

**Jesus Is Lord:
Studies in Mark
Dr. R. Wade Paschal**

Dr. Paschal has given us a gift in this study on the gospel of Mark. He takes us through the gospel and provides for us a perspective of the Lordship of Jesus throughout the book. Each lesson is packed with scriptures, commentary, and questions that should fit into a variety of teaching styles and classes. Each lesson has more than one can possibly pack into a thirty minute teaching window, so each teacher will need to make the decisions on what they want to pull out and lead in the time allotted.

Dr. Paschal uses the NRSV and ESV, and all scripture references are clearly marked in the lessons. Lesson seven includes an extended overview of the biblical concept of rapture. He wanted you to have these materials available for your knowledge and your teaching, but his recommendation would not be to get into that discussion in class unless you feel clearly led by the Spirit.

Here is an overview of the eight lessons in Mark.

Lesson 1- Jesus is Lord of the Spirit

Lesson 2- Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

Lesson 3- Jesus is Lord of the Kingdom

Lesson 4- Jesus is Lord of Creation

Lesson 5- Jesus is Lord over Death

Lesson 6- Discipleship under the Lordship of Christ

Lesson 7- Jesus is Lord of the Future

Lesson 8- Jesus is Lord of Life

Lesson 1:

Jesus is Lord of the Spirit

Read Mark 1:1-39

We want to look at the Gospel of Mark as it presents the Lordship of Jesus.

In the early chapters we find this statement in several places:

Mark 1:32-34 (ESV)

³² That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

³³ And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

³⁴ And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Mark 3:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea

⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him.

⁹ And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him,

¹⁰ for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.

¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.”

Mark 6:56 (ESV)

⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

These summary statements underline one of the key features of Mark: an emphasis on the actions of Jesus that prove that he is Messiah and Lord of all. The final actions will be the cross and resurrection—the proof that God has made him Christ and Lord.

Read Mark 1:1-3

Questions: What is the “Good news” of the Gospel? What does the ministry of the Baptist have to do with the Gospel? What is the meaning of the phrase, “He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit”?

The beginning of the Gospel—the Ministry of the Baptist and promise of the Spirit

Mark begins with the briefest of introductions: this is “good news” about Jesus the Son of God.

The phrase “son of God” is at this point not so much about Jesus’ divinity (although it obviously could imply that) as his messiahship.

In the first place the coming of Jesus (and the Baptist) is a fulfillment of OT expectations:

Mark 1:2-3 (ESV)

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

Mark here combines two separate prophecies:

Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

¹ “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 40:3 (ESV)

³ A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The “messenger” will prepare the way of the Lord in the wilderness—that is for Mark, John the Baptist who appears in the Judean wilderness and begins to preach a message of repentance.

Read Mark 1:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The "way" will be the person who comes after John and baptizes people, not with water, but in the Holy Spirit.

John prepares for this coming one by calling people to confession and repentance—his baptism is a sign of that repentance.

Water washings were part of preparation for the Sabbath in the synagogues of Judea. More than 700 miqva'ot or ritual immersion baths have been discovered in the area of Palestine (most as ancient as the ministry of Jesus). Washing the body as a sign of ritual and moral purification was well-known to most Jews.

It is not surprising that people who recognize and embrace a call to national repentance and cleansing in preparation for God sending the Messiah.

What John stresses is that this Messiah will bring in a new era of the Spirit. This, too, was an OT expectation:

Isaiah 44:3 (NRSV)

³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NRSV)

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

²⁷ I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

The coming of the Spirit brings not only cleansing from sin, but new power to follow the law of God and to be righteous. Mark seems to be suggesting that the Messiah/Son of God will bring this age of the Spirit into existence.

Read Mark 1:9-13 (NRSV)

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Question: What is the meaning of Satan's temptation of Jesus?

It is significant then that this is what happens next:

Jesus comes to John and is baptized in the Jordan. A voice from heaven confirms his Sonship (as the gospel opening has announced)—he is the Son. More than that he is "beloved"—a term frequently applied in the OT to Israel. The term suggests the destiny and call of God's people is now fulfilled in Jesus. Upon his baptism, he receives the Spirit—and then the Spirit drives him into the wilderness where Satan tempts him.

How are these connected?

I think that Mark intends for us to see a connection with the original temptation:

Genesis 3:1-5 (NRSV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;

³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;

⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

By Jesus' day many commentators connected the snake in the garden with the devil. In Genesis 3 the snake corrupts Adam and Eve and gets them to try to be their own gods and authorities.

Now, empowered by the Spirit Jesus meets the devil and is undeflected from his ministry. Note that Mark does not give any detail to the temptations (see Matthew and Luke). I think Mark's account has more in common with this passing reference in John:

John 14:30-31 (NRSV)

³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me;

³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

Mark shows that Satan has no power over Jesus—so that Jesus is completely free to do the mission of the Father.

Read Mark 1:14-29 (NRSV)

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,
¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Questions: Why does the arrest of Baptist lead to the call of the disciples?

Jesus begins his ministry. He preaches the time is “fulfilled”, the kingdom of God is “near”—the saving action of God implied in John the Baptist’s ministry is happening. It is still a time of repentance, but it is also time now to do more than repent and confess—it is time to believe.

And people begin to respond, Jesus calls the first disciples and they follow him. They are going to be more than people who learn from a rabbi the intricacies of interpreting the law (which is what a rabbinic disciple would expect). They will “fish” for people—bringing other people to faith. The goal of God in sending the Spirit is not to send one miracle-working person, but to create a people who are faithful to God. In gathering disciples for the purpose of reaching other people, Jesus is anticipating the gathering of a new people of God.

Questions: What is the significance of Jesus’ first miracle? What is this “authority” that he has?

²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

²² They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not

as the scribes.

²³ Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,

²⁴ and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

²⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

²⁶ And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

²⁷ They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

²⁸ At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Jesus' first miracle underlines his power over Satan. A man with an unclean spirit sees him and says, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." And Jesus casts him out.

The people are astounded again at Jesus' ability not only to command and teach, but to command evil spirits.

Questions: What does Jesus' healing and exorcism ministry show? What is his message?

Mark only narrates three other exorcisms: Mark 5:1-13, 7:24-30 and 9:17-29. Mark 5 tells the story of the man who lived among the tombs bruised himself—a perfect picture of the power of Satan and evil. In Mark 7 we have the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman and in Mark 9 the father who begs for his son. In Mark and 9 the significance of the demonic possession emphasizes the self-harm of the person possessed. The essence of the demon-possessed is not so much that they are crazy, but that they hurt themselves and live among death. It is that power to destroy that is typical of Satan (see John 8:44)—death is the promised result of the sin of the garden and the goal of the demonic.

Jesus' exorcism shows his power over the evil and death started in Genesis 3. The essence of the Spirit will be opposite to the fall—bringing life and freedom and right thinking. Though Satan continues to have power in this world, Jesus' exorcisms show that indeed the Kingdom of God has come near as he shows his power to reverse the work of Satan and set people free.

Read Mark 1:29-39 (NRSV)

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

³¹ He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began

to serve them.

³² That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

³³ And the whole city was gathered around the door.

³⁴ And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

³⁵ In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

³⁶ And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

³⁷ When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

³⁸ He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

³⁹ And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

We end with the story of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. She has a fever and Jesus heals her—and the result is that people begin bringing others for healing and who need exorcism. Jesus heals them all, forbidding the demons to speak. He then goes out for a time of prayer and the next day starts on his ministry in the neighboring towns around the North-western side of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 39 repeats the summary of verse 34—emphasizing again his authority over the demonic world.

Summary:

- 1) Mark 1 announces the “good news” of Jesus the Christ, Son of God
- 2) Mark places this good news in the context of OT expectations that God was sending first a messenger to get people ready, then to send one who bring the new era of the Spirit to God's people.
- 3) John the Baptist prepares the people through baptism for repentance and a call to confession
- 4) The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, the voice from heaven designates him as the “Beloved Son.”
- 5) Jesus immediately confronts Satan and resists temptation, counteracting the failure of Adam in Genesis 3.
- 6) Jesus begins to preach not only repentance, but also that the Kingdom is near.
- 7) He calls disciples that will follow him and make further disciples

- 8) He casts out a demon (who recognizes him as the “Holy One of God”) showing that he not only resists temptation successfully but is undoing the work of Satan that brings death and destruction to this world—the kingdom is shown to be “near” as Satan’s work is undone.
- 9) He continues his ministry of preaching and exorcism, showing that the Spirit has come through him to heal and to cleanse the world.

For reference: other exorcism narrated in Mark.

Mark 5:1-13 (NRSV)

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

² And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him.

³ He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain;

⁴ for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.

⁵ Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

⁶ When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him;

⁷ and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me."

⁸ For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!"

⁹ Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

¹⁰ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country.

¹¹ Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding;

¹² and the unclean spirits begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them."

¹³ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

Mark 7:24-30 (NRSV)

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter."

³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Mark 9:17-29 (NRSV)

¹⁷ Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak;

¹⁸ and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so."

¹⁹ He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me."

²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

²² It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."

²³ Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!"

²⁶ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead."

²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

²⁸ When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

²⁹ He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

Lesson 2:

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

The second group of stories around Jesus in Mark ends with a similar summary statement in Mark 3:7-12—

Mark 3:7-12 (NRSV)

⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him;

⁸ hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

⁹ He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him;

¹⁰ *for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.*

¹¹ *Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"*

¹² But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

This is very close to the language we found in Mark 1:34. The emphasis in this second section is different.

The section begins with the healing of a leper:

Mark 1:40-45 (NRSV)

⁴⁰ A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean."

⁴¹ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"

⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

⁴³ After sternly warning him he sent him away at once,

⁴⁴ saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Questions: What was the status of a leper in Jesus' day? What does Jesus mean by this healing?

Leviticus 13-14 spend a great deal of time describing what skin conditions render a person unclean. If a person has leprosy they are isolated from the community, forced to warn others of their uncleanness, and even their clothing becomes unclean and must be burned after they are free from the disease (Leviticus 13:52). After the person has become clean the former leper must offer a sin-offering, a offer that brings atonement in the temple:

Leviticus 14:13-19 (NRSV)

¹³ He shall slaughter the lamb in the place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered in the holy place; for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest: it is most holy.

¹⁴ The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot.

¹⁵ The priest shall take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, ¹⁶ and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD.

¹⁷ Some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering.

¹⁸ The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD:

¹⁹ the priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he shall slaughter the burnt offering;

The OT does not say that leprosy happens as a direct result of a person's specific sin, but the implication seems to be that unclean status of the leper reflects the overall sin of the world that needs atonement.

The priest only touches the leper after he/she is cleansed, and then only with the blood of the sacrifice.

The leper emphasizes first Jesus' will—"If you choose you can make me clean." Whereas Jesus showed his authority over Satan and unclean spirits in the first section, now he is showing his authority and willingness to heal and to cleanse.

It is significant that Jesus heals the leper by touching him. Even the priest would not do this directly without the blood of the sacrifice and then only after the leprosy has disappeared. Jesus directly touches the leper evidently without fear of being made unclean himself.

This is an amazing act of inclusion—the “kingdom” is coming near in that the outcast is now touched, and the sin is healed. Jesus sends the leper on to the priest to follow the law as given in Leviticus, but Jesus has healed and made clean in a way that even the sacrificial system could not do.

It is no accident then that the next healing takes up directly the issue of the forgiveness of sins:

Mark 2:1-13 (NRSV)

¹ When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.

³ Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,

⁷ "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?"

⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?

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

¹¹ "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

¹² And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

¹³ Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them.

Questions: Why would Jesus connect healing in Mark 2:1ff with forgiveness? What is the connection between this healing and the miracle with the leper?

The traditional home of Peter in Capernaum is directly across from the synagogue. If he were teaching and healing in the house, scribes from the synagogue could watch from doorway merely feet away. The four men lower the paralyzed man into the house through the roof. But Jesus does not merely heal the man, he says first, “Your sins are forgiven.”

This naturally raises questions, “who can forgive sins but God?”

Jesus responds, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?"

⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?

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

¹¹ "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home."

Clearly Jesus sees his authority to heal as equal to the authority to forgive sins. He is not shirking from the fact that this is the authority of God.

When Jesus healed the leper his touch replaced the touch of the sin sacrifice, going beyond that sacrifice. The sacrifice only recognized the cleansing of the leper and affirmed it—Jesus touch effected the cleansing.

And now Jesus word goes further and gives the forgiveness of sin implied in the sacrifice. As the OT sacrifices affirmed God's willingness to forgive sins, now Jesus does that in a word.

The theme continues in the next story:

Mark 2:13-17 (NRSV)

¹³ Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them.

¹⁴ As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him.

¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Question: What does the call of Levi have to do with the previous healing?

Jesus goes out and comes across Levi, a tax-collector. We see in v15ff that "tax collectors and sinners" form what we call a "hendiadys"—two words connected with the word "and" to convey a single idea. Tax-collectors by the nature of their jobs are considered traitors and thieves from the people of God. And yet Jesus not only calls Levi to be one of his disciples, but proceeds to meet with his friends.

The act of eating with a person had serious implications in Jesus' culture. One only ate with a person with whom one wanted to identify. The scribes of the Pharisees do not understand—one should avoid sin and sinners, not identify with them. But Jesus sees his call in terms of the mission of the physician—to heal those who are sick. "Sickness" signifies not only physical illness, but the infirmity of sin and rebellion.

The New Kingdom

Mark 2:18-22 (NRSV)

¹⁸ Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

²⁰ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day.

²¹ "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

Questions: How does Jesus answer the Pharisees' question about fasting? What "new wine skin" does the Kingdom offer?

Mark emphasizes that what Jesus is doing is both radical and new.

Fasting was a regular part of the lives of most seriously religious people in Judaism. Some people fasted two days a week regularly. But Jesus tells the scribes that while he is with them, fasting is inappropriate for his disciples.

In the OT people fasting as means of seeking God's answer to problems and prayers (see Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3) or a sign of repentance (Nehemiah 9). But the presence of Christ is a time for feasting. Jesus is a sign that the long promised feast of God is near:

Isaiah 25:6-9 (NRSV)

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,

and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.
⁹ It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

To fail to see that something new is happening in Jesus is like trying to put new wine into old wineskins—it is doomed to failure.

The Pharisees find a further reason to criticize the disciples:

Mark 2:23-28 (NRSV)

²³ One sabbath he was going through the grainfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?"

²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?

²⁶ He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions."

²⁷ Then he said to them, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath;

²⁸ so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Questions: Why do the Pharisees criticize the disciples for plucking the grain? How does Jesus defend them? What does it mean if he is "Lord of the Sabbath"?

The disciples on a sabbath take grain and eat from the wheat as they pass. This is allowed under OT law (Deuteronomy 23:25), but the Pharisees saw the action of taking the grain as work on the Sabbath. Jesus disagreed—the Sabbath never meant to be used as an excuse not to feed the hungry. Those serving him have a right to be fed—even if it seems to break the Sabbath law because of who he is—the Lord of the Sabbath.

What does this term "lord of the Sabbath" mean? It certainly means that Jesus has the right to make authoritative pronouncements about what one can and cannot do on the Sabbath. But, I think it means more—the Sabbath is for humanity—and Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath has come to do for people what the Sabbath is supposed to do.

The next story shows that means.

Mark 3:1-6 (NRSV)

¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

² They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

³ And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."

⁴ Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent.

⁵ He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Question: What is Jesus demonstrating when he heals the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath? Why is this important?

We should understand that the Pharisees do not condemn Jesus because they are against healing. Rather, they want to preserve the holiness of the Sabbath at all costs. After the debacle and misery of the exile, Jews looked hard at what had led to God's judgment against them. They particularly saw the failure to keep the Sabbath as a prime cause of the exile:

Nehemiah 13:17-18 (NRSV)

¹⁷ Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the sabbath day?"

¹⁸ Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath."

The man had a withered hand—he was not about to die. Although sad, it was not a fatal problem. Jesus could have waited a day and healed the man and shown care for the Sabbath.

But Jesus felt that the Pharisees had it all wrong. The Sabbath was not meant to put off good, but to make sure that the goodness of God had place in the weekly worship of the people.

In healing on the Sabbath Jesus is proving that he is "Lord of the Sabbath"—the Lord who puts back to right what is broken and wrong in the world.

So the section ends as the Mark 1:34ff ended—the crowds pressing around Jesus to find healing.

Mark 3:7-12 (NRSV)

⁷ Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him;

⁸ hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon.

⁹ He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him;

¹⁰ for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him.

¹¹ Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!"

¹² But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.

The crowds are bigger and people now press in to touch Jesus.

And no wonder—because he is something complete new. He brings cleansing and forgiveness from sin. He offers healing and goodness that the Sabbath was intended to bring. He not only conquers Satan, but he brings victory over sin. He is bringing the new wine and the feast of God that will eventually bring victory over death.

Lesson 3:

Jesus is Lord of the Kingdom

Mark 4:1-32 gives us Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom. The chapter contains a series of parables on the Kingdom that Jesus was announcing to the world.

Read Mark 4:1-20

The Parable of the Sower is used to explain the purpose of Jesus' teaching through parables. The parable itself, then, teaches about the nature of discipleship. In some ways it might be better called the "Parable of the soils" since the parables mainly examines the differing types of soils as images for differing responses to the Word of the Kingdom.

Note the flow of the chapter:

4:1-9 the speaking of the Parable, followed by the admonishment "Let he/she hear who has ears to hear."

4:10-11 Quotation of Is 6:9 to explain why Jesus teaches in parables

4:12-20 Explanation of the meaning of the parable to the disciples

The parable assumes normal agricultural practice in Judea. Plows and modern farming utensils were unknown. Instead of plowing the land and put the seed in the broken soil and then turning the soil over the seed as we do, the Palestinian farmer (doing all his work by hand) would throw the seed on the soil and then turn the soil over the seed—making planting a simple two-step operation.

This method saved labor, but wasted some seed.

As Jesus pointed out, as the farmer threw the seed across the soil, some landed in the wrong place. Some might land on a path where it lay on the hardened soil exposed and would be quickly eaten by birds.

Some would fall on rocky ground. A Palestinian farmer would clear his field of rocks by hand, throwing to the boundary of the field where they piled up. Seed falling here might sprout, but would have no real roots in soil and would quickly die.

Some seed would fall among weeds—however much a farmer might weed his field, there would always be weeds that grew too fast for the seed the farmer planted would choke out the good plants.

But where seed fell on the ground that the farmer had prepared for the harvest, they would take root and grow.

Questions: Put yourself in the place of a first-time hearer of this story: what questions would you want to ask? What would you wonder about Jesus’ point? What does v10-11 tell us about Jesus’ use of parables? What is the point of the quote from Isaiah 6?

The original hearers of the parable would probably wonder what Jesus is trying to say. They might ask many questions: who is the sower supposed to represent? What does the seed represent? What is Jesus trying to tell us about our lives? Obviously, we want seed in good soil—but what does that mean?

Mark tells us that Jesus spoke in parables deliberately. In some ways Jesus is putting the truth of the gospel in stories that people can understand. Parables are real life stories meant to illustrate a point. But, being stories a parable can be interpreted in more than one way—and that meaning may not be completely obvious.

Jesus’ quote of Isaiah 6:9 refers back to the call of God for Isaiah. In Isaiah 6 God sends Isaiah on a mission. He is to preach coming judgment, but as 6:9 says not many will receive the message.

Mark 4:12 suggests that Jesus’ present audience will be much like Isaiah’s—not many will accept and understand his message.

What is the point of the four soils?

The interpretation of the parable gives the disciples insight into the story’s meaning:

4:13 The “seed” of the story is the word of God. Seed and the word of God are linked together in Isaiah 55:10-11. Isaiah 55 as a chapter looms large in the background of Mark 4:

Isaiah 55:1-11 (ESV)

¹ “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich

food.

³ **Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.**

⁴ **Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.**

⁵ **Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.**

⁶ **“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;**

⁷ **let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

⁸ **For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.**

⁹ **For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

¹⁰ **“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,**

¹¹ **so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.**

In Isaiah 55 God promises real food to feed the people—and a renewal of the covenant with David and Israel. The key is for people to call upon the Lord (v6) and to repent (v7) and to understand that God’s ways are beyond their understanding (v8-9). This is the attitude Jesus is seeking in the disciples. The parables will speak to those who are willing to listen and ready to follow God—those who are in any way lazy or complacent will not take the trouble truly to understand. (See Jeremiah 4:3 for a similar thought).

The soils are interpreted as follows:

4:15 The path = those who hear the word, but Satan immediately takes away any sense of meaning

4:16-17 The rocky soil = those who hear and respond, but lack strength and perseverance. When persecution comes, they fall away.

4:18-19 The weeds= those who hear and respond, but whose fruitfulness is choked off by greed for wealth or by the concerns of every day life.

4:20 The good soil = those who hear and bear significant fruit.

Question: What is Jesus trying to say through these descriptions of the four soils?

In one sense Jesus is telling us what to avoid. The seed/Word of God will bear fruit so long as we do not let things get in the way. The path represents those who are so hard to God Satan immediately takes whatever they hear away. The rocky soil represents those who are easily discouraged through persecution. The weeds represent those whose faith is nullified because they want other things (money, safety, comfort, status) more than they want Christ.

Real and long-lasting fruit in the Christian life happens when do not let things get in the way of the Word of God in Jesus. The things that most likely undercut our faith will be suffering, fear, greed, and temptations.

To be “good soil” we need to avoid these traps. But, if we do, then the word of God will bear fruit in our lives.

Read Mark 4:21-25 (NRSV).

²¹ He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand?"

²² For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.

²³ Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

²⁴ And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you.

²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

Question: What two new images of does Jesus use in these verses? What is his point?

It is interesting to note that these verses found together in Mark and in various places in Luke and Matthew.

V21 = Matthew 5:15; Luke 8:16

V22 =Matthew 10:26; Luke 8:17

V23 =Mark 4:9 and other places

V24=Matthew 7:2; Luke 8:18

V25= Matthew 13:12; Luke 8:18

These are sayings of Jesus that probably had been memorized and kept among disciples on their own—now Mark is bring them together to make a point.

The purpose of lighting a lamp is to let it shine—not hide it. And in the second saying—if you receive something, you must give it away or lose everything.

In short, Jesus is stressing that “good soil” bears fruit—that is the one who receives the word of Jesus has to share it and show in their lives what the gospel means. You cannot be a secret or quiet disciples or else you risk losing what you have gained—becoming one of the types of soil that does not bear fruit but withers and dies.

Read Mark 4:26-29 (NRSV)

²⁶ He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground,

²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.

²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

Questions: What is Jesus trying to say about the Kingdom to the disciples in this parable?

The parable tells the story of nature: you plant seed and then the plants grow and you get a harvest. From the point of view of the farmer of that day, the whole process was a mystery. How seed turned into plants and what made the plants grow into a harvest was a mystery---it just happened.

Jesus is saying, “That’s the way the Kingdom is. God is going to a goal and destination, but how God gets there will seem a mystery to you. You just receive the harvest.”

Jesus seems to be telling the disciples to trust God to bring the Kingdom into being. Don’t be surprised if you are surprised at how things happen. We are not in charge of the process and we don’t make it happen—we just cooperate with the work of God.

Read Mark 4:30-32 (NRSV)

³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?

³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;

³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Question: What is Jesus saying here about the Kingdom?

The point of the parable is the nature of the growth—from small seed to large plant. The Kingdom will happen like that.

In other words the Kingdom will not be opposite—starting with a big bang and a huge deal. Most of God’s works start small and then grow. We should expect the same in the Christian life.

The implication is that one of the things that gets in the way of God’s work in us will be impatience. We want quick results—we want things to change completely right now. And when things don’t happen quickly, we quit.

Question: Summarize what we’ve learned from this chapter?

Jesus sees himself and his ministry as the fulfillment of Is 55—he is bringing the “Word” that will be “bread” that fills the hungry—bread with out price.

Jesus is warning us about the things that get in the way of receiving that word and bearing the fruit that God wants for us. If we are not willing to suffer and bear inconvenience, if we are tempted by easy answers or other sources of pleasure or security, we will not be ready to receive God’s word. And certainly if our hearts are hard—unwilling to hear or repent, we will miss the Kingdom.

But if we are seeking God and the word of God, that will bear fruit in our lives.

It will probably start small—but the Kingdom will grow big. We will not understand everything that happens, but we should expect this. This is God’s project and we are not in charge. But we must be ready to let the reality of the Kingdom show in our lives—we are lamps to be seen, not hidden. We are to share what we have received and not hide it.

Lesson 4

Jesus is Lord of Creation

We find the third summary statement in Mark 6:53ff:

Read Mark 6:53-56 (NRSV)

⁵³ **When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.**

⁵⁴ **When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,**

⁵⁵ **and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.**

⁵⁶ **And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.**

Note the common themes—the crowds surround Jesus, he heals all who come to him.

The section between the previous summary (3:7-12) and this summary covers a great deal of ground:

3:13-19 Appointment of the Twelve

3:20-35 Controversies with Pharisees and family

4:1-34 Parables

4:35-41 Stilling of the storm

5:1-20 Garasene exorcism

5:21-43 Healing of the woman with the flow of blood/Jairus' daughter

6:1-6 Rejection at Nazareth

6:7-13 Mission of the twelve

6:14-29 Beheading of the Baptist

6:30-44 Feeding of the 5000

6:45-52 Jesus Walks on water

The controversies and the healings and exorcisms continue the earlier themes of Jesus' ministry.

The new element in this section is Jesus' teaching and his Lordship over nature.

Questions: What new thing do we learn about Jesus when we see him calming the storm? Why is this important?

The later theme is stressed in the stilling of the storm:

Read Mark 4:35-41 (NRSV)

³⁵ On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

³⁶ And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him.

³⁷ A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped.

³⁸ But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

⁴⁰ He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"

⁴¹ And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The question the disciples ask, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" is a pointed and pertinent question. The ability to still the storms of the sea is typically attributed only to God:

The answer is God alone controls creation.

Similarly, the Psalms celebrate God's control over the seas as a sign of God's sovereignty over creation and over people:

Psalm 65:7 (NRSV)

⁷ You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

Psalm 89:8-9 (NRSV)

⁸ O LORD God of hosts, who is as mighty as you, O LORD? Your faithfulness surrounds you.

⁹ You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 107:28-29 (NRSV)

²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress;

²⁹ he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

Note that it is especially the stilling of the seas that denotes God's control over creation.

Given the rising opposition to Jesus this is important. Jesus will do three notable miracles in the next few verses: the exorcism in Gerasene, the healing of the woman with the flow of blood, and the raising of Jairus' daughter.

Each of these is a powerful story. The Gerasene demoniac is completely uncontrollable. Chains do not hold him (5:4). He lives among the tombs—in the midst of death itself (5:3) and does physical harm to himself (5:5). He is filled with many demons (5:9). This is the image of the work of Satan—a man who frightens other people with his violence and self-destruction. And Jesus casts out all the demons, sending them into a herd of swine (unclean animals) where they self-destruct. Jesus overcomes the image of the complete and total work of Satan's destruction in a word—he is completely Lord over Satan.

Then he heals a woman who had been beyond the help of medicine and caught in uncleanness through a flow of blood of years. She is ritually contaminated through illness and made an outcast. She touches Jesus and without even his conscious decision is healed. This shows his power over the sin and alienation of the world—Jesus is indeed Lord of the Sabbath and all things related to human holiness and sin.

Finally, he makes it to Jairus' house where the people believe it is too late. The girl is dead. But, Jesus raises her up—anticipating what we shall see in the final chapters of Mark that Jesus is Lord of the Resurrection and Lord over death.

We would think this would lead to universal acceptance and faith in Jesus.

But, it does not.

Instead, he is rejected in Nazareth (6:1ff). He sends out the twelve on a mission, but despite their own healing mission, they too will face rejection (6:11). The Baptist is beheaded anticipating Jesus' own arrest and execution.

Questions: What is the significance of the feeding of the 5000? What OT story does this remind you of?

Why does Jesus feed the 5000?

Mark tells us:

Mark 6:34 (NRSV)

³⁴ **As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.**

The image of the shepherd appears in several places in the OT—first in the story of Micaiah the prophet who compares Israel under the divided kingdom like this:

1 Kings 22:17 (NRSV)

¹⁷ Then Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, "These have no master; let each one go home in peace."

Then in Ezekiel the Lord tells the prophet that the people are like a sheep without a shepherd:

Ezekiel 34:8 (NRSV)

⁸ As I live, says the Lord God, because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep;

And the solution?

Ezekiel 34:11 (NRSV)

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

And he further says that "I will feed them" (34:13).

Mark tells the story like this:

Mark 6:35-44 (NRSV)

³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late;

³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat."

³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?"

³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass.

⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties.

⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.

⁴² And all ate and were filled;

⁴³ **and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.**

⁴⁴ **Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.**

John 6 clearly ties this story with the miracle of the manna under Moses. In Mark the reference to “all ate and were filled” may hint at the Moses story (see Exodus 16:18 where all get the manna they need).

But in the Marcan version the point is simply that out of compassion for the sheep the shepherd takes five loaves and two fish and makes them into a full meal for 5000 men (plus women and children) with twelve baskets left over.

Note the differences between this and the Exodus story. The manna could not be stored—any extra disappeared that day. But Jesus’ provision remains. And in the manna story, God clearly provides, Moses only asks for food. Here, Jesus initiates the miracle through his blessing.

Jesus’ miracle control over this physical need of the people exceeds the Exodus miracle—showing his greater power over nature. It is possible that the lifting up and blessing of the bread is meant to anticipate the Lord’s Supper and the meaning of the broken bread to the Christian Church (John 6 makes this more explicit), but this is not clear. Jesus’ Lordship over the food is.

Questions: What does the story of Jesus walking on the water tell us about Jesus?

Mark 6:45-52 (NRSV)

⁴⁵ **Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.**

⁴⁶ **After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.**

⁴⁷ **When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land.**

⁴⁸ **When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by.**

⁴⁹ **But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out;**

⁵⁰ **for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."**

⁵¹ **Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded,**

⁵² **for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.**

All the gospels follow the feeding of the 5000 with the story of Jesus walking on the water except Luke (Matthew 14:22-32; John 6:16-21). Some have seen this as another Exodus

reference—like the crossing of the Red Sea. But it is more likely that it is a further reference to Jesus' control over creation. Job 9 tells that God walks on the waves of the Sea.

Job 9:8 (NRSV)

⁸ who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the Sea;

And now Jesus as Lord of creation is walking on the sea waves like God.

Note how Mark treats the disciples' reaction. They do not understand either the feeding of the 5000 or the significance of the walking on the water. He even says, "Their hearts were hardened"—a term used in the OT in connection with Pharaoh's rejection of Moses.

The disciples will be uncertain witnesses to Jesus over the next chapters. Peter will recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and then immediately Jesus will call him "Satan" because Peter balks at the necessity of the cross (Mark 8:33). While they will continue to follow Jesus, they will argue about things like their status in the Kingdom and finally disappear in the crunch of the crucifixion. The disciples will struggle to find a new wine skin into which they can allow the new wine of this Messiah.

Then the section closes with the summary that we noted at the first.

In the end Jesus identifies himself with the God who will feed the sheep of Israel, who uses creation for the needs of his people. He shows ever-increasing power over the Spirit of evil through exorcism. He heals more decisively the uncleanness of people and their infirmities. The disciples even begin to participate in his healing and exorcism ministry.

But this will not mean greater acceptance. In fact the opposition to Jesus increases. Even those who follow Jesus will not find it easy to understand or accept what he is saying. They will resist the deeper implications of his Lordship, preferring a more manageable Messiahship than the one who walks on water deserves.

Mark Lesson 5

Jesus Is Lord over Death

Read Mark 8:27-38 (NRSV)

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Questions: What kind of Messiah does Jesus describe? Why did Peter reject this idea? Why does Jesus equate Peter's position with Satan?

Mark 8 27:ff pivots the story of Jesus. Now instead of summary statements about his ministry we begin to have summary statements about his death and resurrection:

8:31, "Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again."

We find similar words in Mark 9:9; 9:30; 10:33-34; 14:26-28 and in parable form in Mark 12:1-11 (The Parable of the Wicked Tenants).

Mark has been the good news about Jesus the Christ. So far Mark has seen Jesus as the baptizer in the Holy Spirit who has power over Satan and demons in his exorcism ministry, who is Lord of the Sabbath and the cleanser of lepers and forgiver of sins, and who is Lord over creation, multiplying the loaves, stilling the storms and walking on the waves.

Beginning in Chapter 8 he begins to tell the end of the story: Jesus the Christ who dies and rises again—who rules over death and life.

This part of the story begins when Jesus takes the disciples away and then asks them the question, “Who do people say I am?”

The answers vary: some identify him with the recently executed Baptist. Others believe he is Elijah (who is to come before Day of the Lord) others as merely one of the prophets.

But, Jesus asks them for their own opinion, Peter is the one who steps forward boldly and calls Jesus the Christ. At this point Jesus warns them not to reveal this to others, and goes on to warn them that as the Christ he will suffer greatly, be rejected and finally killed by the authorities.

There are not many OT passages that explicitly talk about the character and mission of the Messiah. Where we find messianic passages they tend to emphasize the Davidic linkage:

Jeremiah 23:5 (NRSV)

⁵ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Isaiah 11:1-2 (NRSV)

¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

What would most Jews think of when they think of David? They would probably think of the establishment of the kingdom of Judah.

But, Jesus takes this idea of “Kingdom” in very different direction—indicating that he will suffer and die and then rise again.

Where would Jesus get that idea? The prophet Isaiah not only has this reference to the line of David (Jesse was David’s father), but also the figure of the servant:

Isaiah 53:3-6 (NRSV)

³ **He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.**

⁴ **Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.**

⁵ **But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.**

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

This “servant” on whom God has poured the Spirit (Isaiah 42:1, see also 44:3) will suffer for the sins of the people and bring healing to their diseases through his own bruising.

Peter when he hears this wants none of it. The idea of a suffering, rejected Christ makes no sense to him.

But, Jesus’ response to Peter is telling. He calls him, “Satan.” Mark never told us how Satan tempted Jesus in chapter 1, but if Peter is being “Satan” here, we have a clue. To seek not to suffer but still triumph is satanic. The essence of human sin is to want power and control in place of God, and Jesus firmly rejects this.

Question: What does Jesus’ idea of Messiah imply for life in the Kingdom?

Jesus holds up a counter-intuitive idea of what Christ and his followers are about:

³⁴ **He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**

³⁵ **For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.**

³⁶ **For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?**

³⁷ **Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?**

For Peter the cross is antithetical to being Messiah. For Jesus the cross is the means of being the Christ. Only the one who denies himself and dies on the cross can be Messiah—only those who likewise deny themselves and follow the Christ can be his disciples.

The fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 was the attempt to save their own life with the result that they died and lost everything.

Therefore, it makes sense that if we truly want life we will only find that life if we die for Christ. It makes no sense to gain the world and then lose life itself. The truth is human beings have no way to earn their own lives for themselves—we can only truly find life by following Christ.

Jesus makes our acceptance of this gospel—the good news of the cross—absolutely fundamental for the future. If we reject this, we will be rejected in the judgment. If we accept Christ and the cross, we will find acceptance.

Jesus is the Christ because he is willing to go to the cross and die and be raised from the dead. Death came through the sin of claiming Godship. Life will now come through submission to God through death. Only the person willing to give all will save all.

Questions: What does Jesus mean when he talks in Mark 9:1 about the “Kingdom of God” coming with “power”? What does Transfiguration have to do with Jesus’ Messiahship?

The next statement has always caused some confusion among interpreters:

Mark 9:1 (NRSV)

¹ And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

What does the “Kingdom of God [coming] with power” mean? We might think Jesus is talking about some end of history event. But, the next few verses suggest something else.

Mark 9:2-13 (ESV)

² And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

³ and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.

⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

⁵ And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

⁶ For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷ And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”

⁸ And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

⁹ And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might

mean.

¹¹ And they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?”

¹² And he said to them, “Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?

¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him.”

Jesus takes Peter, James and John away for prayer on a mountain. In that prayer time they see Elijah and Moses standing with Jesus, whose clothes are transfigured into a blinding white. Blinding light and brightness is typical in visions of heaven (see Ezekiel 1, 9:2; Daniel 10:1ff). Elijah and Moses are two OT figures who had visions of God or were taken into heaven. They are also both figures both connected with the idea of Messiah. Moses is the typical prophet-King—The Messiah will be like him (see Deuteronomy 18:10). Malachi 4 anticipates that Elijah will return before the day of the Lord comes:

Malachi 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes

Picturing Jesus with these two messianic figures, glowing in heavenly glory confirms that Jesus is the Christ.

A voice comes from heaven recognizing Jesus as the “Beloved Son”—the same confirmation heard at Jesus’ baptism, except now the disciples are told, “Listen to him.”

What is interesting here is that Jesus immediately ties this back to his words in chapter 8—the disciples are to say nothing until the Son of Man is risen. And he confirms that Elijah has already come (meaning the Baptist) and has suffered as the Son of Man/Messiah will also suffer. The Transfiguration confirms that the Messiah will suffer and die and rise again.

The disciples are not sure what this mean. But Mark seems to be suggesting that the coming of the Kingdom with power and the rising of the Son of Man are linked. The cross and the resurrection will show the coming of the Kingdom in power as Jesus suggests.

Questions: What are James and John asking? What understanding of the coming Messiah and Kingdom does Jesus give them? What does it mean that the Son of Man will give his life a ransom for many?

We find the next saying about the coming suffering of the Messiah in chapter 10—and we should note what comes after our saying:

Read Mark 10:32-45 (ESV)

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,

³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?”

³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”

³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”

³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized,

⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.

⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus increases the dramatic detail of his prediction: the Son of Man will be handed over to both the priests and the Gentiles (Romans). He will be mocked, spit upon, flogged and killed and then after three days rise from the dead.

It is a shock to hear what the disciples say next. James and John ask for positions of power at Jesus’ right and left hand in the coming Kingdom. The words of “taking up your cross” have not sunk in at all. They are not thinking of self-denial, but sharing in the booty of the new Israel.

The other disciples are angry, but not because James and John have misunderstood Jesus. The disciples resent James and John for getting their request for special privilege first.

Jesus knows that James and John do not understand what they are asking for. He asks them if they are willing to accept his “baptism” and the cup he is about to drink. James and John quickly say, “Yes”—and Jesus assures them they will get what they ask for in terms of sharing his suffering, although not necessarily the positions of glory they covet.

What they do not understand is really how the new Kingdom of God is going to work. The Kingdom will come in “power” as Jesus said in Mark 9—but the way to power in this Kingdom is very different. In the regular world, power comes with status and the ability to have others serve you. In the Kingdom power comes as one serves. The more one serves, the more Kingdom power one holds.

The Son of Man is the example of this: he will give his life in order to ransom people.

The church has sometimes asked, “from what does the Son of Man ransom us and from whom?” Neither of those questions is really answered here directly. As Jesus has set people free from the power of Satan and sin in life, his cross will do the same in a full and final way.

And Christians will follow Jesus as we serve and care for others and deliver them from the power of sin and death.

Questions: Why does Jesus tell the Parable of The Tenant? What is he saying about his coming death?

The Parable of the Tenants is not a simple summary statement about the death of Jesus, but in parable form makes a similar point:

Mark 12:1-11 (ESV)

¹ And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.

⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, “They will respect my son.”

⁷ But those tenants said to one another, “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.”

⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

¹¹ this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”

The owner of the vineyard (a frequent OT metaphor for Israel, see Is 5) sends servants to collect rent from the tenants. But the tenants refuse to send the rent owed and abuse these servants. When the owner sends a “Beloved Son” the tenants kill him.

This is the ultimate “rejection” that Jesus has been talking about—and he quotes a Psalm to show that his death is a fulfillment of what God has been about all along:

Psalm 118:22 (NRSV)

²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

As the servant of Isaiah is rejected, the Son will be rejected and killed—but on that rejection God will build the Kingdom where the power of sin and death are overcome forever.

Summary:

Jesus is the Christ—he does set up a new Kingdom. But that Kingdom is built on his broken body and spilt blood. Through his death and resurrection he brings power and life to those who believe in him and follow him.

Those who receive this power do not find positions of status and power over people—but they become servants as Jesus is a servant. The power of the Kingdom is not the power of command, but the power of giving and serving.

Mark Lesson 6

Discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus

Following the bold declaration of faith by Peter in chapter 8 and the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain at the beginning of chapter 9, we then have a series of stories about the disciples—a look, if you will, into what it means to be a disciple of this Messiah. There is an integrating thread in chapters 8-10—three predictions of Jesus coming passion and resurrection (8:31; 9:31 and 10:32-34). These predictions loosely tie these chapters together. While there is a diversity of material in this section of John, we will look at the material relating to the disciples and what discipleship seems to mean.

Read Mark 9:14-29 (NRSV)

¹⁴ When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.

¹⁵ When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him.

¹⁶ He asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?"

¹⁷ Someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak;

¹⁸ and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so."

¹⁹ He answered them, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me."

²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

²² It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."

²³ Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!"

²⁶ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead."

²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

²⁸ When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it

out?"

²⁹ He said to them, "This kind can come out only through prayer."

Questions: What is the problem? What does Jesus say? What does Jesus do? What are the disciples lacking?

9:14 This happens immediately after the vision on the mountain. The implication seems to be that discipleship will not be as easy or automatic as the disciples would hope. It is one thing to know Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God—another actually to follow him.

9:17-18 A father has brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples for healing. Note the parallel to the beginning of Mark. The very first thing Jesus did in Mark was to exorcise an unclean spirit (Mark 1:21ff).

9:19 Jesus calls the disciples "Faithless generation". The disciples' inability to heal the boy signals a lack of faith. What this means is further illustrated in verse 24 when the father confesses his own limited faith.

9:20-21 A further description of the problem—this shows the nature of the demonic world. Not only does the demon bind the boy in muteness, but demeans him through seizures and seeks to kill him. This is the nature of evil—it is destructive.

9:24 The father asks for help with his lack of faith. This is an interesting touch in the story. Jesus asks for faith, the father does have faith, but he is also aware of the weakness of his faith. His response in a sense helps us to define what faith is. The father does not claim to have enough faith—but he trusts Jesus for what he does not have. The point of faith is not something we have, but the power of the person we trust. Faith is not about me, it's about Jesus. The father has "enough" faith because he is trusting Jesus for what he does not have. The disciples' lack of faith in v19 may then suggest that they were trying to do the miracle in their "faith" and not so much through a trust in Jesus. The answer to a lack of faith is not to try to summon up a feeling of faith in oneself, but to confess your weakness and to look more to Jesus.

9:25-26 Jesus rebukes the demon and it comes out

9:28-29 When the disciples ask why they could not cast out the demon, Jesus tells them that this kind requires much prayer.

The story tells us that following Jesus is not simply a matter of accepting him as Messiah and using his name as if it were magic word. Following Jesus takes faith and prayer. Faith means realizing our own lack faith—our weakness—and trusting His strength. We develop a real

relationship with Jesus through prayer (and some manuscripts add, “fasting”—probably not original, but reflects the idea that Jesus is calling us to serious prayer).

This story shows us that discipleship is not going to be simple or automatic, but will take time and a real relationship with Christ.

Read: Mark 9:30-37 (NRSV)

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;

³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,

³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

And Read: Mark 9:38-43 (NRSV)

³⁸ John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

³⁹ But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us.

⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

And Read Mark 10:13-34 (NRSV)

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them.

¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Questions: What connects all these passages together? Why does Jesus emphasize the treatment of children? What is he saying about being a disciple in the Kingdom?

These passages begin with the second prediction of Jesus' coming death, and are tied together by the words "children" or "little child" or "little ones". Note that 9:35 is almost the same as these verses from the end of chapter 10:

³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

Mark 10:43-45 (NRSV)

⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

These verses are talking about the nature of what it means to follow Christ as a disciple—and it is not what the disciples think.

9:32 tells us that the disciples do not understand Jesus words about his coming death—and are afraid to ask what it means. They do not understand why Jesus had to die—and even more they do not understand what that implies for them. And they are afraid to ask for the very good reason that they might not like the answer.

What happens next shows how much they do not know.

9:34 they are arguing about which of them is the greatest. This shows they are looking for status and preferment for themselves. Part of their attraction to Jesus was clearly selfish: if Jesus is the Messiah, they want to be at the front of the new Kingdom so that they can be important people.

9:35-37 Jesus tells them that if they want to be great they must be ready to be "last" and "servant"—and to make his point he takes a little child and says they must be like him.

Children in the culture of the day were expected to listen, to follow and to serve. To "welcome" a child would be to pay attention to and honor a child—when culture would expect just the opposite and think the child should honor the adult.

Jesus is saying that in his Kingdom the values will be quite different from the world. The world values status, power and wealth, the Kingdom values treating the weak and the least in society with honor and dignity.

9:38ff shows another difference. The disciples are wary, even jealous, of people outside their group claiming allegiance to Jesus. They think that if people are not “in” their closed community, then they ought to be punished for doing deeds in the “name of Jesus.”

Jesus however welcomes this—if for no more than the practical reason that anyone who does a miracle in his name will not soon speak against him.

These verses speak against our human tendency to divide people into those “In” and those “out”. “Us”/“them” language fails to grasp what the Kingdom is about. Jesus wants to bring people into faith.

9:41-42 set up a strong contrast between something that leads to a reward and something that leads to judgment.

9:41 suggests that God is aware of our smallest act of faith. To give a cup of cold water is no small thing if that is an act of hospitality and grace to those who believe in Jesus—any willingness to identify with Jesus will be accepted.

9:42 Alternatively, if you cause any “little one” to “stumble”, you would be better off if you had been drowned at birth. This is more than just causing another person to sin—it is the act of deliberately leading people away from God into idolatry.

The theme of “stumbling” and especially of those who should take care of others and help them to God rather than causing them to sin is well-known in the prophets:

Malachi 2:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

⁸ But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts,

⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

Jeremiah 18:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway,

“Stumbling” means more than just causing a person to sin—it means leading people away from God into idol worship. While even the least bit of help for people following Christ will be honored, it is likewise a terrible thing to cause people to go away from God.

In other words being a disciple has serious consequences—our acts of mercy and love that lead people to Christ have tremendous power to bless, and our acts of selfishness and deceit that cause people not to come to Christ are deadly!

This emphasis is carried over into the last verse of chapter 9:

Read Mark 9:43-50 (NRSV)

⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,

⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ "For everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Question: What is Jesus saying when he suggests that it is better to have one hand and live than two hands and go to hell?

A textual note: you will see that newer versions of the Bible (NRSV, ESV and so on) omit verses 44 and 46. That is because these are repetitions of verse 48. The earliest manuscripts we have do not contain these verses (though most later ones do). The easiest explanation is what scholars call ‘dittography’—that is the accidentally duplication again of a verse in a text. You can imagine that if you are copying a text and going back and forth between the old manuscript and the new it would be easy to write down twice a word or verse. This phrase is put in with every mention of “hell” or the “fire” and once in would be faithfully recopied. The NRSV or ESV text is the most likely original. Note however that with or without the phrases in v44 and 46 the text means exactly the same.

The serious nature of discipleship is doubly underlined in these verses. Jesus says that if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, then you would be better off cutting that offending member off than staying “whole” and going to hell.

Vv42-47 emphasize the seriousness of “stumbling”. Jesus uses exaggeration and repetition to make his point. He does not really want a lot of one-handed or one-eyed Christians. He is to be understood metaphorically. If what we do with our hands, or where we go with our feet or what we see with our eyes leads us into sin or rejection of Jesus, we should stay away from those things.

We must ruthlessly cut out the things in our life that tempt us. This is Paul’s point in I Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

It is wise not to expose ourselves to temptations rather than have to fight to overcome them!

The word for “hell” in Greek is “geenan” or “Gehenna”. This comes from the Hebrew for the “valley of Hinnom” which was the place outside of Jerusalem where child sacrifices were made (see Jeremiah 7:1; 19:35ff and 2 Kings 23:10). This most abhorrent of sins becomes the place of God’s complete judgment in later Jewish literature.

The phrase in v48, “Where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched” is from Isaiah 66:24—the very last verse of the prophet:

Isaiah 66:24 (ESV)

²⁴ “And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

Is 66 is not talking about going to hell, but the nature of the what it means to be separated from God and to face judgment. In Mk 9 Jesus is taking this image and applying it to the character of hell—hell is a place where the effects of our rebellion live on and gnaw at us and burn within us.

There is not a great deal of information in the NT about Hell. The apostle Paul mentions judgment, but not hell. Revelation talks about “Death and Hades” to which Jesus has the keys (Rev 1:18) and which themselves will be thrown into a “Lake of fire” in the end (Rev 20:14). “Hades” can be just the place where the souls of dead abide before the resurrection (a NT counterpart to the OT idea of “Sheol” see Rev 20:13). The rich man in the parable of Luke 6:23 is in Hades in torment while Lazarus is with Abraham far away separated by some great chasm.

Many Christians and even more non-Christians balk at an idea of God sentencing people to a place of physical torment—it sounds too much like torture. But, that is to take these images too

literally. Just as Jesus is not really encouraging Christian to cut off their hands and feet, but to take serious steps to avoid temptation, so here Jesus is graphically illustrating the effects of turning away from God. Why? Because the coming judgment will be real, and the resulting separation from God “painful” in ways that we can never imagine.

C. S. Lewis in his book, “The Great Divorce” gives an alternative vision of hell. Instead of physical torment, the people in hell are left with the dissatisfaction of chasing their old ‘gods’ and desires without ever being happy or fulfilled. Lewis imagines Napoleon in his house going over his defeats again and again and blaming his failure on his other generals, saying, “If only...” into eternity. Similarly, another person would go over and over his own self-pity or bitterness.

Lewis sees the torment of hell as perpetual regret without remorse. He sees people harboring resentment, nurturing their own sense of offense without release. The torment is entirely self-inflicted. The torment is the gnawing reality of eternal regret and resentment and the burning of ambition and pride and self-pity.

Whatever “hell” is, we can trust that God will just and not cruel. There is a real judgment and a real consequence to rejecting God that we should not under-estimate.

Read: Mark 10:17-34

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

- ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."
²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,
³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.
³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."
³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him,
³³ saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles;
³⁴ they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

The section ends with the third prediction of the coming death of Christ.

I suggest skipping the verse on the divorce controversy. I suspect they are in this place in Mark either because this happened shortly before the entry into Jerusalem, or because Mark saw Jesus' teaching on divorce as an example of the high calling of discipleship. But, there is so much to this passage that I think it would be distracting to study it in connection with the rest of the material in Mark 9-10.

Note Jesus returns to the theme of children in 9:13—

Mark 10:13-16 (ESV)

- ¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them.
¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.
¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."
¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

The person who enters the Kingdom of God is most like a child—which means that the disciple does not become a disciple because she/he is so strong or powerful or important. The disciple understands his/her lack of power and need for the care of God (like a child) that is what enables us to enter the Kingdom.

To illustrate this we see in the Rich Young Ruler one who is very much not a child.

Questions: What does the man ask? What does Jesus tell him? What is his problem? What is Jesus' point?

V13, The man asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” note he is not asking, “How do I go to heaven and live forever?” The phrase, “eternal life” is literally, “life of the age.” He is asking how can he be part of the age to come that God will inaugurate with the coming of the Kingdom. Life everlasting may be part of that and heaven, but he is asking to be part of God’s reign and God’s Kingdom.

V14f Jesus turns him back to the commandments—“Do kill” and so on, which the man claims he has followed from his youth.

V21 Jesus, because he loves the man, then tells him he lacks one thing—he must go sell all he has and give it to the poor and follow him.

V22 The man cannot do it. He is too rich to give away his money and he leaves Jesus.

V23ff Jesus says that it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. The disciples protest—they had always assumed wealth was a sign of blessing from God. Jesus responds that it is hard for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God, and for a rich person, it is like a camel going through the eye of a needle. This is an exaggeration (there have explanations suggesting that the “needle” was some sort of small gate in the walls in Jerusalem, or that “camel” really meant rope. These are not necessary—this is something impossible). The point is what Jesus says---no one can be saved without the help of God. But with God’s help everyone can be saved.

V28ff Peter says, “But we have left all and followed you”—and Jesus recognizes their sacrifice and tells them God will honor them. T

The point is that to follow Christ means sacrifices and the willingness to be persecuted. In the Kingdom of God the most important people will not be the ones that our culture values.

People have often felt uncomfortable about this story—and well we should. Is God calling all of us to give up all our money and follow Christ? That seems radical and even foolish.

But if we do not take this story at face value are we compromising the faith and making Jesus’ words more comfortable for our own selfish reasons?

The church has wrestled with this for centuries. From time to time Christians have set up communities in which the members have given up all personal wealth. These communities have often done good things for Christ, but have still had to wrestle with human greed and sin.

In one sense the rich young man is an example who does not “Cut off” the thing that tempts him—and as result he misses what says he wants “the life to come.” He is a warning that if we do not take our temptations seriously we may end up walking away from Christ as he did.

We may see this idea as a reason not to think Jesus is actually talking about us giving up our money—but we should remember that for most of us the easiest thing to trust in place of God is our possessions. Jesus is saying that unless we put him and the Kingdom first and make everything else radically second, we run the risk of missing it all.

Summary:

If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, what does that mean for us?

- 1) It means developing a real relationship with him, based on prayer and faith that knows we have no power, but Jesus does
- 2) It means taking on the attitude of a child—humble and knowing our lives depend on Jesus
- 3) It means being willing to be an obedient servant, like a child
- 4) It means that we are not the “in club”—Christ wants to invite all in
- 5) It means what we do for Christ that invites others to him will have great blessing—but if we offend or turn others away from Christ that will be a terrible tragedy
- 6) Therefore we take seriously those things that tempt us and take us (or others) away from Christ and avoid them. We will cut ourselves off from those things that damage faith.
- 7) We understand that not to follow Christ means being cut off from Christ and living in regret and bitterness.
- 7) We realize that apart from the power of God we would not be saved.

Mark Lesson 7

Jesus is Lord of the Future

Read Mark 13:1-13 (ESV)

- ¹ And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”
- ² And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”
- ³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,
- ⁴ “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”
- ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray.
- ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.
- ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.
- ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.
- ⁹ “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.
- ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.
- ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.
- ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.
- ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Questions: What does Jesus say about the temple? What do the disciples ask?

13:1-3 The disciples marvel over the beauty of the temple—and ancient authorities agree that this temple, built by Herod the Great was one of the architectural marvels of the world. The “Wailing Wall” seen today Jerusalem is really the foundation stones of the Herodian temple.

Nevertheless, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. This happened earlier in the judgment against Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonians. The idea of judgment and the destruction of the temple were linked together in Jeremiah 7:14 when the Lord promised to do to the temple of Jerusalem what he did to the altar in Shiloh (which was probably destroyed in 722 BC with the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom). Note that Jesus quoted Jeremiah 7:11 “This house which is to be house of prayer for all nation, you have made a den of thieves” when he cleansed the temple—indicating he was already anticipating the destruction of the temple.

In fact the temple would be completely destroyed as a part of the Roman repression of the rebellion in Judea in 70 AD.

Peter, James, John and Andrew then take Jesus aside for private explanation (as they did in Mark 4:34). They want to know when these things will happen and what signs will be visible before hand.

Question: What signs and timing does Jesus give them?

Jesus begins with things that will not be signs:

13:6 People coming in Jesus name or saying, “I am he.” Jesus knew that some would try to prophet off the anticipation of the last days and try to get attention or power through claiming falsely either to be Jesus or know something secret about the last days.

13:7-9 Wars, rumors of wars, famine and earthquakes. In other words there will be terrible times when people suffering. The temptation will be to think that disasters or war will lead up to the last days—but that is not necessarily so. There will be terrible times in history and great suffering—but that will not tell you anything about the day of judgment.

13:9-11 There will be terrible persecution for the disciples. They will take the gospel all around the world, and they will be hated for it, brought before judges and governors for their faith. The Holy Spirit will be with them to witness through them through this all.

Jesus is telling the disciples not to think that their own suffering means the last days are just around the corner. They will be persecuted but God has a plan to witness to them even as they are persecuted.

Read Mark 13:14-23 (ESV)

¹⁴ **“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.**

¹⁵ **Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out,**

¹⁶ **and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.**

¹⁷ **And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days!**

¹⁸ Pray that it may not happen in winter.

¹⁹ For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.

²⁰ And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.

²¹ And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.

²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

What is the “abomination of desolation”? Why is this important? What is Jesus promising?

Jesus is referring back to another prophecy of the destruction of the temple from the book of Daniel:

Daniel 9:24-27 (ESV)

²⁴ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

And again in chapter 11

Daniel 11:31 (ESV)

³¹ Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

And 12

Daniel 12:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.

These prophecies refer first to the work of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC who conquered Jerusalem, looted the temple and forced the cessation of sacrifices. Antiochus erected an idol of Zeus in the temple and sacrificed pigs on the altar—both desecrations of the highest order.

But the temple was not completely destroyed. Jesus saw this new and final fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel as about to come.

Jesus tells the disciples that they will know it is here when the temple is desecrated again—and it will be sudden and terrible time. For the sake of the “Elect” God will not allow all to die. Note, however, that even this sign is not the sign of Christ’s coming again. There will be more false Messiahs even at this time—but the fall of the temple will not be the end.

Who are the elect?

This is a new word, not used in the gospel before Jesus apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13/Matthew 24). Paul uses the word to mean “Christian” (cf Romans 8:33; 11:7; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1) and it is found also in 1 Peter 1:1 and 2 Jn 1, 13. For the sake of Christians not all in Judea will die in the Roman attack, but it will be a horrible time.

Read Mark 13:24-37 (ESV)

²⁴ “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.

²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

³⁰ Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge,

each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—

³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Question: What does Jesus say is still to happen?

13:24 After this tribulation (fall of Jerusalem) sun will darken and moon will not give light (solar/lunar eclipses)

This is standard language for the coming “Day of the Lord” in the OT, cf

Isaiah 13:9-10 (ESV)

⁹ Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it.

¹⁰ For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.

See also Is 24:23; Ez 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 5:20; 8:9; Zeph 1:15.

In other words the fall of the temple will not be the real “Day of the Lord”—that is yet to come as God promised.

13:25 Stars will fall from heaven—heaven will be shaken (also in Isaiah 14:12; 34: 4)

13:26 Son of Man will come in the clouds with great power and glory

This is the heart of Jesus vision—and it straight from Daniel 7:

Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus will be the Son of Man who comes on clouds (which are signs of divinity and heavenly power) to the earth. The “Day of The Lord” will be the coming of the Son of Man to the earth to judge the earth and make things right

13:27 Angels will gather elect

The motif of gathering the scattered people of God is also an OT theme:

Deuteronomy 30:4 (NRSV)

⁴ Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back.

Isaiah 11:12 (NRSV)

¹² He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

See also: Isaiah 43:5; Jeremiah 23:3; 31:8; Ez 11:17 and others

Jesus draws together the expectation of the coming of the Son of Man and the regathering of the people of God—except now the “elect” are his disciples and not just the people of Israel.

Question: What lessons is Jesus trying to convey to the disciples?

13:28 The lesson of the fig tree—to pay attention to the signs and be ready

13:30-31 That his words are true, “This generation” will not pass away before the fulfillment of these things

13:32 That no one knows when these things will happen

13:33f Therefore, be on guard and keep ready

What does Jesus mean when he says, “This generation will not pass away”.

The most likely explanation is that he is talking about the disciples’ first question about the destruction of the temple—that will happen in their lifetime. The “all these things” might seem to include the coming of the Son of Man and the Day of the Lord. But it doesn’t have to—he could be referring just to his statements on the temple.

Less likely, “this generation” may not refer just to the disciples, but to Christians who will go all over the world sharing the gospel and endure persecution until everyone has heard. This would use the word “generation” not to refer to a specific group of people living now, but to a type of

people (Christians). This, however, is not the first meaning of the word, which is why the first explanation is preferred.

How does this tie in with the idea of the “Rapture”?

The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds and the gathering of the elect are both first and foremost fulfilment of OT ideas about the Day of the Lord. The reference to clouds is not a reference to a rapture, but to the heavenly/divine nature of the Son of Man. And the gathering of the elect is not in the air, but from all over the world. Mark 13 just doesn’t talk about taking Christians out of the world. Rather, after a time of persecution and tribulation God gathers the people of God together and establishes the Kingdom of God.

Ideas about a rapture typically come from a passage in I Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 (NIV)

¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Paul speaks a little further about this in 2 Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (NIV)

¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers,

² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

Note that the “coming” of Jesus is part of “our being gathered to him” and “the day of the Lord.” This sounds very much like Jesus’ language in Mark 13. Note that Paul here is responding to a concern about people who have died before the coming of the Lord—will they be left out at the Day of the Lord? Paul says, “No”—that the coming of the Lord will be the start of the final resurrection. The dead in Christ will rise and will join those still alive with Jesus.

It is not quite clear what it means that they will “meet the Lord in the air.” Paul does not say where they go after the meeting because the main point is that from then on they will be with the Lord forever.

In 2 Thessalonians Paul is battling a false idea that somehow this has already happened (perhaps that the resurrection of Jesus was the Day of the Lord). Paul goes on to point out that there must be a time of rebellion and lawlessness under a “man of lawlessness” who sets himself up in the temple and deludes those who want his kind of power. This again corresponds to Jesus’ concern for false prophets and messiahs in Mark 13 and the fulfillment of the prophecies from Daniel.

The idea of a “rapture” of the church before a time of tribulation and judgment on the world is very popular in our country. But, there are some significant problems with the concept.

- 1) Mark 13 and the book of Revelation emphasize the need for Christians to be faithful to God in the midst of persecution and turbulent times. The idea that Christians will somehow miss out on these difficulties is not suggested in either book. 2 Thessalonians say the same—the coming of the Lord happens after the time of the “lawless one”—who sounds very much like the “anti-Christ” of Revelation.
- 2) The background of Mark 13 is firmly rooted in OT concepts from Daniel and the prophets and the idea of the Day of The Lord. The “Day of the Lord” is the time when God judges the wicked and establishes the rule of God and restores the people of God. The “gathering” of the people is not a rapture into heaven, but a establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The verb translated “caught up” in I Thessalonians 4:17 is the strongest indication of something like a rapture. The word is used in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 to describe Paul’s journey into heaven (Paul himself is not sure if it was something that happened physically or not). Elsewhere the verb translated “snatched (John 10:29)” and used to talk about the entry of robbers to a house. It’s an odd word—which makes it hard to know exactly what Paul is saying here.

What we can say is that Jesus and Paul both expect a second coming of the Son of Man/Messiah/Lord (who is the resurrected Jesus) and at that time the people of God will be gathered together, the judgment of God finished and the kingdom of God brought into full being.

The word for Christians in the meantime is to be ready for this time, to expect that in the meantime we will face opposition and persecution, and that we will be tempted to follow false messiahs and prophets.

The words of Jesus remain applicable to us:

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

Lesson 8

Jesus is Lord of Life

The gospel in the end moves inexorably toward the death of Jesus.

Read Mark 14:1-11 (NRSV)

¹ It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him;

² for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?"

⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.

⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.

⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.

⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Questions: Why do the chief priests and scribes want to kill Jesus? What is their fear? How does this relate to the anointing at Bethany and the decision of Judas to betray Jesus?

In chapters 11-12 the conflict of between Jesus and the authorities reaches a new height—he has cleansed the temple and condemned the leaders through his teachings. He has announced the coming destruction of the temple. All of this makes him a threat to the leadership. However, his popularity is such that they want to find a reasonable way to have him killed without taking blame themselves. Jerusalem is full of pilgrims and a powder keg. They do not want to incite a riot that the Romans would put down.

But, his death (as he foretold) is coming. He is anointed in Bethany by a woman in Simon the leper's house—in preparation for his burial (Mark 14:16).

This anointing is significant on many levels. The priest (Exodus 28:41) and the King (I Samuel 16; Ps 45:7) were anointed for their office. The anointing of a holy place for the forgiveness of sins was part of the Danielic prophecy:

Daniel 9:24-27 (ESV)

²⁴ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

²⁵ Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time.

²⁶ And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

²⁷ And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

And Isaiah looked for a new anointed one:

Isaiah 61:1-2 (ESV)

¹ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Mark sees this anointing by this woman as not only preparation for Jesus' burial, but his anointing as “Christ” who will be “anointed one” who puts an end to sin.

Mark tells us that some of the disciples are offended by the waste of money in this anointing. But it is Judas who makes plans with the priests to betray him (Mark 14:10-11). The Gospel of John tells us bluntly that Judas was a thief and motivated by money to betray Jesus (John 12:4-6).

So, now we have Jesus, anointed as Christ and ready for his death. A betrayer is at hand to help the priests find a way to have him arrested quietly. The stage is set:

Then Jesus sits down for a Last Supper with his disciples:

Mark 14:22-25 (NRSV)

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Jesus body is about to become the broken bread of the covenant—his blood the cup. The symbols of the Passover meal are taken over and applied to the death of Jesus. His blood is now a "covenant for many"—the Son of Man will give his life to ransom a new people of God. As the blood of the Passover lamb protected Israel from the angel of Death and led to their liberation from slavery to Egypt, the death of Christ will protect and liberate people.

Jesus is Lord over death and the grave—but his Lordship comes because he is the servant willing to give his life for others. He takes on suffering and rejection that those who are rejected and bruised in life might be healed and saved.

The Denial of Peter predicted

Read Mark 14:26-31 (ESV)

²⁶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not."

³⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

³¹ But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

Questions: What is Jesus prediction for the disciples? Why is this important?

After the supper and Judas' departure to betray Jesus, Jesus predicts that all the disciples will fail him that night.

In one sense this is a fulfillment of OT prophecy:

Zechariah 13:7 (ESV)

⁷ “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones.

The NT sees that it is important that Christ suffer alone. As the servant of Is 53, he alone suffers for the sins of the people.

Isaiah 53:1-6 (ESV)

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

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

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Read Mark 14:55-65 (ESV)

⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.

⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.

⁵⁷ And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying,

⁵⁸ “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”

⁵⁹ Yet even about this their testimony did not agree.

⁶⁰ And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?”

⁶¹ But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”

⁶² And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

⁶³ And the high priest tore his garments and said, “What further witnesses do we need?

⁶⁴ You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death.

⁶⁵ And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” And the guards received him with blows.

Questions: What are the charges against Jesus? Why is he finally condemned?

14:58 sounds like a corruption of Jesus’ teaching that the temple would fall (Mark 13:1-3). In John 2:19 we find words very close to these in Jesus’ mouth. And we hear an echo of these words in Paul:

2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

It is likely that the witness have either misunderstood or twisted Jesus’ teachings on the coming fall of the temple.

However, there is not enough agreement among the witnesses to secure conviction on the charge that Jesus was blaspheming against the temple.

Instead the high priests asks him, “Are you the Christ.”

Jesus affirms that he is, but he goes further in the next phrase, “You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

He claims to fulfill the prophecy of Daniel 7—

Daniel 7:13-14 (NRSV)

¹³ As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

¹⁴ To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

The “Power” is a euphemism for God—Jesus is claiming to be the heavenly agent of God come to earth. This is blasphemy for the High Priest and seals Jesus’ fate.

At this point the priests hand Jesus over to Pilate—and accuse him of being a messianic pretender, claiming to be “King of the Jews” (15:2). Pilate tries to arrange Jesus’ freedom, but the

crowds call for his crucifixion (these are probably not the same people who welcomed Jesus in on Palm Sunday, but followers of the temple leaders).

Jesus is then scourged and led out for crucifixion.

Read Mark 15:25-27 (NRSV)

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.

²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:29-47 (NRSV)

²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,

³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!"

³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself.

³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah."

³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Questions: How do Jesus enemies taunt him on the cross? What does Jesus say? What is the final word about Jesus as he dies?

Pilate puts a sign on the cross, "The King of the Jews"—letting people know that anyone who tries to overthrow Rome will face a similar death. Crucifixion was a penalty normally given only to traitors and murderers—the lowest of the low. It was especially Rome's favorite way to deal with those who sought to overthrow Rome.

The crowd taunts Jesus with his “inability to save himself.”
But Jesus quotes from Psalm 22—

Psalm 22:1 (NRSV)

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

This is called the Psalm of the righteous sufferer. If you read the entire Psalm it sounds like an incredible description of the crucifixion.

Psalm 22:7 (NRSV)

⁷ All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

Psalm 22:12-18 (NRSV)

¹² Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³ they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled;

¹⁷ I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;

¹⁸ they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

And the Psalm ends with the promise that God delivers those who trust him:

Psalm 22:29 (NRSV)

²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

In these words are a hint of the resurrection.

Read Mark 16

Note that there is a short and a longer version of this chapter. The shorter version simply narrates the empty tomb and the explanation of an angelic messenger:

Mark 16:1-8 (NRSV)

¹ When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.

² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"

⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.

⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."

⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. [And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]

The longer version goes on to narrate appearances to disciples and includes a commissioning of the disciples and the ascension.

Mark 16:9-20 (NRSV)

⁹ [Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

¹⁰ She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping.

¹¹ But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

¹² After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.

¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.

¹⁴ Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

¹⁶ The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be

condemned.

¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues;

¹⁸ they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

²⁰ And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it.]

We have many thousands of copies of the NT, some as old as 120 AD. Compare this to other works of the ancient world (like Caesar's Gallic Wars) and you will see that the copies we have of the NT are both much older (by several hundreds of years) and much more numerous.

Copying the Greek manuscript was typically done one of two ways—either the scribe writing a new manuscript as he read an older one, or a group of scribes writing down words as they heard them dictated aloud in a room. Either way it was easy for minor variations to creep into the copies.

Most variations are inconsequential. Think of the difference between these two phrases:

“This is our book”

“This is your book”

The difference is only one letter—and it really doesn't affect meaning much. The vast majority of the differences between manuscripts fall into this kind of category. And, since we have so many copies of the NT, scholars can often compare one to the other and come up with a pretty good idea of which reading was original and how it was changed.

The end of Mark is a little different. The shorter reading seems too short. It is surprising that we do not actually see Jesus, though the fact of the resurrection is pretty clear.

The longer version is fine—but if this were the original reading, how did the shorter version come about? Was the last page of the gospel somehow lost and these verses cut out?

Some scholars think that the original ending of Mark is lost, and the longer ending is an attempt to fill in what was lost.

But we don't really know.

But even the shorter version, while not quite what we expect, makes the main point: the tomb is empty. Jesus has risen just as he said he would. As Ps 22 said, the righteous one of the Lord has been given life. Jesus is both the one suffered for others (Is 52) and is now raised as the justified Son of God. There is no need to anoint his body—the earlier anointing at Bethany had done the job. This is the Christ, the Holy One of God and the one who gives his life as ransom for many (10:45).

Jesus is Lord, not simply of Israel as King of the Jews, but Lord of all.