they fail to see the scope of the Kingdom of God—they’ve seen Him cast out demons and heal the sick, but never feed the hungry!
- Perhaps they view this time as *theirs*. They are “off the clock.” This isn’t the mission trip anymore, it’s “me time.” We need to be reminded that time belongs to God. It’s God who gives us Sabbath—a time to rest. It’s His to give, not ours to own. Rest is important, but even in times of rest we continue in Kingdom virtues of compassion and care for one another. This is why Jesus is willing to heal on the Sabbath.
- If the disciples won’t participate in the miracle, Jesus will have to do it Himself. He feeds over 5,000 people with twelve basketfuls to spare.

“Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.”
(Mark 6:45-46)

- Jesus models the exact rhythm of rest He’s suggested to the disciples. He sends them home to Bethsaida—where most of the disciples are from. This trip across the lake likely felt like a continuation of their rest and relaxation time. They may have hoped for a quiet week or so with their families.



(Map adapted from *The Carta Bible Atlas*, 233)

“When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.”

(Mark 6:47-52)

- Imagine the disciples’ mounting frustration as their trip home for break turns into an agonizing fight against the elements. Consider in our day those whose vacations have been interrupted by frustrating travel experiences. The disciples grow more and more frustrated and hard hearted, “for they had not understood” the lesson Jesus had taught them with the loaves.
- Despite the darkness and the distance, Jesus sees the struggling disciples and comes to their aid.

“It would not be correct, in taking note of the Master’s knowledge and of his power, to forget his love, as here revealed. That these men in distress were by no means perfect is shown in verse 49 (they were superstitious) and 52 (in a sense their hearts were hardened). Nevertheless, so tender is his compassion, so paternal his affection, that no darkness, tempest, or billows can keep him away from those who are very, very dear to his heart. When they need him he wants to be with him.”

(Hendriksen, 260)

- Why, then, was Jesus “about to pass by them”? It may have been another opportunity for the disciples to act in faith—to recognize their Lord and go to Him for aid. They miss this opportunity, too.

“When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—

they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.”
(Mark 6:53-56)

Mark 7-8:26

- So far in Mark's Gospel, Jesus has not been to Jerusalem. He has in His lifetime—the other Gospels record His temple dedication (Luke 2:22) and routine visits for Passover (Luke 2:41). Most of Jesus' ministry happens around the northern countryside of Israel, and some even in the Gentile cities east of the Sea of Galilee.
- Still, the Pharisees and teachers of the law make a point to listen to and observe Jesus' teaching. Though He's done ministry on the fringes of society, it's not a fringe ministry.
- Jesus has continually challenged the traditions of men and expanded their understanding of the law. He does not challenge *the Law* (or God's character), He challenges *their understanding* of the Law.

“The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were ‘unclean,’ that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with “unclean” hands?’ He replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.’ And he said to them: ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother,” and, “Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.”

But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: “Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban” (that is, a gift devoted to

God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

(Mark 7:1-13)

- Mark makes sure to explain the Jewish rituals to his Roman audience, and translates the word “Corban” for them.
- The challenge of the disciples’ cleanliness is likely in relation to their contact with Gentiles. This is another way Jesus has challenged the Jewish traditions. Though God’s Law *expected* the inclusion of aliens and foreigners, Jewish tradition had made Gentiles (non-Jews) into a lower class of people.
- Jesus, however, restores the intent of the Law. He’s done ministry among the Gerasenes and the Decapolis, with pig farmers and tax collectors.
- Jesus’ teaching is not a *reinterpretation*, it’s a *restoration*. His citing of the prophet Isaiah shows the consistency of His teaching. The Law was always meant to reflect God’s character and created intent for the world. Simple lip service without the proper intent was hypocrisy.

“Jesus did not deny that his disciples broke the traditions, but justified it by saying that these traditions were merely of men, and that in the case of the Pharisees, observing them often went along with a rejection of Gods plain command. If tradition contradicts Scripture, it must go, no matter how much loved.”

(Cole, 962)

- The “Corban” gift to parents was particularly hypocritical. Jews could dedicate their possessions to God (Corban). This dedication could be merely philosophical, pledging no actual moneys or possession to the temple or synagogue. It could also be done posthumously, so a portion of moneys or possessions would go to the temple after someone passed away.
- These Corban dedications were used as a way around daily generosity and service. If you were asked to donate to someone in need (or support aging parents, as Jesus mentions), you could deny them under the guise of piety. For example, “I cannot give you any money. My money doesn’t belong to me, it belongs to the Lord.”

“Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him “unclean” by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him “unclean.”’ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him “unclean”? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean.’) He went on: ‘What comes out of a man is what makes him “unclean.” For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man “unclean.”’”
 (Mark 7:14-23)

- Jesus expressed plainly here what Peter and Paul would come to understand later in the New Testament.
 - Peter: “Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’” (Acts 10:13-15).
 - Paul: “As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself...For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men” (Romans 14:14, 17-18).
- The outward rites and traditions are only as good as the inward character they protect and feed.
- Jesus now heads even further north, further from Jerusalem, into the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon. These were Phoenician cities (called Syro-Phoenicia to distinguish it from Libyan Phoenicia to the south). Psalm 87:4 prophesied of the Lord’s coming to Tyre.

“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her

daughter. ‘First let the children eat all they want,’ he told her, ‘for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied, ‘but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ Then he told her, ‘For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’ She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.”
(Mark 7:24-30)

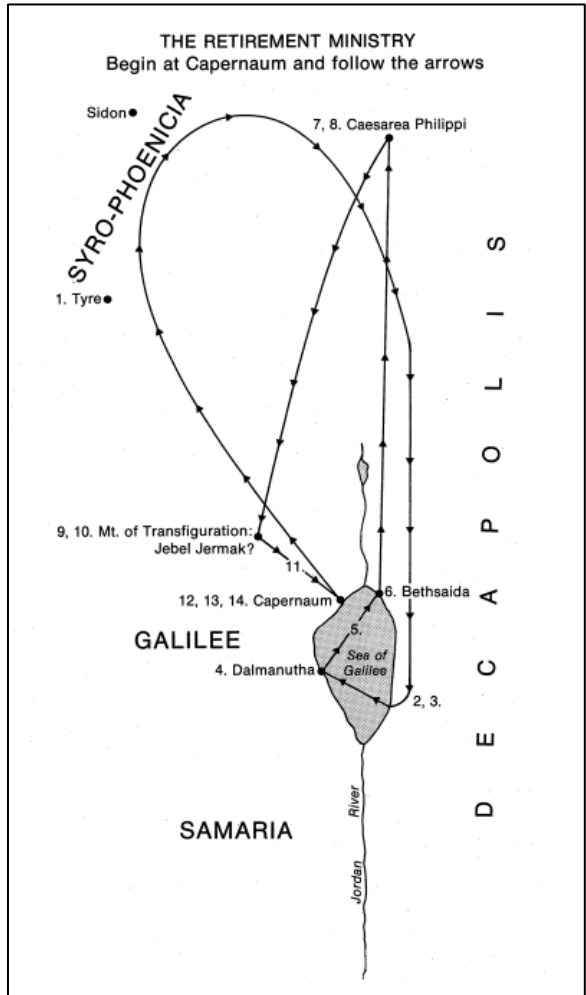
- This Greek woman shows great faith in coming to Jesus for rescue. They exchange a strange dialogue about food for children and dogs. Some read “dogs” as a racial slur from Jesus, suggesting that He saw these Gentiles as lesser or even outside of God’s salvific plan. This reading is hard to justify, as we’ve already seen Jesus’ ministry reach Gentile cities—where He’s even cast out demons previously—while continually challenging Jewish traditions.
- A more logical interpretation goes as follows:
 - Jesus has fled north to Tyre with His disciples in search of privacy and opportunity to teach them (“He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it”). Some commentators refer to this season of Jesus’ ministry as “The Retirement,” since He seems more interested in preparing Himself and His disciples for the Cross than He is in public ministry.
 - With a focus on teaching in mind—as His emphasis has been all along—Jesus responds to the woman’s interruption. “First let the children eat all they want...for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”
 - The distinction between “children” and “dogs” should be understood as “believer” and “unbeliever,” not “Jew” and “Gentile.” The bread is Christ and His message of salvation. This bread is received by His teaching—the miracles meant to establish the teaching.
 - Jesus’ response, then, is “First let me teach those who believe, for it is not right to interrupt the teaching to perform miracles for unbelievers.” This understanding connects with much of what we’ve already seen (i.e. this is why He chose not to do miracles in His hometown of Nazareth).
 - The woman’s response, then, is “Yes, Lord, but even unbelievers benefit as Your children are fed this teaching.” Her response shows her belief in the transformative power of Christ’s message of salvation! She understands that the mustard seed sprouts a large tree, big even for even the birds to perch and find shade.

- This demonstration of *faith in the message* is what brings about the miracle that establishes it.

“But if the underlying reason is the same as that in [Matthew] 9:30-31, taking the bread from the little children and throwing it to the little dogs means depriving the disciples of the attention that teaching them demands and giving it instead to the woman’s daughter and other Gentile children in her train.”
 (Gundry, 373)

- Jesus drives out the demon without a command, and from quite a distance. Attempts to replicate a formula or model for exorcism can often be a fool’s errand in rites and rituals. Christ is the stronger man who binds up the evil one. He is all we need.

“Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.”
 (Mark 7:31)



(map from Hendrickson, 295)

- To further support our understanding of Christ taking His message of salvation to the gentiles, we find him not only in Tyre, but in the Syro-Phoenician town of Sidon and the Greek speaking “Decapolis” (Ten Cities) east of the Sea of Galilee.

“There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means, ‘Be opened!’). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”

(Mark 7:32-37)

- As we’ve come to expect, He is willing and able to miracles for Gentile people.
- While in the region of the Decapolis, Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish *for a second time*. The first incident occurred in Bethsaida, the hometown of many of the disciples, while they sought rest from their public ministry. Here, in the Greek-speaking cities, Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish while seeking His own rest from public ministry.

“During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.’ His disciples answered, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?’ ‘How many loaves do you have?’ Jesus asked. ‘Seven,’ they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four

thousand men were present. And having sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.”
(Mark 8:1-10)

- As in the first loaves and fishes miracle, Jesus has compassion on the crowd (in Bethsaida, Jewish countrymen; in the Decapolis, Greek-speaking Gentiles).
- To continue the comparison with the first miracle, the disciples are given a second opportunity to act in faith and expectation to provide food for the people. And again, they fail.
- The disciples collect “seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over” (Mark 8:8). The word for “baskets” is “*spyris*, an affair woven of twigs or rushes, of the kind carried by Gentile merchant-men and large enough to contain a man” (Swift, 821).
- In this miracle, Jesus has demonstrated that “bread” is not only for Israel, but for the Gentile too. This further dismantles any idea that “dog” was a slur meant to disparage Gentile people. It cements our understanding of “dog” meaning unbelieving sign-demanders. The Pharisees qualify for this term.
- “Dalmanutha” is also called “Magdala” in Matthew’s account of the story (Matthew 15:39). This is the home town of Mary the Magdalene.

“The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, ‘Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.’ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.”
(Mark 8:11-13)

- The moment Jesus sets foot back on Israelite soil, He is greeted by the malicious questioning of the Pharisees yet again.
- In the same way that Jesus denied the sign for the Syro-Phoenician woman before she demonstrated faith, He denies the request for a sign from Israel’s elite.
- Mark’s Gospel is arranged in such a way that we are continually reminded that the *message of salvation* was primary, and the signs and wonders simply established the work of the *message*. The Pharisees have rejected the *message*, so for them no sign will do.

“The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. “‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.’ They discussed this with one another and said, ‘It is because we have no bread.’ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’

‘Twelve,’ they replied. ‘And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ They answered, ‘Seven.’ He said to them, ‘Do you still not understand?’”

(Mark 8:14-21)

- The disciples must have been shaken by their double-failure in the multiplication miracles. A simple teaching of Jesus sets them off.
- They assume they are being chastised for their failure—which may well have been appropriate. However, their understanding of *what exactly that failure was* is way off.
- It seems as though the disciples think their issue at the last two multiplication miracles was lack of preparedness. “Jesus must be upset because in Bethsaida and the Decapolis, we failed to bring enough bread along.” They find themselves with only one loaf and think, “Jesus is going to be so mad that we weren’t more prepared.”
- Their failure, however, had nothing to do with human effort—it had to do with lack of faith in God. This is a biting reminder for Christians today: God asks for faith alone. Faith drives our effort and works, not the other way around.
- The “yeast of the Pharisees” is described by Paul as “malice and wickedness” (I Corinthians 5:8).

“They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said, ‘I see people, they look like trees walking around.’ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes.

Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, ‘Don’t go into the village.’”

(Mark 8:22-26)

- We are troubled with a healing that seems to take Jesus two tries. But on the heels of an incredible display of power—where Jesus had exorcised a demon without a word and from a considerable distance—we must be reminded that nothing is beyond the power of God.
- Jesus, by His own intention, chooses to heal the man this way. In the same way, believers today are rescued from sin in a multitude of ways. Some, raised in the Lord, have very few hindrances to believing. Some, in an instant, throw off the entanglements of the flesh to pursue God. Some war with the flesh for many years, progressively increasing in sanctification. Still others toil under the weight of their flesh all the way to the end. God will choose the manner by which He saves His own; and in each case, increases His glory among men.

“It has already been observed that there must lie a deep meaning in all the variations which mark the different healings of different sick and afflicted, a wisdom of God ordering all the circumstances of each particular cure. Were we acquainted as accurately as He, who ‘knew what was in man,’ with the spiritual condition of each who was brought within the circle of His grace, we should then understand why one was healed in the crowd, another led out of the city ...why for this one the process of restoration was instantaneous while another saw at first ‘men as trees, walking.’ We are not for an instant to suppose in cures gradually accomplished any restraint on the power of the Lord, save such as He willingly imposed on Himself,—and this, doubtless, in each case having reference to, and being explicable by, the moral and spiritual state of the person who was passing under His hands. It is true that our ignorance prevents us from at once and in every case discerning ‘the manifold wisdom’ which ordered each of His proceedings, but we are not less sure that this wisdom ordered them all.”

(Trench, 276)

PETER'S TESTIMONY

Mark 8:27-9:13

- Perhaps Peter's influence on the Gospel of Mark is most noticeable in this section. We get three consecutive stories where Peter speaks. There are elements specific to Peter not mentioned in the other gospel accounts.
- Caesarea Philippi is north of the Sea of Galilee. Though it is still considered part of Jewish territory, it was as far north as Jesus ever reached (see map on p. 65).
- If Peter's role in the Gospel of Mark is as strong as the historical data suggests, Peter describes an incredibly humble, even self-deprecating version of events. We'll note these elements as they come about.

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him."

(Mark 8:27-30)

- Asked about who Jesus is, the disciples describe the comments made in Mark 6:14-16. Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, or a prophet. The same line of questioning was given to John the Baptist (John 1:19-21). In John's list of questions was the title "Christ," which John denies. This title is not asked of Jesus; the people failed to see Him as the Christ.
- One possible solution gets at the prominent messianic image of the day. The Jews expected a Christ who would overthrow Rome and restore theocracy in Israel. John the Baptist, in his challenges to Herod (Mark 6:17-20), may have seemed like a suitable Christ. Jesus, on the other hand, was challenging the teachers of the law and kept company with Roman sympathizers like Matthew.
- Peter, however, knows the truth and confesses: "You are the Christ."

- While this was certainly a banner moment for Peter, Mark’s Gospel leaves out even more details that Matthew includes.

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

(Matthew 16:17-20)

- If, in fact, it was Peter who chose to omit this beautiful promise from the Lord we ought to be struck by his humility. Peter certainly grew to understand that his faith was a gift from God.
- Upon Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ, Jesus launches into details concerning His betrayal, death, and resurrection.

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’”

(Mark 8:31-33)

- Almost immediately, the high of Peter’s brilliant confession crashes with a biting rebuke from Jesus. Jesus calls him, “Satan!”
- Peter may have had in mind that typical Jewish messianic figure—the one who would overthrow Rome and restore the nation of Israel. In Peter’s mind, Jesus couldn’t die, He had to be king. He has in mind “the things of men.”
- How often, like Peter, do we take God aside to rebuke Him? Is it not daily that we think we know better? Don’t we, too, disagree with God’s plan every day? How often do we miss the clear revelation of God because our own desires and interests cloud our judgment? Where must you submit to “the things of God” today?
- Just as the omission of Christ’s blessing (Matthew 16:17-20) shows Peter’s humility, so does the inclusion of this rebuke. In Luke’s account (Luke 9:18-21), no rebuke is found. Had Mark chosen to tell the briefest story—as he

often does—we would expect it to look as it does in Luke (no blessing, no rebuke). But Mark has consciously chosen to *omit* the blessing and *include* the rebuke. Mark’s account gives the worst possible portrayal of Peter.

- Jesus launches into a teaching meant to change His followers’ idea of the Messiah. He would not only be triumphant (Isaiah 11), but also suffering (Isaiah 53). The first mention of the cross occurs in this teaching.

“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’ And he said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.’”

(Mark 8:34-9:1)

- Our understanding of the word “cross” in our place in redemptive history is significantly different than the hearers of this teaching. This is prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection. To them, the cross is simply an instrument of Roman torture. It was a symbol of the weight of the occupation; they had expected the messiah to throw the weight off, not take it on! Carrying a cross leads to death.
- But the cause of Christ is not *only* suffering! It’s the suffering that brings the triumph. The promise of triumph in Christ is worth suffering for the sake of your soul.

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened).”

(Mark 9:2-6)

- Jesus takes three disciples to what is likely Mt Tabor—just east of Nazareth. He is transfigured, or changed into a more glorious state.
- This scene is unfamiliar and incomprehensible, and we're left with a lot of questions. There are some suggestions from Scripture that may help us:
 - Why were only three disciples chosen? Deuteronomy 17:6 requires two or three witnesses to verify a testimony. These three disciples were a sufficient witness for humanity of the Deity of Christ. Similarly, Moses and Elijah were sufficient witnesses for heaven of the Deity of Christ.
 - Why Moses and Elijah? Christ has come to fulfill the Law and Prophets (Matthew 5:17). Moses is the figurehead of the Law and Elijah of the Prophets. Their conversing shows a continuity and agreement in the work of each—Christ affirming the work of the Law and Prophets, and the figureheads affirming the work of Christ.
 - What did they talk about? Luke's account (Luke 9:31) says, "They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem." That is, His death.

"Though it was now a long time since they had died and finished the course of their calling, yet our Lord intended once more to ratify by their voice what they had taught during their life, in order to inform us that the same salvation, through the sacrifice of Christ, is held out to us in common with the holy fathers. At the time when the ancient prophets uttered their predictions concerning the death of Christ, he himself, who was the eternal wisdom of God, was sitting on the invisible throne of his glory. Hence it follows that, when he was clothed in flesh, he was not liable to death any farther than as he submitted to it of his own free will."

(Calvin, 346)

- Peter wants the experience to last, and proposes they construct shelters for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus to remain in. He misses the mark in two major ways:
 - First, a shelter containing the glory of God is a *backward* move in redemptive history. God had set His glory in the Ark of the Covenant and hid it in the tabernacle. This was great grace from God that He would dwell among the people. But Christ has now tabernacled among the people in a more present and relational way than ever before! *And*, at His impending ascension, He will tabernacle *within* them by the Holy Spirit! To build a

shelter is to have *less* of God's presence than He is already graciously offering!

- Second, Peter has wholly underestimated the sacrifice and humiliation of Christ's incarnation. He has laid aside glory to dwell in the weakness of human flesh. Why would Moses and Elijah want to remain on earth when the joy of heaven was already theirs? Christ, in *choosing* to remain among them is demonstrating His great love for us.
- Note that Peter speaks out of turn once again. Mark adds, "He did not know what to say, they were so frightened." Here is another example of details unique to Peter's own experience.

"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud:

'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant. And they asked him, 'Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.'"

(Mark 9:7-13)

- No matter how plainly it is revealed to them, the disciples fail to grasp the suffering of the Messiah. "Rising from the dead," they figure, must be symbolic of something else.
- The Transfiguration account closes with a conversation on Elijah, who Jesus identifies as John the Baptist (in Matthew 11:14).
 - Malachi 4:5-6 prophecies that Elijah would come before the Messiah. The angel Gabriel revealed in Luke 1:17 that John would fulfill this prophecy.
 - If John is the Elijah who is to come, why did he reject that title in John 1:21? Jewish theologians predict *actual* Elijah would return to the people. He never died (II Kings 2:11), so they expected God had saved Elijah for this special occasion. The disciples may have also had this in mind, as the questions about Elijah come up when they discuss "rising from the dead."

John, then, was rejecting the claim that he was *actual* Elijah—the prophecy about him called him “one in the *spirit* of Elijah” (Luke 1:17).

- Christians who look for *actual* Elijah in connection to the Two Witnesses prophesied in Revelation 11 would do well to understand the role of John the Baptist as “one in the *spirit* of Elijah” (Luke 1:17).
- How does John the Baptist “restore all things”? Two ideas:
 - His message of repentance provided the way to restoration for all things. When the hearts of humanity have turned to the God of creation, there is real and whole restoration.
 - By Scripture’s own standard, all prophecy must be 100% accurate (Deuteronomy 18:22). Had Elijah *not* come, the Old Testament revelation of the coming Messiah would be incorrect and *not* of the Lord. By fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi 4, John—by God’s gracious decree—participated in the grand story of salvation.

“Instead of asking, ‘How does God want us to treat John the Baptist?’ they had done to him whatever they pleased. And the same combination was about to kill Jesus...This very fact—that it was written, hence divinely planned—is filled with comfort. It shows that without in any way erasing human responsibility and guilt, these murderous intentions and (in the case of the Baptist and Jesus) deeds happened in accordance with the divine decree. In the end, therefore, God always triumphs. His truth is victorious.”

(Hendrikson, 343-344)

SOME TEACHINGS

Mark 9:14-10:52

- Bookended by two miracles, Jesus continues His Retirement Ministry with a longer list of teachings—most of them specific to His disciples.
- We've commented a number of times on the specifics of demons and exorcisms, so we'll focus instead on the unique teaching aspects of this miracle.

“When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ‘What are you arguing with them about?’ he asked. A man in the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.’ ‘O unbelieving generation,’ Jesus replied, ‘how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.’ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has he been like this?’ ‘From childhood,’ he answered. ‘It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’ ‘“If you can”?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. ‘You deaf and mute spirit,’ he said, ‘I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, ‘He’s dead,’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’”

(Mark 9:14-29)

- In Mark 6:13, the disciples went on their first missionary journeys and “drove out many demons.” However, they are unable to do so in this scenario.
- Jesus explains, “This kind can come out only by prayer.” We should learn two things here:
 - Demons are spiritual beings of the same kind as angels. Scripture reveals “ranks” of angels (“archangel” in Jude 9, 1 Thessalonians 4:16). We might expect “ranks” of demons in the same way.
 - This is not cause for fear!
 - Jesus rebuked this demon as easily as any other. His power is far superior to that of the angels (Hebrews 1:4-14). He is and will be victorious!
 - The disciples, too, *could have* driven out this demon. In Christ, we have power and majesty above the heavenly beings. The disciples’ failure came because of a lack of connection to God (fasting and prayer). In Matthew’s account (Matthew 17:20), Jesus rebukes them for their “lack of faith” and explains that with faith “nothing will be impossible for you.”

“They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed in to the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise,’ But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.”

(Mark 9:30-32)

- For a second time, Jesus explains in great detail the events that await Him in Jerusalem. Despite His clear explanations, the disciples continue to miss the “suffering” role of the Messiah. Much of the teaching that follows helps articulate the purpose of serving and suffering to the disciples.

“They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in

my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”
(Mark 9:33-37)

- It's not hard to imagine the disciples' argument. The sin of pride is ever before us. Peter, James, and John had just days ago been specially selected to witness the Transfiguration. Questions about their roles and position in the group naturally arise.
- They are aware of their error, and plead the fifth when questioned about it. Jesus, in His omniscient power, knew of their argument even before asking.

“It is strange how a thing takes its proper place and acquires its true character when it is set in the eyes of Jesus. So long as they had thought that Jesus was not listening and that Jesus had not seen, the argument about who should be greatest seemed fair enough, but when that argument had to be stated in the presence of Jesus it was seen in all its unworthiness. If we took everything and set it in the sight of Jesus it would make all the difference in the world to life.”
(Barclay, 228)

- Jesus uses an object lesson to teach the disciples about humility and service. A little child serves as an example. The goal is not to be first, greatest, strongest, biggest, wealthiest; the goal is to be meek, mild, inquisitive, and reliant.
- A child needs his father for protection, sustenance, and provision. In the same way, we ought to live as children of the Father.

“Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.’ ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward. And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into

hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “there worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

(Mark 9:38-50)

- John, holding fast to whatever prominence is left for a disciple of Jesus, wants Jesus to at least affirm their ministry over and above other followers of Jesus. This, too, Jesus rejects. There is one Spirit by which every gift is given.
- The church today might be served well to talk about these two kinds of ministries:
 - The first, the disciples, are well educated and orthodox. They’ve learned closely from the proper teacher and mimic His ways, if not imperfectly. They are chosen for this ministry. They are successful in their ministry. They are eye-witnesses—they know best. Perhaps these are our ordained ministers from the top seminaries today. They’ve learned from the proper teachers the most historical ways to practice their ministry, and are successful in doing so!
 - By contrast, the second group is less-educated and unorthodox (not in a doctrinal way, but in a practical way). They may be learning as they go. They are not ordained in any proper ceremony or granted any formal degree. Yet, they are successful in their ministry!
- While doctrine, offices, and Christian history are worth guarding closely, we ought to acknowledge good, God-glorifying ministry wherever it happens. This man was doing a work that Christ had given men to do: driving out demons. He was doing it by the Holy Spirit’s power and to God’s glory. This is a rewarding work!
- However, work that is not done in Christ’s power and to God’s glory—work that is contrary to the Word of God—should be rebuked. No matter the education or status, any work that increases sin and wickedness is to be done away with. It would be better for that teacher to be drowned in the sea.
- The warning about hands, feet, and eyes is typically taken as hyperbole. It’s symbolic, we often say, of the seriousness of sin. We would be served well to understand it quite literally. We *are* better off with no eyes than to use our sight for lust.

“Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ ‘What did Moses command you?’ he replied. They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’ ‘It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,’ Jesus replied. ‘But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female.” “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.’ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’”

(Mark 10:1-12)

- Jesus is pushed into a debate that was roaring among religious scholars of the time. First-century Judaism condoned divorce for just about any reason a husband could come up with. This was the teaching of Rabbi Hillel (circa 100 BC).
- Opposite Rabbi Hillel was Rabbi Shammai, who said a serious offense (like adultery) was the only grounds for divorce. The question posed to Jesus was a century long debate: on what grounds can we divorce women?

“Thus women could be divorced for failing to measure up to the beauty of a rival ([Rabbi] Akiba), for failures in the kitchen ([Rabbi] Hillel) or for any reason whatsoever.”

(Gushee, 279)

- Jesus challenges this entire premise, offering a radical understanding. He affirms the Law, as we’ve seen Him do, by appealing to Moses. But Jesus appeals to the created intent for marriage: males and females in inseparable union. The question could no longer be, “On what grounds can we divorce women?” but instead, “How can I protect this marriage?”
- This was a radical protection for women, and a great reclamation of God’s character and intent.

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”

(Mark 10:13-16)

- The disciples continue to miss the point about service. In their minds, Jesus is too great to deal with little children. What did they know anyway?
- Jesus rebuke them yet again—this message is for *everyone*, everywhere.
- Children set a wonderful example for true faith. They don’t know where the next meal comes from, they know nothing of the securities in place for their protection. Still, they trust that provisions and protections *will* be there—there is exemplary faith in children.
- But this is not blind, stupid faith. Children are inquisitive, they learn quickly. Children have a real desire to be near their parents—especially in times of trouble or pain. We would do well to model their example.

“As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.”’ ‘Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’ Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

(Mark 10:14-22)

- Jesus meets a man with rocky soil (to borrow from the parable of the sower). His faith springs up quickly, running to Jesus and falling on his knees before Him.
- Things go off the rails quickly for the man. He calls Jesus “teacher” twice. There are many in the world today who call Jesus “teacher” and acknowledge

the truth and goodness in His words, yet deny His divinity and have no place in His kingdom.

- He also calls Jesus “good.” Jesus poses a challenge here: can you have good without God? This, too, is pertinent in the world today. We want goodness and justice in the world, yet we reject any standard of morality! Jesus articulates the standard for goodness: holy perfection in the Triune God. Even the most righteous, pious disciple has nothing if he has not God.
- In the end, sadly, the man’s faith withered in the sun because it had no roots. This man leaves sad, done in by his own great wealth.

“Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’”
(Mark 10:23-27)

- In Jesus’ second statement here, he drops the word *rich*; “how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!” These verses are not a condemnation on the wealthy, but on all humanity.
- In that society, the rich had the means to perform all the sacrifices and keep themselves from the impurities of daily life. If the *rich* couldn’t satisfy the Law and make it into the kingdom of heaven, who could? The disciples understand this, “Who then can be saved?”

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’ Peter said to him, ‘We have left everything to follow you!’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.’ They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the

chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

(Mark 10:28-34)

- Who can be saved? All those God has chosen.
- Jesus explains how this good God would welcome fallen people: through His atoning death on the Cross and victory over the grave.
- This is the third *clear* explanation of the events of the next few weeks. Still, the disciples do not grasp the suffering mission of the Messiah.
- Included in this passage is the promise that followers of Jesus will “receive one hundred times” what they lost to follow Jesus “in this present age.”
- Often, we talk about rewards and inheritance in Heaven—and rightfully so, as this is where our eternal home will be. But so often, especially in times of need, we recognized the hundreds of brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers we’ve gained! How often are we blessed by the hundreds of children? We remember the hundreds of homes and kitchens open to us; we think fondly of the tables and chairs and mugs that are ours. Praise God for the blessing of His Church!

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.’ ‘You don’t know what you are asking,’ Jesus said. ‘Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?’ ‘We can,’ they answered. Jesus said to them, ‘You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.’”

(Mark 10:35-40)

- Despite His consistent teaching and modeling, the disciples will not grasp the message of the Suffering Servant. James and John have in mind some kind of earthy prominence and rule. They think the cup is the celebratory feast of a king—not the blood of the Messiah.

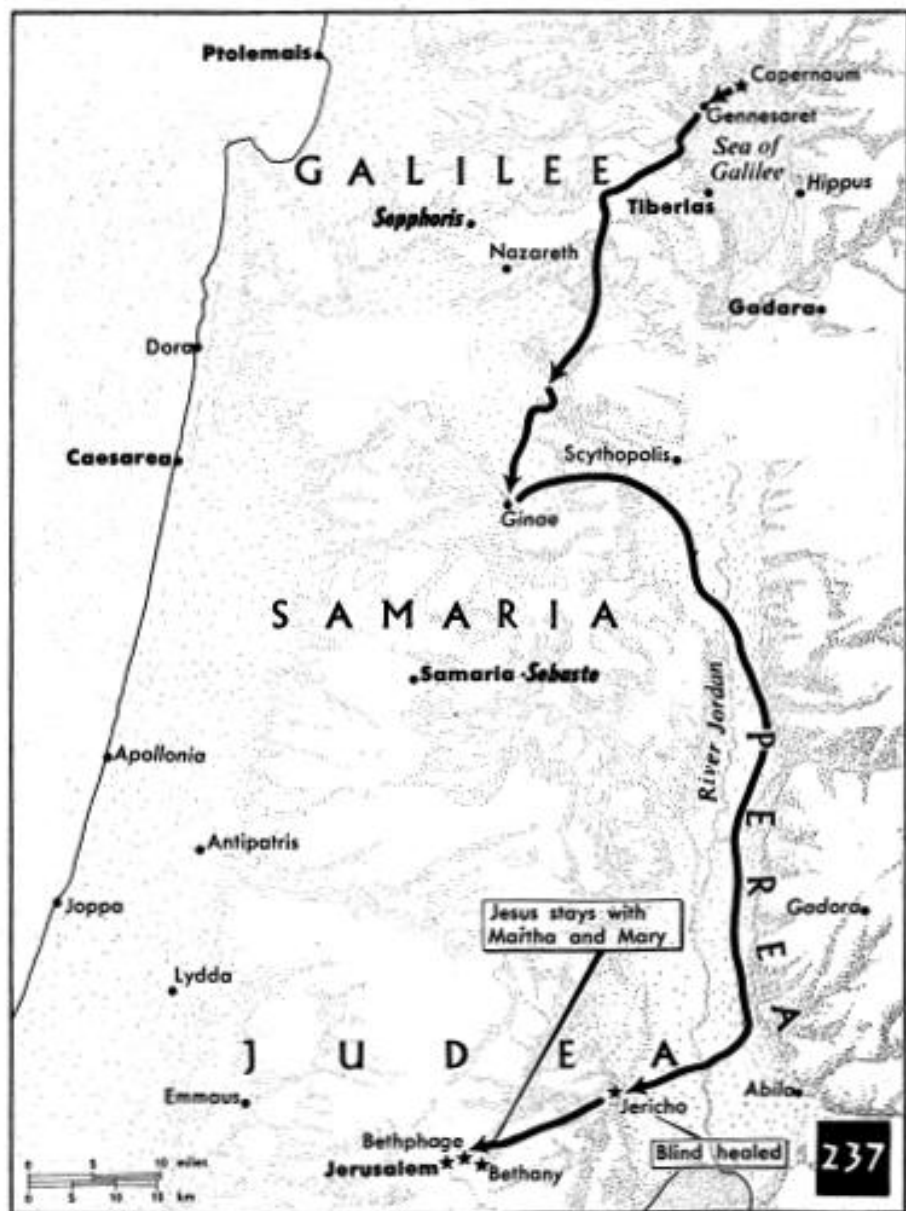
- Jesus prophesies of their deaths—though James and John don’t realize. They, too, would be persecuted for this message. Thanks be to God that there’s another cup! The cup of the New Covenant. In about one week, James and John would take that cup for the first time as Jesus declares His victory in death.
- Perhaps Jesus has in mind the robbers on crucified on either side of Him. Those places have already been assigned by God.

“When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”
 (Mark 10:41-45)

- This serves as a beautiful summary of all Jesus’ has taught on this Retirement Ministry. This disciples hadn’t grasped this call to service yet, but they would soon.

“Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called to the blind man, ‘Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.’ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’ ‘Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”
 (Mark 10:46-52)

- Another miraculous healing bookends the retirement ministry. This is the Son of Man, the Son of David, the Messiah long promised. And now, He was heading to His glory.



(map adapted from the Carta Bible Atlas, 237)

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Mark 11

- For the first time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus makes the trip into Jerusalem. He's visited Jerusalem for His circumcision and routinely for Passover before, but so far in this Gospel we've seen Him only ministering in the north (Capernaum, Bethsaida, Tyre, Sidon) and east (Decapolis).
 - The Gospel of John records three visits to Jerusalem in John 2, John 5, and finally in John 7.
- Finally, Jesus heads south into the capitol. They use the word "up" to describe the trip into Jerusalem because of its altitude.
- Jesus' ministry spans three years, yet the final six chapters of the book focus in on one week.
- As Jesus has three times explained: He is headed to Jerusalem to be turned over to the chief priests, killed, and raised from the dead. This is the Gospel, and the mission of the Messiah.

"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethpage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you doing this?" tell him, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'"

(Mark 11:1-3)

- As they prepare to enter Jerusalem, they stop near Bethany at the Mount of Olives. As Capernaum served as a ministry center for Jesus in the north, the Mount of Olives in Bethany will serve as the ministry center for Jesus' final week.
- Jesus requests a donkey that "no one has ever ridden." This meets the criteria of an animal consecrated to the Lord (Numbers 19:2, 1 Samuel 6:7).

- The donkey is chosen to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, “See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

“They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, ‘What are you doing untying that colt?’ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it.

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’
(Mark 11:4-10)

- Jesus enters Jerusalem to a King’s welcome. The people cry, “Hosanna,” which means, “save now.” They ascribe to Him the “kingdom of our father David.” It is clear that Jesus is viewed as the Messiah King.

“The manner of His entry expressed the character of His Messiahship, for here was in fact no military conqueror upon a war-horse, or political revolutionary of the kind the Jews expected. His purpose was not the overthrow of Rome but the breaking of the power of sin.”
(Swift, 828)

- This triumphal entry sours almost immediately. It becomes clear Jesus is not here to receive the praise of men, but to fulfill His mission from God.

“Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And his disciples heard him say it. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple

courts. And as he taught them, he said, ‘Is it not written: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?” But you have made it “a den of robbers.”’ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.”
(Mark 11:11-19)

- Jesus doesn’t exchange pleasantries with the crowd. There is no teaching or healing. He heads straight for the temple, and then straight back out of the city. We’re certainly given a picture of Jesus on a mission, single minded and focused.
- When He returns to the temple the next day, He lays bare the hearts and the spiritual state of Israel. The temple is no longer a house of worship and prayer, a place for spiritual formation and meditation on the Lord. Rather, it’s become a cultural center, a big business. The merchants are selling doves, the offering for poor families. Jesus rebukes them as robbers, taking advantage of the less fortunate.
- This story is nestled in the middle of a larger story about a fig tree.

“In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!’ ‘Have faith in God,’ Jesus answered. ‘I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”
(Mark 11:20-26)

- The fig tree serves as an example of the spiritual state of Israel. They present as healthy and flowering, but they bear no fruit.
- Jesus articulates two necessities for effective prayer:
 - First, you need faith in God—His plan, purpose, and will. If you ask for His will to be done, your prayer is powerful and effective.
 - Second, you ought to forgive others as you have been forgiven.

“They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’ Jesus replied, ‘I will ask you one question. Answer me and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!’ They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, “From men”’ (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’ Jesus said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’”
(Mark 11:27-33)

- Jesus is challenged yet again by the teachers of the law on the authority by which He ministered. Jesus’ answer is essentially, “My authority is the same as John the Baptist’s.” The teachers of the law rejected John as a prophet, as they had rejected Jesus. But both men had been given their authority by God.

DAY OF QUESTIONS

Mark 12

- During his week in Jerusalem, Jesus has several altercations with the teachers of the law. Routinely, as we've seen with the question on divorce in Mark 10, they present impossible scenarios to Jesus attempting to put Him at odds with the people. But Jesus will lay down His life on His own accord, on His timing.
- The Parable of the Tenants was a teaching that illustrated the hostile relationship not only between Jesus and the teachers of the law, but between all the prophets and all of Israel.

“He then began to speak to them in parables: ‘A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, “They will respect my son.” But the tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.” So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven’t you read this scripture: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”’ Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.”

(Mark 12:1-12)

- The servants of the master are the prophets of God sent throughout the ages. Israel had rejected and mistreated them, from Elijah to John.
- The “son, whom he loved” is a direct quotation from both the baptism (Mark 1:11) and the Transfiguration (Mark 9:7). The son is certainly meant to illustrate Jesus.
- As the master dealt harshly with the wicked tenants, so God will deal harshly with the wicked who reject His message of salvation. The Parable of the Tenants helps explain God’s justice in judging the wicked—the ones who have stolen what’s His, mistreated His servants, and killed His Son.

“God owes sinners no mercy of any kind, only condemnation; so it is a wonder, and matter for endless praise, that he should choose to save any of us; and doubly so when his choice involved the giving of his own Son to suffer as sin-bearer for the elect.”

(Packer, 149)

- Already, just one chapter from the triumphal entry, the people have turned against Jesus. They look for a way to arrest him.

“Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, ‘Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?’ But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. ‘Why are you trying to trap me?’ he asked. ‘Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’ They brought the coin, and he asked them, ‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’ And they were amazed at him.”

(Mark 12:13-17)

- The Pharisees and Herodians—otherwise enemies, remember—come together to set a new trap: suggest allegiance to Rome and lose the Jewish audience, or break Roman law and face the consequences.
- They shower Jesus with praises about His integrity and truthfulness. This is a false confession, and Jesus sees right through it. We are reminded that not everyone who says, “Lord, lord” belongs to the kingdom of Heaven. These

men are wolves presenting as sheep; God looks not at the outward appearance, but knows their hearts.

- Aside from the skillful handling of this trap, there is a great teaching here for us about subjection to the State.

“Duty to God and duty to the State are not incompatible; we owe a debt to both, and it is certainly possible to be a good Christian and a loyal citizen. This answer would be of particular interest to Mark’s Roman readers, since it acquits Christianity of the charge of disloyalty to the State.”

(Swift, 830)

- We “owe a debt to both” (Swift), but our debt to God and our debt to the State are incomparably different in magnitude. What belongs to Caesar is man-made and wasting away; what belongs to God is our whole life—mind, body and soul. We cannot serve two masters. God is our master, and our service to the State is an expression of our service to God—like a child who respects a piece of fine furniture at the command of a parent (you take your shoes off the couch because mom said so, not because the couch is worthy).

“Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.”

(Mark 12:18)

- After Jesus put the Pharisees and Herodians to shame, the Sadducees take their turn. The Sadducees and Pharisees were the two largest sects of Judaism. The biggest point of contention between the two groups was their theology of the afterlife. The Sadducees did not believe in a physical resurrection of the dead.

“‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?’ Jesus replied, ‘Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of

God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”
(Mark 12:19-27)

- The question is meant to expose the absurdity of Jesus’ (and the Pharisees’) belief in a physical resurrection. How would something as foundational as marriage even work if a physical resurrection were to happen?
- Jesus notes that their error is in knowing “the power of God.” If the idea of the dead inhabiting new bodies is fantastical, you don’t know the power of God.
- The Law of Moses, that the Sadducees cherished, cited here is from Deuteronomy 25:5-10. It was meant to preserve lineage, and in so doing protect the widow. A childless widow had very little rights to inheritance and property, so this law insured that she would have some protection.
- Such inheritance and protection was already assured in the New Heaven, so this law was unnecessary. Surely we will have relationships, memories, and affections in Heaven—but without the brokenness of earthly relationships with all their abuses, suffering, and selfishness.
- Jesus also corrects the Sadducees on the physical resurrection, citing again from the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible), which the Sadducees held in higher esteem than the rest of the Old Testament. He notes that God maintains a real, full relationship with the patriarchs of old—they are *alive* and with God!

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these.’ ‘Well said, teacher,’ the man replied. ‘You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and

sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.”

(Mark 12:29-34)

- Still a third teacher comes forward with a question. This one has all the marking of another trap. Jesus is put in the middle of another roaring debate: which commandments are “light” and which are “weighty” (Swift, 831).
- Jesus links together the two focuses that many had tried to separate: love for God and love for man. One flows from the other, they are joined at the hip.
- In answering, Jesus quotes the *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The *Shema* was a recited twice daily by any serious Jew.
- This teacher is more sincere than the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees before him. He is able to consider honestly the answer of Jesus, and has been given eyes to see the wisdom in Jesus’ response. It’s this evident work of the Holy Spirit on the man that indicates his nearness to Christ’s Kingdom.

“While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, ‘How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” David himself calls him “Lord,” How then can he be his son?’ The large crowd listened to him with delight.”

(Mark 12:35-37)

- Jesus has suffered through the questions of the others, now He asks one: What does it imply if David calls his ancestor, “my Lord”? This suggests that the coming Messiah was more than just a descendant of David, more than just a mere man

“All Jesus’ audience would have agreed that Ps. 110 was written by David; they would also have agreed that ‘my Lord’ in the Psalm must refer to God’s anointed, the Messiah. How then could David, the honoured ancestor, possibly call his descendant, the Messiah, ‘my Lord’, so giving him a superior position? Any one from a culture which reveres ancestors will see the point at once here. It would be unthinkable, unless this Messiah was more than human and thus far superior to his ancestor.”

(Cole, 970)

- On His way into Jerusalem Jesus had been called the Son of David twice:
 - Mark 10:47-48 – “When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus son of David, have mercy on me!...Son of David, have mercy on me!’”
 - Mark 11:10 – “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”
- If the people were to believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of David, they must also believe that He was their Lord—and David’s Lord, too!

“As he taught, Jesus said, ‘Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.’ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”

(Mark 12:38-44)

- Jesus continues to confront the ideas of prominence and power. Having the first place, the seats of honor, the loudest voice, the richest coffers—none of it was of importance if the heart was in the wrong place. This has been the consistent message of the prophets. This is what the young teacher had understood. This is what Jesus has been preaching—have faith in God, and you will be strong!

ESCHATOLOGY

Mark 13

- Mark 12 (together with Matthew 24 and Luke 21) is called the Olivet Discourse, and contains Jesus' longest, clearest prophecy of the end times.
- After Jesus finishes teaching at the temple, the disciples point out the magnificence of its structure. This was the second temple, and it was far less magnificent than the first (Ezra 3:12).

“As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’ ‘Do you see all these great buildings?’ replied Jesus. ‘Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?’”

(Mark 13:1-4)

- Jesus prophesies the destruction of the second temple, which will take place in about 40 years (70 A.D.) at the hands of the Rome.
- The temple was central to Israel's religion. It was the place the sacrifices took place, it was the destination for annual celebrations, it was the place God's glory resided among the people. Its destruction meant the functional end to Jewish religion—no sacrifices, no celebrations, no glory of God.
- Had the disciples understood what the teacher in the last chapter had (“To love [God]...and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices”), this would not have been such a blow. But they are understandably shaken by this prophecy.
- The disciples ask two questions:
 - When will these things [the destruction of the temple] happen?
 - And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?
 - In Matthew 24:3, “And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

- The disciples wrongly connect the destruction of the temple with the end of the age. If the temple is destroyed, it must mean all the prophecies are fulfilled.
- Jesus answers the questions separately, beginning with a general warning about interpreting signs: Not every calamity means the end of the age.

“Jesus said to them: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

(Mark 13:5-13)

- Jesus describes terrible things that would happen *before* the end will come:
 - War
 - “Wars and rumors of wars...Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”
 - Anarchy/Civil War
 - “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”
 - Famine
 - Earthquakes
 - “There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.”
 - Persecution
 - “You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues...All men will hate you because of me.”

- Jesus makes sure to say “the end is still to come” and “the beginning of birth pains” to clearly show that these kinds of things would all take place *before* the end times.
- This list from Jesus shares a striking resemblance to the Seals described in Revelation 6. The Olivet Discourse serves as a useful outline for reading Revelation and understanding eschatology.
- Jesus also says that “many will come” in His name to deceive. He does not describe one specific antichrist but a general spirit of deceit—as John does in I John 2.
- Jesus now addresses the first question directly, “When will these things [the destruction of the temple] happen?” and describes a Roman occupation that will soon turn oppressive.

“When you see “the abomination that causes desolation” standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”
(Mark 13:14)

- Jesus references Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11. Daniel prophesied correctly—to the exact day—the destruction of the temple by Babylon in 167 B.C.
- Jesus now prophesies correctly about the destruction of the second temple by Rome in 70 A.D., which many of His followers lived to see.
- The days leading up to the destruction of the temple would be terrible for the Jews.

“Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.”
(Mark 13:15-23)

- Now Jesus will address the second question, “And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” (or, from Matthew 24:3, “And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”).

“But in those days, following that distress, “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”

(Mark 13:24-27)

- Jesus explains the state of the earth
 - Sun and moon are darkened
 - Stars fall from the sky
 - Spiritual turmoil
- This celestial falling apart is the condition of Christ’s return in glory.
- This list from Jesus shares a striking resemblance to the Trumpets and Bowls described in Revelation 8, 9, and 16.
- Jesus goes on to describe the suddenness and finality of this return.

“Now learn a lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!””

(Mark 13:28-37)

- We've spent the entirety of this gospel watching Jesus triumph over one sphere after another. Even in the last days, the end of the world, we see Christ standing triumphant! All things will pass away, but not the truth of Christ and His Gospel.

Mark 14:1-11

- Jesus had originally traveled in to Jerusalem for Passover. He has spent the week leading up to the feast at odds with the religious leaders.
- Passover was an annual meal to celebrate Israel's liberty and remember how God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. A Passover lamb was sacrificed. The following day, the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. This celebration lasted seven days, and regular thanksgiving offerings were made to the Lord. All bread was baked without yeast, to remember their hasty rescue from Egypt.
- During these celebrations, Jerusalem was packed with people. Jesus and the disciples aren't the only ones who have traveled a long way to take part in these celebrations in Jerusalem.
- Jesus' ministry center for the week has been in Bethany, a town just east of Jerusalem. This might be a way for Him to retreat from the attention and hostility of the city; or there may have been "no room for them in the inn" due to the increased traffic in Jerusalem.

"Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. 'But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or the people may riot.' While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head."

(Mark 14:1-3)

- Interestingly, Mark names the host colloquially—"a man known as Simon the Leper." We do not know Simon the Leper from Scripture, but it's possible that Mark (who was from Jerusalem) was familiar with Simon personally.
- The woman with the perfume is named in John 12:3. This is Mary, sister to Martha and Lazarus.

- Mary and Martha are well known to Jesus. They have confessed that He is the Christ (John 11:27). They are believers in Jesus and have received His message of salvation.
- Mary anoints Jesus with an expensive perfume, worth “more than a year’s wages.” Today, this might be upwards of \$40,000!
- It’s easy to understand the disciples’ issue with this seemingly wasteful display.

“Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly.”
(Mark 14:4-5)

- The disciples have been watching as Jesus has consistently denied prominence and the “first place” and instead taken the role of a suffering servant. They may have seen this anointing as a kingly one—to them, Mary was recognizing Jesus as her King. “He would not want that!” they may have thought.
- This \$40,000 display of affection comes on the heels of the Widow’s Offering (Mark 12:41-44). Jesus was trying to teach them about the *heart* of the giver over and against the *size* of the offering. The disciples have missed the point yet again, still squabbling over the *size* of the offering.
- It’s easy to sympathize with the disciples here. We don’t know the hearts of others, we can only see the outward display. Our culture’s heavy emphasis on material value and fiscal responsibility makes this display seem wasteful, over the top, misappropriated, and selfish.
- But Jesus, consistent with the prophets of the Old Testament, rightly notes that the *heart* of the giver was correct. He also explains that this was not a kingly anointing at all, but rather a burial preparation!

“‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.’”
(Mark 14:6-9)

- If Mary intended this anointing to be a preparation for burial, it shows exemplary wisdom and faith! The Holy Spirit must be active in the heart and mind of Mary of Bethany! Remember, she and Martha had already confessed that Jesus was the Christ (John 11:27) and had seen Him raise the dead. They had listened to His prophecy about His death and, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, had understood it clearer than the disciples themselves.

“The fact should not be overlooked that Mary of Bethany was perhaps the best listener Jesus ever had. The woman who now anointed Jesus’ feet was the same one who had previously been sitting at his feet (Luke 10:39). If even the enemies of Jesus knew about the predictions Jesus had made concerning himself (Matthew 27:63), can we not assume that Mary knew fully as much? If so, is it not probable that the thought had occurred to her, ‘This may well be the last opportunity I shall ever get to bestow a kindness upon Jesus; and when, according to his own prediction, his enemies kill him, will his friends be accorded the privilege of anointing his body?’ This view, accordingly, that Mary’s conscious purpose was to prepare Jesus for burial must not be ruled out.”

(Hendrikson, 560)

- Mary sets for us a beautiful example:
 - Love and follow Jesus
 - Listen well (by the Holy Spirit)
 - Act generously

“Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”

(Mark 14:10-11)

- Judas Iscariot was the money keeper of this group (John 13:29). In the account described by John, it was Judas who raised the objection about Mary's offering:

“But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

(John 12:4-6)

- Out of his greed, it's Judas who rebukes Mary. Mark attributes this rebuke not to Judas explicitly, but to “some of those present.” Might this be another humble telling from Peter, who recognized his own failing and participation in the evil plot currently unfolding? Surely Judas is not the only one to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, but all those who sin; Peter, and myself, included.

We shudder at Judas. But let us think again—covetousness, jealousy, ambition, the dominant desire to have our own way of things. Are we so very different? These are the things which made Judas betray Jesus, and these are the things which still make men betray Him in every age.”

(Barclay, 346)

- Mary's anointing *is* retold wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, Mark has ensured it. “In memory of her” is, fittingly, a memory of Jesus.
- What Mary did directs our eyes and hearts to Jesus death. This is the Gospel, the good news of salvation! Jesus died for all those who sin, this is the source of our grace, our joy, our peace and comfort. With Mary, let us praise God for Jesus Christ!

 THE LAST EVENING

Mark 14:12-52

- The day to celebrate Passover had come. The celebratory meals could begin that evening at sundown.
- These meals required careful preparations, and a group this large (thirteen, at least) would require a large enough space. Jesus, host of this Passover, had made the necessary preparations.

“On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover Lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, “The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.’ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them.”

(Mark 14:13-16)

- Jewish custom mandated that Passover be celebrated *only* within Jerusalem’s city limits. Bethany would not do for such a meal. So, much like the situation with the donkey at the Triumphal entry, Jesus sends the disciples to meet a friend in Jerusalem.
- Some theologians (often attributed to Theodore Zahn) suggest that the “man carrying a jar of water” is Mark. They followed Mark to his mother Mary’s home. This is based on the strange inclusion at the end of the chapter, and the fact that Mary’s home was well known to the disciples by Acts 12:12.
- If this is right, the increase in story detail that picks up now through the end of Jesus’ life may not only be because of the climax of the story (The Gospel of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection), but also because Mark is a close, participating eye-witness.

“When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.’ They were saddened and one by one they said to him, ‘Surely not I?’ ‘It is one of the Twelve,’ he replied, ‘one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.’”

(Mark 14:17-21)

- Notice that the disciples ask Jesus, “Surely not I?” They have been wrong enough times, and have seen enough of the divine knowledge of Christ, to know better than to put forward a bolder charge.
- Matthew 26:25 and John 13:26 indict Judas as the betrayer. Judas, as we’ve read, has already made such arrangements.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them. ‘I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.’ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

(Mark 14:22-26)

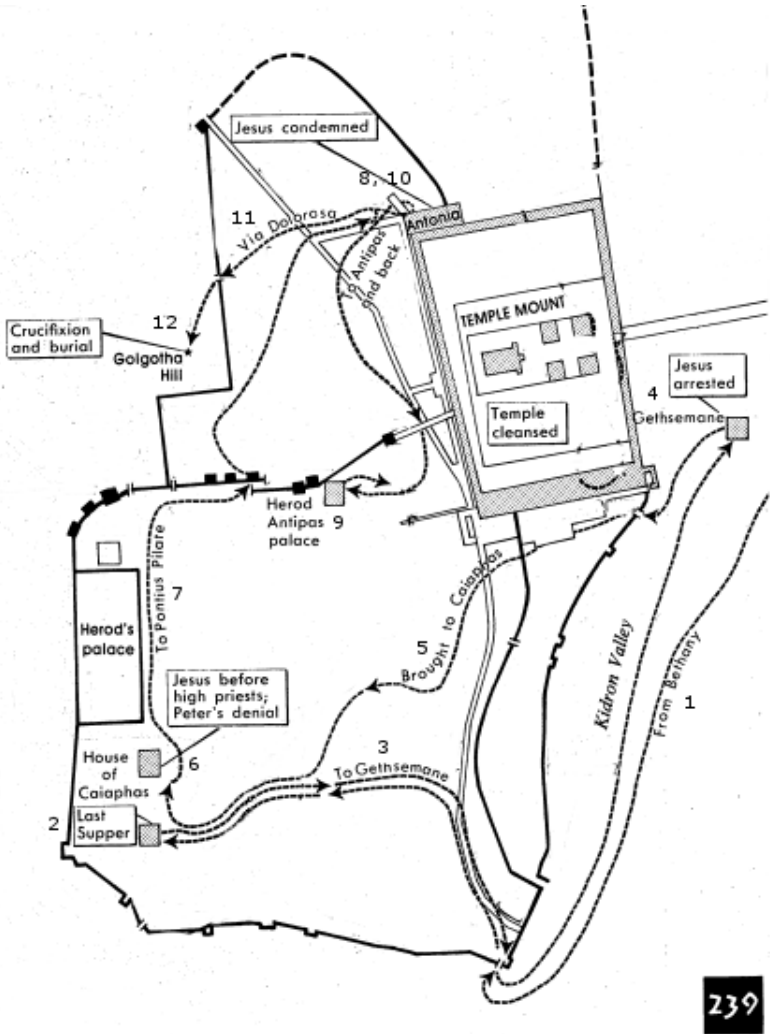
- After they have eaten this Passover meal (Luke 22:20) with all its rituals and meanings, Jesus institutes a new ritual—a New Covenant.
- There’s a rather large omission at this new celebration. There is bread and drink; but where is the sacrificial lamb? Jesus indicates, yet again, that He is to die. He is the sacrificial lamb. Much like Isaac so many years ago, the lamb is absent because the Son is to take its place.

“I do not understand these words to mean that with the paschal supper was mixed this new and more excellent supper, but rather that an end is then put to the former banquet... Thus when the [Passover] supper was ended, they tasted the sacred bread and wine; because Christ had previously aroused them from their indifference, that they might be all alive to so lofty a mystery. And,

indeed, the nature of the case demands that this clear testimony of the spiritual life be distinguished from the ancient shadow.”

(Calvin, 503)

- From the Upper Room in Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples retreat to the Mount of Olives—located in view of the temple in the Kidron Valley, just outside of the city gates.



(map adapted from the Carta Bible Atlas, 239)

“‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’ Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘today—yes, tonight—before the roost crows twice you will disown me three times.’ But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.”

(Mark 14:27-31)

- While earlier the disciples had inquired of Jesus, “Surely not I?” now they insist emphatically, *Surely, not !!* How often we boast as the disciples. Most of us believe we could join the ranks of the martyrs with no threat of unbelief. Many desire martyrdom, few receive it. “Faith” is listed in I Corinthians 12 as a spiritual gift. Let us all yearn for that kind of strong faith!
- Despite their falling away, Jesus loved them, persisted with them, and redeemed them.
- They arrive at their destination in the Mount of Olives—a place called “Gethsemane.”

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”

(Mark 14:32-36)

- Just as during the Transfiguration, Jesus takes just Peter, James and John with him.
- Christ’s humanity is on display here: In deep distress, He asks the Father to redeem creation by another way—if at all possible.
 - Laying down His own life was not an easy task for Jesus. In His humanity, He dreaded the great pain and anguish He would experience under the full wrath of God.
 - Even so, Christ laid down His life *willingly*.
 - One with the Father, Christ shares the Divine Will.

- In His humanity, however, Christ also has a Human Will. We learn from Christ what it looks like to submit our own wills to that of the Father. Are you having trouble submitting to the will of God in an area of your life? Christ did so under extreme duress—He is truly a Savior that sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15)!

“Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.’”

(Mark 14:37)

- Just an hour ago, Peter and the other disciples assured us that under *no* circumstances would they fall away from Jesus. Yet already they’ve succumbed to temptation and left Jesus for sleep.
- Peter’s weaknesses are already shown, and will be fully so in his denial soon to come. We cannot be quick to point fingers, however, but rather say along with Paul that we are counted among “the worst” of sinners (I Timothy 1:15).

“Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!’ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.”

(Mark 14:38-47)

- Judas has fulfilled what Jesus already knew to be true. He is the betrayer.
- John 18:10 notes Peter as the sword-swinger who took off the servant’s ear. Luke 22:51 notes that Jesus healed the man’s ear.

“‘Am I leading a rebellion,’ said Jesus, ‘that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.’”

(Mark 12:48-49)

- Jesus has taught and demonstrated all along (Caesar’s tax, for example) that His ministry is not a military coup. He is a King, but not in the way the people had projected on Him. Despite His consistent teaching, Jesus is treated here as any other rebel leader.
- He calls out the cowardice of the leaders, who avoided arresting Him in Jerusalem in plain sight of the people and instead opted to do so outside the city gates under the cover of night.

“Then everyone deserted him and fled.”

(Mark 14:0)

- This only affirms all that we’ve known. If they truly wanted to be prominent and first, they would have counted the cost to follow him.

“A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.”

(Mark 14:51-2)

- Mark includes a strange line at the close of this story about a young man fleeing the scene. Many commentators—including Cole, Hendrikson, Barclay, and Zahn—suggest that this young man is Mark himself.

“There are those—the majority by far—who either lean toward the position that the young man was Mark, or rather positively so assert.”

(Hendrikson, 600)

- How did Mark end up at this scene?
 - Did the riot stop first at Mark’s house—the potential site of the Last Supper—before learning that Jesus had walked out to the Mount of Olives?
 - Had Mark followed when he heard Jesus and the Twelve leave the house?

- No matter who this young man is or how he got there, the fact is that he *fled*. Like all the others, he deserted Jesus in weakness of faith. If this is Mark, he humbly includes himself among those that left the Christ in His hour of great distress.

“Whoever it was, he too had left Jesus, like all the rest, and run away.”

(Cole, 973)

THE TRIAL

Mark 14:53-15:15

- Jesus is hauled away from Gethsemane and brought—now very late at night—to the home of the high priest Caiaphas.

“They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.”

(Mark 14:53-534)

- Jesus is led to the home of the high priest. This was likely a home similar to the one where the Last Supper had just been held earlier. Perhaps Jesus is in the upper room of this home. One at a time, witnesses are brought in to testify against Jesus.

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, “I will destroy this manmade temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.”’ Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.”

(Mark 14:55-61)

- From the beginning, the entire trial was a sham. A meeting of the Sanhedrin (religious rulers) at such a late hour was not allowed. The falsified testimonies were perjury. No two testimonies would agree, and by law (Deuteronomy 19:15) two or three testimonies were needed to convict a man.

- Despite the opportunities for a defense or an appeal, Jesus remains silent. “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). This Jesus is *willingly* laying down His own life—it will not be taken from Him, but He will offer it up.

“Again the high priest asked him, ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ The high priest tore his clothes. ‘Why do we need any more witnesses?’ he asked. ‘You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?’ They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophecy!’ And the guards took them and beat him.”

(Mark 14:61-65)

- Jesus invokes the Holy Name of God in His response: “I am.” In doing so, He has not only claimed to be the Messiah, but claimed to be God Himself (Exodus 3:14). This, to the Jew, was blasphemy! Certainly, God Himself was no mere man; He would not live as a servant. If God were among them, certainly *they* (the religious rulers) would know!
- For the sin of blasphemy, this mob intended to treat Jesus as the young man in Leviticus 24. He was to be put to death.
- We should note who the convicting testimony comes from: Jesus. Christ lays down His life on His terms, of His own accord.
- According to Deuteronomy 19:15, a testimony of two or three witnesses was required to convict a man. In affirming this *one* testimony (from Jesus), they unknowingly affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit testify together—as they have at the baptism and transfiguration—that Jesus is the Messiah.
- The behavior of the religious rulers here further confirms the treachery of this trial. The fix was in, bias was showing. Because of their contempt for Jesus, they had intended all along to convict Him.

“While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. ‘You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,’ she said.”

(Mark 14:66-67)

- Due to the size of the high priest’s home, only a handful of people were probably in the room at a time. The courtyard must have been full of people—many of whom were willing to testify falsely against Jesus.
- The guards had tried to seize the young man in the garden with Jesus. It’s likely they tried to seize the disciples, too. Peter, only hours earlier, had fled from this very crowd to avoid his *own* arrest and trial—a trial that currently has Jesus blindfolded, spat on, beaten, and mocked.

“But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ‘This fellow is one of them.’ Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about.’ Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.”

(Mark 14:68-72)

- Despite his assurances a few hours earlier, Peter denies any connection to Jesus—three times. To add to the pain and betrayal of this moment, the Gospel of Luke adds, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter” (Luke 22:61).
- Peter breaks down, seeing now the great depth of his weaknesses. He has not been smart enough to understand, spiritual enough to perform the miracles, or faithful enough to stand by Jesus. Peter, on his own, cannot walk with the Lord. The recognition of this weakness is a terrible low for a man of such strength.

“Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.”

(Mark 15:1)

- The Jews were not able to enact capital punishment without permission from Rome. In order to carry out their conviction, they first needed permission from Pontius Pilate, the Rome-appointed governor of Judea.

“‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate. ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, ‘Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.’ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.”

(Mark 15:2-5)

- Once again, “as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” We’re reminded, yet again, that Christ is participating in this—treacherous sham as it was—willingly to fulfill His mission as Savior.
- Pilate seems to realize Jesus is not guilty. The amount of baseless accusations flying around must have given Jesus plenty opportunity to demonstrate some semblance of innocence. Pilate gives Him an opportunity to defend himself. Jesus will not—He is laying down His *own* life.

“Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. ‘Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. ‘What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?’ Pilate asked them. ‘Crucify him!’ they shouted. ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder. ‘Crucify him!’ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”

(Mark 15:6-15)

- The same crowd that one week ago had shouted, “Save us now!” has turned to shouts of “Kill him now!”
- In rejecting Jesus’ movement, they had chosen another: They way of Barabbas. They wanted to end a rebellion, but instead continued one. They wanted to protect their traditions, but they released the very type of zealot who would lead to increased Roman oppression. Jesus offered them peace, safe passage through the valley of the shadow of death. They chose death instead.
- The bitter cup—the one Jesus hoped to avoid, yet willingly drank—was upon Him.

Mark 15:16-47

- Frederick Lehman’s great hymn *The Love of God* argues: “Could we with ink the oceans fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.” Our Lord’s death and resurrection demands volumes upon volumes. It demands our whole life—body, mind, and soul.
- To continue with our bullet point format feels cheap. There is a fullness in this love of God that demands regular devotion, study, and participation in a local church

“The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

(Mark 15:16-20)

- We are dependent on the whole life of Christ. He is our Creator and sustainer. Our righteousness depends on Him as sinless. His triumph over temptations and trials, His obedience to the Law—all of this is necessary for our Salvation. Here at the crucifixion, however, we find Jesus at His greatest: bearing the weight of God’s wrath.

“Why does the [Apostles’] creed add, ‘He descended to hell’? To assure me in times of personal crisis and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, especially on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.”

(Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A #44)

- Here is our King, our Suffering Servant—taking on our infirmities, sorrows, transgression, iniquities, and punishment. This was our path. This injustice on the Christ is justice for guilty sinners.

“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.”

(Mark 15:21)

- Simon of Cyrene, like many, made the trip in to celebrate Passover—which would have continued until that evening. He traveled all the way from Cyrene, west of Egypt in Libya. Had the message of Christ reached so far? Was he struck by the passion of the Christ in that instant? Both are possible for our God.

“Usually, the condemned man carried the crossbar of his own cross to the place of execution, but Jesus must have been too weak after his flogging. People sometimes died as a result of the flogging (there was no limit to the number of strokes) that always preceded crucifixion.”

(Cole, 975)

- Peter and the other disciples, hiding in the crowd, watched as Simon of Cyrene fulfilled the duty of a true disciple—carrying the Cross (Mark 8:34).
- Many believe that Mark mentions Rufus by name here because he is known to the church in Rome—the audience this gospel is written for. Paul sends his greetings to Rufus in Rome: “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too” (Romans 16:13). As we’ll see, many who witnessed Christ’s great humiliation and sacrifice on the Cross were moved to believe in Him as Lord. Rufus may be counted among that number.

“They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by

hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him."

(Mark 15:22-32)

- James and John, who had earlier asked to sit at Jesus' right and left hand in His glory, watched from a distance as two robbers took those places. At each passing moment, humiliation mounts for the disciples as they witness the true mission of the Messiah.
- The cries of "Hosanna!, Save us now!" have turned to accusations, "Save yourself!" This is the Unpardonable Sin, the rejection of saving work of Christ on the Cross.
- At the beginning of Christ's ministry, He had been met with a temptation from Satan: "Throw yourself down from here" (Luke 4:9). That temptation has stayed with Him, even to the very end: "Come down now from the cross." Jesus' Human Will was greatly distressed by this moment, yet He stood up to this temptation and submitted to the Divine Will of the Father, unto death.

"At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'—which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'"

(Mark 15:33)

- As it gets dark, Passover is concluded. The book is closed on that old symbol. There is a new, greater sacrificial lamb: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
- Forsaken by God, Jesus is experiencing the full wrath of God.

"When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.' One man ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said."

(Mark 15:34-36)

- These people are spiritually dead. They had not understood that John the Baptist was the one in the spirit of Elijah. They had done to him what they had done to all the prophets—what they were doing now to the Son. They had no eyes to see and no ears to hear what He taught them in the parable of the Tenants just days ago.
- Instead, they mock him and offer a bitter drink to add to His suffering.

“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’”

(Mark 15:37-39)

- Perhaps like Simon and Rufus of Cyrene, this Roman guard is moved by the Spirit as he witnesses the passion of Christ. He, and even one of the thieves on the cross, confesses: “Surely this man was the Son of God!”
- The curtain of the temple was meant to separate the people from the holiness of God. In taking the wrath of God on sin and dying in our place, Christ made available to us the unveiled presence of God! Dressed in His righteousness, we are able to enter the Throne Room of God in confidence!

“Christ, the true and everlasting Priest, having abolished the figures of the law, opened up for us by his blood the way to the heavenly sanctuary, that we may no longer stand at a distance within the porch, but may freely advance into the presence of God...Thus the rending of the vail (sic.) was not only an abrogation of the ceremonies which existed under the law, but was, in some respects, an opening of heaven, that God may now invite the members of his Son to approach him with familiarity.

(Calvin, 559)

- God had chosen this way and this moment of history to redeem for Himself a people. Jesus message of salvation was assured: Repent, believe the good news of forgiveness! On this day, forgiveness was purchased for all who believed.

“Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome.

In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.”
(Mark 15:40-41)

- This was not a message for the religious elites, the “in crowd,” or the leaders. This was a message for everyone everywhere. Fishermen from the countryside, tax collectors, and infirmed. That God has chosen these women to be numbered in the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) should come as no surprise.

“It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph brought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.”
(Mark 15:42-47)

- At sundown, pious Jews were no longer to do any labor. Jesus’ friends move quickly to bury His exposed body while they were able.
- Jesus has demonstrated a life of simplicity (Luke 9:58). He had encouraged His disciples to do the same (Mark 6:8-9). He had chided the wealthy (Mark 10:23), and praised the poor (Mark 12:43). But we must acknowledge the great ministry done by wealthy brothers and sisters, who use their means for the glory of God and His church. Joseph was a wealthy man, and ensured the safe burial of our Lord. Mark’s own mother had a large home, and extended it to the Apostles for regular meetings and for prayer. Lydia was a dealer of fine clothing, and opened her home for the church to meet.
- Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses witnesses Jesus’ final breath and saw where he was buried. There was no mistaking: Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried.

“As customary, a great stone was slidden down a groove in the rock to protect the body from animals or tomb-robbers. The fact that the two Marys saw

where Jesus was buried meant that there could have been no mistake when they returned when the Sabbath was over.”

(Cole, 976)

- We believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to Hades.

THE LONGER ENDING

Mark 16:1-20

- Our eye witnesses return to the tomb where they laid Jesus body.

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’

(Mark 16:1-3)

- Jews would not have done any work of the Sabbath. Jesus dying so quickly meant that he had been in the grave two evenings already (the evening that began Sabbath, the evening that closed Sabbath). This was the third day.
- The ladies have been eye-witnesses all along. They knew the place where He was buried, they knew about the stone. They had seen the tomb in chapter 15.
- The women had no plan for getting access to the tomb. Maybe they hoped the Roman guard was still posted there (Matthew 27:66). Maybe they expected His disciples to be there, too. They simply approached in faith.

“But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.”

(Mark 16:4-5)

- Their faith was rewarded! God had provided entrance to the tomb!
- To their alarm, they see a young man at the tomb. There is still a danger of supporting Jesus. The women are right to be concerned about arrest or persecution. But their fears are eased.

“‘Don’t be alarmed,’ he said. ‘You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, “He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”’”

(Mark 16:6-7)

- On the third day, He rose again from the dead!
- These witnesses investigate the tomb, what He said has come true! They are instructed to tell the disciples of a meeting in Galilee.
- But strangely, Mark’s Gospel ends suddenly and without resolution.

“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”

(Mark 16:8)

- We know from the other Gospels that the “meeting in Galilee” spoken of here *did in fact* take place. Matthew 28:8 tells us, “So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”
- So what do we make of this abrupt ending? It seems to many that Mark’s Gospel, ancient as it is, is missing His ending. This abrupt, “cliff-hanger” finish was not stylistic of his time period—and it wouldn’t have served his purposes in presenting the full Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Mark leads us to expect great things, a marvelous reunion in Galilee, but then all of a sudden his message breaks off. Are we now blaming Mark? Not at all, as will become clear. What we, along with many other interpreters of various theological positions, are saying is that we probably do not have all that Mark wrote. This will become clearer when we study ‘the long ending’ (verses 9-20).”

(Hendrikson, 682)

- The ending we *do have* (verses 9-20) does *not* appear in the earliest manuscripts we have recovered (Vaticanus and Sinaiticus). We’ll notice a switch in literary style—a move toward Christian language typical of later centuries (possibly third or fourth).
- The predominant view among Christian theologians is that Mark did *not* intend to conclude his Gospel at verse 8, but that the longer ending is *not*

original to Mark but added by later scribes to conclude the message more fittingly.

- This should not shake our faith in the slightest! Rather, it strengthens us!
 - The Christian Bible is not controlled and edited by a small group. It is a real, historical document of incredible reliability and veracity. Copies of the Gospels outpace historical documents of the same era by 1,000%! All of the information has been included and available our entire lifetimes (see any footnote in your study Bible). None of the small discrepancies in the more than 5,000 ancient manuscripts suggest any substantial changes to our doctrine or belief.
 - Though we do not have Mark's ending, we do have the ending of "two or three witnesses"! God has preserved His Word for us in Matthew, Luke, and John!
- We will not include the longer ending with inspired Word of God, but it provides a rich insight for us into the beliefs of the very early church.

"These verses, as said above, are not part of Scripture, and so we should not use them for establishing any doctrine, but they are still a valuable summary of the beliefs of the early church, and in so far as they agree with Scripture we may accept them."

(Cole, 977)

"To the extent in which this ending truly reflects what is found elsewhere inside the covers of our Bible it can be described as a product, however indirectly, of divine inspiration. Since it would be very difficult—perhaps impossible—to defend the thesis that every word of this ending is without flaw, no sermon, doctrine, or practice should be based solely upon its contents."

(Hendrikson, 687)

- The longer ending seems to be a summary of the endings of the other Gospels and of Acts.

"When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were

walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either. Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.' After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

(Mark 16:9-20)

- Here is added:
 - Jesus' bodily appearance before Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:9)
 - The women's report to the disciples, and their unbelief (Luke 24:10-11)
 - Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-16)
 - The men from Emmaus share with the disciples (Luke 24:33)
 - Jesus' appearance before the disciples (Luke 24:36) and rebuke (John 20:29)
 - The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - The Signs and Wonders of the Apostles
 - Driving out demons (Acts 19:11-12)
 - Speaking in new tongues (Acts 2:6)
 - Their protection from snakes and poison (Acts 28:5)
 - Healing the sick (Acts 3:7)
 - Jesus' Ascension (Acts 1:9)
- From this longer ending, we see how the full of message of salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ had preached and demonstrated on the Cross and in the grave was available to even the ancient church. They believed it and preached it with fervor! May the reader do the same. Praise God for Jesus Christ!



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