

THE GOSPEL OF MARK: PART 1 **DISCIPLESHIP GUIDE**



**AMAZED** BY **JESUS**

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# AMAZED BY JESUS INTRO

## THE GOSPEL OF MARK PART 1: THE POWER OF JESUS

The gap between knowledge *about* Jesus and *knowing* Jesus personally, as if He has embraced you and sat you down at His table to serve you a warm meal, is as wide as the gap between East and West. The Gospel of Mark was written to bridge that gap.

As Mark takes us right to the dirt paths Jesus traversed throughout His ministry, he does so as if he has a camera right alongside him. You can almost picture him dumbfoundedly pointing the cameraman to focus in on the moment Jesus' fingers briefly settle on the blind beggar's eyelids to heal his life-long disability. Mark wants us to perceive that, in a moment such as this, God Himself has physically invaded a dark spot in the universe and put it to flight with His glorious power.

The first part of our exploration of the Gospel of Mark will reveal this amazing power in multifaceted ways as we look at Jesus' earthly ministry. And after a year like 2020, we need the power of God more than ever, for it is the power of God in the Person of Jesus that heals the worst wounds and the most devastated souls. It is the power of God in the Person of Jesus that moves our emotional world from fear and sorrow to confidence and delight. It is the power of God in the Person of Jesus that satisfies all curiosity, while provoking even more amazement.

God's response to a year, or even a *life* of illness, turmoil, disaster, and death, is not easier circumstances; God's response is instead an offering of Himself and His power for our good. As God gives Himself and His power to us, we are transformed in such a way that circumstances alone - even the most dire circumstances - simply won't have the power to sway our hearts into hopelessness.

Join us in being amazed by Jesus and His redemptive, healing power.

In Christ,  
Your Pastors

## ART EXPLANATION

The art for Amazed by Jesus: The Power of Jesus is blunt, yet vivid, to visually mirror the grammar and narrative style of Mark. Throughout Mark, the emotion of both observers and Jesus Himself is recorded (see 1:27; 2:12; 7:34; 9:5). This communicates that those who encounter Jesus don't just learn from Him or learn about Him, they're *amazed* by Him. The colors here represent the swirling emotions surrounding the power of Jesus - some are amazed, some perplexed, some afraid - but when Jesus physically touches a man desperate for healing, his internal and external reality are clarified. As Jesus manifests His power in a redemptive way, the glory of God is put on display, even in the midst of darkness. The dark background is a visual nod to the reality of the sin-marred world that Jesus entered.

The focal point of the art is the intimate scene of Jesus healing a blind man. The blind man desperately grips Jesus, and Jesus gently touches the man's broken eyes in an act of gracious restoration. Although this scene occurs later in Mark (one healing happens in chapter 8 and one in chapter 10) it demonstrates the power of Jesus.

This central scene is wrapped in white for several reasons:

- Jesus brings purifying, cleansing renewal simply by His touch.
- Jesus and darkness cannot co-exist; wherever Jesus is, light is. The blindness is a representation of both physical forces of darkness and spiritual darkness (unbelief and sin) - both are conquered by the touch and command of the Messiah.
- Jesus brings clarifying amazement by His power. Many people who have encountered Jesus testify about a "weight" being lifted; in other words, the emotional and mental turmoil that used to so dominate them is removed by their Savior's power.

# A BRIEF THEOLOGY OF THE GOSPELS

What's the difference between the *gospel* and the *Gospels*?

The gospel is the good news of what God has done in Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension to redeem His people for His own glory.<sup>1</sup>

The Gospels are the four books that begin the New Testament - Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John. These four books are "historical narrative motivated by theological concerns"<sup>2</sup> and "stories of God's eschatological, redemptive, covenant-fulfilling activity through the person of Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>3</sup>

What does this mean? ***The four Gospels are historically-true, authoritative, and infallible narratives about Jesus the Messiah and how He is the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan.*** The Gospels are what G.K. Beale calls redemptive history, which he defines as "God's salvific dealings with his people throughout the entire history, from the fall of Adam until the final consummation."<sup>4</sup> We may not be told about Jesus's eye color or His childhood interactions with friends, but we are told and shown how He fulfills and even continues the story of the Old Testament, and how He will bring history to completion at His return.

The four documents we now call Gospels weren't designated as such until after the Second Century. But the earliest disciples of Jesus were anticipating written documents because the Jewish community already had a precedent for such documents: the entire Old Testament. Since the disciples were intimately familiar with covenantal documents, they were expecting new documents to come with the New Covenant. Not only this, but Jesus Himself tells of this reality in John 17:

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."*

From the beginning, Christianity was going to continue in the tradition of Judaism as it advanced through "the word" of Jesus' disciples. We have that "word" recorded in the Gospels.

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, The Gospel Coalition ([www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org))

<sup>2</sup> Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Kruger, *Covenant Theology: Covenant in the Gospels*

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*

# BACKGROUND ON THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Biblical scholar Michael Kruger writes this about the Gospels:

*"The covenantal nature of these books means they are not so much human testimony about God as they are God's testimony to humans about the terms of his covenant through Jesus. God is the maker of divine covenants and therefore rightly understood to be the author of covenant documents. [...] The Gospels are authoritative [...] because the Gospels are, from their very inception, a legal and divine witness."<sup>5</sup>*

The Gospel of Mark, then, is about one thing: Jesus. This is not a narrative about social revolution, moral instruction, or religious experiences; this is a proclamation about Jesus the Son of God, written to provoke faith in Him. With this in mind, below is some basic information about the Gospel of Mark.

- This is the only Gospel that explicitly refers to itself as a proclamation of *good news* or *glad tidings*
- The first verse of Mark would have been immediately recognized by anyone familiar with Roman government as a direct rebuttal to the claim that the Caesar was divine. One inscription about Caesar Augustus says this: "Caesar, by his appearance excelled our expectations and surpassed all previous benefactors [...] the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning for the world of the good news that came by reason of him."
  - When Mark writes that his document is the good news about Jesus **Christ** (Messiah), he is immediately connecting the identity and actions of Jesus with the entire Old Testament story.
  - When Mark writes that his document is the good news about Jesus Christ, the **Son of God**, he is not only communicating truth, he is refuting the dominant cultural and political narrative of his day.
    - This makes the ending of Mark even more astounding because a centurion, who would have been required to have total devotion to Rome, announces the actual truth at the death of Jesus: "Truly *this man* was the Son of God!"
- Mark is the earliest written Gospel, having been written some time in the late 50's to early 60's AD (roughly 20-30 years after Jesus ascended)
- The Roman emperor Nero began his rule around the same time as the Mark was written; Nero would (in AD 64) begin heavily persecuting Christians - clothing them in animal skins so they'd be devoured, crucifying them, and lighting them on fire in his royal gardens

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<sup>5</sup> Kruger, *Covenant Theology*

- Most likely written from Rome by the man called John Mark in Acts 12:25 and “my son” in 1 Peter 5:13
- Mark orders events by topic, not chronologically
- Numerous scholars believe that the Apostle Peter’s experiences with Jesus form the background of the Gospel of Mark
  - This makes the Gospel’s appear even more historically accurate since the Apostle Peter would hardly want to make himself and his fellow disciples seem so ignorant about Jesus and His true mission, unless that is actually what happened

Four key verses:

- Mark 1:1 - “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”
  - Mark 1:11 - “And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”
  - Mark 8:29 - “And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.””
  - Mark 15:39 - “And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!””
- Mark begins his Gospel identifying Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. Throughout the Gospel, Mark shows how these two titles of Jesus are intimately linked to His death and resurrection.

# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER GUIDE

## WEEK 11

### LORD OF THE SABBATH

MARK 2:23 - 3:6

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Mark has given us a crystal clear picture of Jesus' authority in his Gospel so far, describing how Jesus utilized the Sabbath to show who He is and what He came to accomplish. Here Jesus and His disciples are challenged by the Pharisees, who verbally charge them with violating the Sabbath's prohibition of work. Jesus responds with a passage of Scripture which proves human needs like hunger may be met on the Sabbath (1 Sam. 21:1-6) and then He asserts His lordship over the Sabbath. Again, as in earlier passages, Jesus doesn't simply assert His authority, He proves it by healing a man's withered hand in the middle of a synagogue on the Sabbath. The passage is charged with emotion as Jesus is personally grieved by the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts, and the Pharisees begin formally plotting the murder of the Messiah.

#### GROUP INTRO

Take some time to discuss your fasting or feasting. What is encouraging, beneficial, or beautiful so far? What is challenging?

*(Goals for fasting: to sharpen our affections for God, repentance, humility, devotion in worship, and seeking the Spirit's guidance.*

*Goals for feasting: to celebrate God's grace, rest in the good news, form God-centered joy, and thanksgiving.)*

#### TEXT

1. Take some time to help your group get familiar with the Sabbath by reading the following Old Testament passages:

Genesis 2:1-3

Exodus 20:8-11

What information do the passages give us that can help us understand the words of both the Pharisees and Jesus?

*(Leader help: in those OT passages we see that God Himself invented and instituted the Sabbath; therefore, when Jesus claims to be lord of the Sabbath, He is claiming to be God Himself. The passages also help us understand the intensity of the Pharisees' reactions - their traditions about how much someone can do on the Sabbath probably did come from a desire to honor God and the Sabbath; their mistake is in treating Jesus as merely a man)*

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2. How does Jesus' response in 2:25-26 connect to the challenge from the Pharisees in 2:24?

*(Leader help: Jesus is essentially pointing out that the strict traditions of the Pharisees have made obedience to the Sabbath more confusing and burdensome than God intended; in other words, God set up the Sabbath to benefit humanity, not to make it impossible to do something like meet a basic human need; there is no instance of God specifically forbidding plucking grain on the Sabbath)*

3. In 3:1-5 what do we learn about the character of Jesus? In what ways is the true Jesus seen here different from a secular version of Jesus?

*(Leader help: in this passage we see the gracious and righteous character of Jesus; He is intimately and passionately concerned about loving those around Him, and is righteously angry at the lack of love and resistance to God that He sees in the Pharisees. In this passage we see Jesus is authoritative, emotionally invested in the lives of people, and capable of profound anger toward those who resist the obvious work of God. We also see that Jesus is willing to have conflict with those who oppose Him)*

4. Why does Jesus decide to heal the man with the withered hand in a synagogue on the Sabbath?

*(Leader help: Jesus proves that He is lord of the Sabbath through this very public action; the synagogue would have been packed with worshipers on the Sabbath - by openly challenging the religious leaders of His time in such a public setting Jesus is asserting His authority and revealing the gracious character of God by literally doing good on the Sabbath, thus showing what the Sabbath was all about in the first place: giving grace to human beings)*

## **APPLICATION**

1. What religious "fences" or "boundaries" do we in the modern church put up around God's Word?

*(Leader help: pay attention to any answers that might reveal someone's practical legalism (like prohibiting going to the movies or having a beer) or antinomianism (which means "against Law" - not caring about living in righteousness and holiness)*

2. How can we respond in a gospel-centered way to our own hearts or fellow Christians when we see evidence of mercilessness, lack of grace, or unwillingness to sacrificially love others?

3. We see in this passage one way to reject Jesus: through a commitment to human tradition and rules rather than a commitment to Him and His Word. Write down other ways we reject Jesus, and ways we can fight against rejecting Jesus.

## **PRAYER**

Thank God for His gracious, loving character.

Confess and repent for the ways you have rejected or mistrusted Jesus.

Pray that our Community Groups and gospel preaching churches throughout Nevada would embrace and joyfully submit to Jesus, and represent Him and His love through acts of mercy.

Ask the Spirit to be quick to remove hardness of heart from Living Stones Church members and leaders.

## WEEK 12

### SENT OUT

#### MARK 3:7-19

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

After engaging in numerous conflicts in Galilee, Jesus will now appoint the twelve disciples through whom He will carry forward His mission.

After another powerful moment of ministry, Jesus again withdraws to the sea. We are given a summary statement about Jesus' ministry (verses 7-12), and we learn that crowds from all kinds of regions are flocking to the Lord, which anticipates the coming global commission Jesus gives to His disciples after His resurrection (see Matt. 28). And though demons try to control Jesus by naming Him, they remain powerless to stop or resist the Son of God.

Twelve (a significant number due to God's choosing of the twelve tribes of Israel) disciples are called then named *apostles* (which means "sent ones") and given authority for two crucial tasks: to preach and cast out demons. In another nod to biblical history, this calling occurs on a mountain (God often revealed Himself on mountains throughout Scripture). The kingdom of God that has come in Jesus will now be extended through mere men, whose only claim to any kind of authority is in the fact that they're *with* Jesus, and He graciously empowers them to witness for the kingdom and overthrow the devil's strongholds.

#### GROUP INTRO

Take some time to reflect on the Gospel of Mark so far by writing down the top 5 impactful truths you've discovered about Jesus through Mark.

#### TEXT

1. What is the significance of the regions that Mark mentions in 3:7-8?

*(Leader help: some of these regions were both far away from Jesus' hometown and largely non-Jewish, which shows that Jesus was probably known as someone who would welcome you regardless of where you come from, and that His miracles can be taken as historical fact since He was known by people so far away, and was believed to be powerful enough to cause people to make dangerous, far journeys just to touch Him)*

2. Why does Jesus strictly order demons to "not make him known"?

*(Leader help: it is thought that demons believed they could control Jesus' revealing of Himself if they made Him known according to their own timeline - Jesus is asserting His control over His ministry and the revelation of Himself; Jesus being totally in control of who receives a revelation of Himself is present throughout the New Testament, and is important for understanding how someone becomes a Christian)*

3. Jesus calls twelve disciples. What is the significance of the number twelve? Where else in Scripture does this number show up?

*(Leader help: the most obvious parallel is the 12 tribes of Israel; by choosing 12, Jesus is showing that He is going to create a new people of God that is established, again, by God's sovereign choice)*

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4. What do we know about the twelve disciples from other portions of Scripture? What are the privileges and tasks of the twelve disciples?

*(Leader help: one example is Peter - though Peter is a prominent leader, it has nothing to do with anything within Peter, for he is later seen to be a coward and someone who constantly needs correction; their privileges are being with Jesus and being sent by Him, and their tasks include preaching and casting out demons)*

### **APPLICATION**

1. Jesus appoints disciples, in part, so that they "might be with him and he might send them out". What priorities, disciplines, and habits do you have that fuel being with Jesus? What needs to change in your life for you to prioritize Jesus and His mission?
2. The power of Jesus can be attractive, but it is the person of Jesus that makes Him worthy of devotion. Aside from powerful acts of Jesus that you've experienced, what amazes you about Him? What aspects of His character and presence are you drawn to most?
3. If we are honest with ourselves, we fail to put Jesus first, make known His power and grace, and can use time and money for selfish purposes rather than Jesus' mission. What are some gospel-centered ways we can help one another prioritize Jesus and His mission?

### **PRAYER**

Praise Jesus for the fact that He chooses those whom He wants, and He joyfully spends time with them.

Thank God for the grace He displays in choosing sinners to join Him in restoring the world.

Confess to God the ways you have failed to prioritize Him and His mission, and ask the Spirit for strength to put God first in all areas of your life.

## WEEK 13

### THE SPIRIT AND THE SON

#### MARK 3:20-35

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

This section of Mark is an example of an intercalation, or “sandwiching” technique that’s used by Mark throughout his Gospel<sup>6</sup>:

A - Jesus’ own family thinks He is crazy and comes to get Him (3:20-21)

B - The religious leaders, representatives of His own people, reject Him (3:22-30)

A - Jesus’ family arrives; He defines true spiritual relationships (3:31-35)

When Jesus is rejected by His own blood relatives it’s a mirror image of His rejection by Israel, so Mark puts the rejection of the religious leaders in-between narratives about His family. The reality is that Jesus has taught who He is and shown who He is - to believe He is either insane or possessed is to seriously misunderstand Him. But this really is the only set of options available to all people: either Jesus really is God and really did come to save sinners through His life, death, and resurrection or He is out of His mind.

Jesus teaches two key doctrinal truths in this passage:

1. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

*(Leader help: blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could be summed up as “decisively rejecting clear Spirit-revealed truth about Jesus by attributing His mighty work to Satan.”*

*This essay helps clarify: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-unpardonable-sin/>)*

2. Being a member of Jesus’ true family has nothing to do with blood relation but instead *repentance & faith* (coming to Jesus and trusting Him) and *obedience* (doing the will of God).

#### GROUP INTRO

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the most solid proof that Jesus was not a crazy man. With this in mind, pray this prayer over your group:

*God, please show me the proof that Jesus’ offering of Himself is accepted,  
that the claims of justice are satisfied,  
that the devil’s scepter is broken,  
that the devil’s wrongful throne is destroyed.  
Give me the assurance that in Christ I died,  
in Him I rose,  
in His life I live,  
in His victory I triumph,  
in His ascension I shall be glorified. Amen.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> From Mark Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, pg. 176.

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from *Resurrection in Valley of Vision*, a Puritan prayer book.

## TEXT

1. Take some time to summarize this passage. What are the three events presented here and how are they related?

*(Leader help: see "Passage Summary" above)*

2. What people and groups are involved in this passage? How are these people or groups presented in the rest of Scripture?

3. What is the point Jesus is making in 3:23-27? Why does Jesus see the need to make this point?

*(Leader help: Jesus is saying that it's illogical to think He's using demonic power to cast out demons and conquer the kingdom of Satan because that would be evidence of demons and Satan working against their own kingdom)*

4. What does it mean to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? Why is this unforgivable?

*(Leader help: see "Passage Summary" above - note that this is a doctrine often misunderstood, and it may be helpful to go deeper on this question than you normally would in order to help your group take both assurance of salvation and living in holiness seriously)*

## APPLICATION

1. We believe that Scripture clearly teaches that a person is made a member of God's family by faith alone in Jesus alone. How can we reconcile this truth with the fact that Jesus declares this: "Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother"?
2. What assurances do we have that in coming to Jesus we will be forgiven of all of our sins? Where else in Scripture does God guarantee this?
3. How would you help an unbeliever understand the true identity and actions of Jesus if they believe He was just a good teacher, crazy man, or legend?

## PRAYER

Confess and repent for times you have resisted Jesus or the work of the Spirit.

Praise God for His forgiveness of your sins.

Pray for the salvation of specific unbelievers in your life.

Thank Jesus for making you a part of His family through faith.

## WEEK 14

### THE SOWER AND THE SEED

#### MARK 4:1-20

#### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Already in Mark we have seen the habitat of unbelief within which Jesus did His teaching and miracles, but in the last section of chapter 3 we saw blatant opposition to Jesus along with the beginning of a plot to kill Him. As Mark unfolds the purpose and identity of Jesus, he hones in on some of Jesus' parables, including this week's parable that is commonly known as the Parable of the Sower.

In this parable, Jesus tells of 4 reactions to the word of God by comparing the word to a seed that is sown in 4 different contexts. Jesus teaches that there are various reactions to His proclamation of the word of God, and those reactions produce various results, but God oversees all of the "sowing" and will ultimately produce a "harvest" when the kingdom is, one day, gloriously consummated by God Himself.

Jesus' followers ask Him for clarification and He states what is actually happening: those who receive and understand what Jesus sows through Himself and His teaching are those who have been *given* - as pure, gracious gift - the "secret" (*mystērion* in Greek, meaning the revelation from God that the kingdom has come in Jesus).

Here Jesus draws a line by quoting from Isaiah 6:9-10: the people who are a part of the unbelieving, even hostile crowds ("those outside") - who are persistent in their unbelief - have the truth of the kingdom of God hidden from them as they continue to disbelieve, while those who have faith in Jesus are given the "secret of the kingdom of God." In other words, those who receive, understand, and believe the revelation of God in the person of Jesus are the recipients of God's grace; they are those whom God has freely chosen to be in His family.

#### GROUP INTRO

This week's text is about the mystery of the gospel being revealed by Jesus to God's people. Take some time to pray together for God to give clarity about the beauty, grace, and power of Jesus. Below are some prayer prompts from various passages about the mystery of the gospel being revealed in Jesus.

Pray that your group would have their hearts encouraged, knit together in love, and reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Jesus.

Thank God for revealing His plan of redemption to you through the person and actions of Jesus.

Ask God to help you be a good steward of the gospel, and to save specific people in your life.

#### TEXT

1. Take some time to observe this passage. What words are repeated? What action words are used? What visuals does Jesus use?

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2. Write out the four seed scenarios from verses 4-9 and the interpretation Jesus gives in verses 14-20 - where is the seed sown, what happens to the seed, and why?

3. What is the "secret of the kingdom of God"? Where else is this kind of "secret"/"mystery" language used in Scripture?

*(Leader help: the "secret" is God's revelation of Himself through Jesus. Elsewhere in the Bible Paul describes the gospel message about Jesus as a mystery that God had veiled until the arrival of Jesus - see Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; Col. 2:2)*

4. What happened in Mark 3:20-30? How does this connect to what Jesus says in Mark 4:11-12? In other words, why does Jesus say He is decided to teach in parables?

*(Leader help: see "Passage Summary" - Jesus has just seen the manifestation of unbelief in Chapter 3. Jesus is essentially stating that He teaches in parables so that those who are already hardened unbelievers are excluded from further revelation of God due to their resistance to the revelation of God they've already seen and rejected in Jesus)*

5. What characteristics of God are revealed in this passage?

*(Leader help: we see God's gracious character (He "gives" the secret of the kingdom of God), God's sovereignty (God decides where revelation of Himself is given, and how it's received), and God's mercy (God reveals Himself so that sinners can be forgiven)*

### APPLICATION

1. What is your emotional response to the fact that Jesus' message about Himself can be purposefully veiled by Him for those who reject Him? What might your response reveal about your view of people and your view of God?
2. How would you know if you're someone who has "been given the secret of the kingdom of God?"
3. Look again at verses 14-20. Where do you see yourself? Where do you see your loved ones who don't believe the gospel?
4. How can we help one another continue to "hear the word and accept it and bear fruit" (v. 20) in the midst of difficulties, suffering, or temptation?

### PRAYER

Thank God for His gracious revelation of Himself and the gospel.

Ask God to help you be, become, or remain someone who hears the word, accepts it, and bears fruit.

Pray for those in your life who have rejected Jesus, asking God to show them mercy and grace and save them.

### PASSAGE SUMMARY

Mark now gives us another set of Jesus' parables which focus on the kingdom of God. Despite the small, nearly-invisible, and seemingly insignificant start of the kingdom, there is a set day when Jesus will return and the kingdom of God will be established fully and completely on earth as it is in heaven. Those who receive Jesus and His teaching in faith will not only be blessed with continuing revelation and joy in Jesus now, but will be welcomed into God's glorious kingdom in the future. In essence, the kingdom of God will grow: (1) Slowly, (2) By God's initiative and power, (3) Through receptive disciples and ordinary means of grace, (5) Until Judgment Day.

### GROUP INTRO

Discuss what would look different in your city if everyone submitted to Jesus as Lord, and God had removed all sin, evil, and pain. Then take time to pray for God's kingdom to come in specific ways, and for His will to be done in your group, the church, and Northern Nevada.

### TEXT

1. In verses 21-25 Jesus refers to Himself as a lamp (see 2 Sam. 22:29 where God is called a lamp), and teaches that He has not come to be hidden forever, for there will come a day when He and His kingdom will be "made manifest" (or "obviously revealed"). He then makes the point that those who take Him and His words seriously by acting on them will be given more and more truths about and experiences of the kingdom ("with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.") What are some examples of people receiving Jesus' words and acting on them in Mark's Gospel so far? What is significant about these specific people being highlighted as those who took Jesus seriously?

*(Leader help: Simon and Andrew in Mark 1:18; the leper in Mark 1:40; the paralytic and his friends in Mark 2; Levi in Mark 2:14. The fact that those who took Jesus seriously were those who probably had little formal education and were social outcasts shows that knowing and trusting Jesus is not a matter of social status, achievement, or merit)*

2. Jesus is the greatest preacher of all time, and yet His illustrations are often very simple. Why does Jesus continue to teach using examples from farming and gardening? What does this reveal to us about Jesus?

*(Leader help: Jesus wants to make Himself clearly known to those who humbly receive Him for who He is, so His lessons are intentionally down-to-earth and easily accessible. This reveals Jesus' meekness and desire to share Himself with those who don't deserve it, which is a tangible expression of His grace.)*

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3. How is Jesus like the man in the parable He teaches in verses 26-29?

*(Leader help: Jesus is scattering seed through His teaching and miracles, and ultimately through His atoning death, triumphant resurrection, and ascension to the throne - what Jesus did has continued to grow and spread all over the world through the work and presence of the Holy Spirit as the Church proclaims the gospel and makes disciples. This growth will continue until "the harvest", or the Day of Judgment prophesied about throughout the Bible [see Joel 3:13])*

4. What is the meaning of the parable Jesus tells in 30-32? What evidence do we have that the parable is true?

*(Leader help: Jesus started with 12 ordinary men in the midst of a region that was hostile to Him and His gospel, and in this way, the kingdom started very small. Yet in 2021, we know that many people all over the world have believed the gospel and given their entire lives to working for and submitting to the kingdom of God, and in this way, the kingdom has grown up and become very large, even during periods of intense persecution, hostility, and apathy)*

5. What makes the kingship of Jesus so different from worldly or satanic kingdoms?

*(Leader help: Jesus is a King who gives His life for His enemies; Jesus is a King who takes on the role of a slave; Jesus is a King who shares Himself and His treasure with His people)*

### **APPLICATION**

1. Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom of God won't grow through human effort or worldly ways. How have you seen the Christian church try to grow the kingdom through human effort or worldly ways? How have you been tempted to make the kingdom grow apart from God's power and grace?

*(Leader help: you may want to discuss human efforts such as political power, giving into cultural pressure to abandon Biblical morality in an attempt to make Christianity "cool", or trying to grow churches by avoiding hard Bible passages/truths)*

2. When someone takes Jesus and His words seriously, how do they live? When someone doesn't believe Jesus or take His words to heart, what does their life look like? What Scriptures support your answer?

3. What ordinary means of grace has God used in your life to help you through difficult times?

4. How does Scripture instruct Christians to join God in His mission to grow the kingdom? For help, look together at Acts 2:42-47.

*(Leader help: this may be a good time to challenge your group in some of the following areas:*

- 1. Prayer*
- 2. Gospel-centered teaching*
- 3. Prioritizing worship gatherings*
- 4. Generosity/giving)*

### **PRAYER**

Thank God that "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13)

Ask God to give you a patient, trusting heart as you walk with Him day after day

Pray that God would bring the light of Jesus into specific areas of darkness in the lives of your loved ones, neighbors, or coworkers