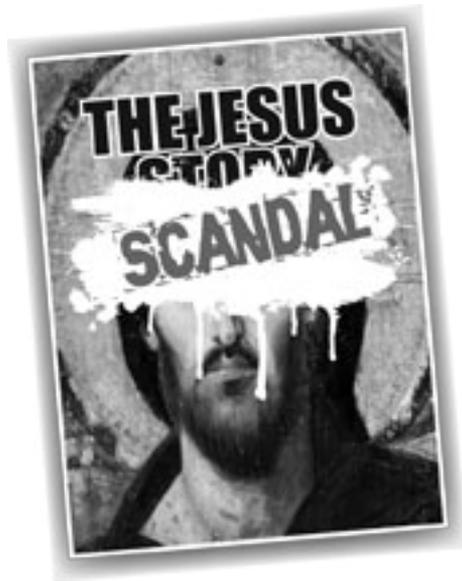


A Study Guide for the Gospel of Mark



The Jesus Scandal

A Study on the Book of Mark

INTRODUCTION

The Jesus Scandal

This September our church is taking a journey through the gospel of Mark. Written in the middle of the first century, just 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, it paints a scandalous picture of Jesus.

As we read through Mark we will discover it is an intricately woven narrative. The predominant themes include the question of Jesus' identity, frequent healings, what it means to follow Jesus as a disciple, and the conflict between Jesus and the reigning power structures of his day. In all of this the picture of Jesus that emerges is a man who is truly mysterious, revolutionary and compelling.

Jesus' identity is given to the reader in 1:1. He is "the Christ, the Son of God." Yet as the narrative begins to gain pace we come to see that not everyone knows this truth. Jesus refers to himself frequently as the Son of Man. This begins in 2:10 and continues even in the presence of the chief priests, elders, and scribes in 15:62. This title was messianic stemming from the book of Enoch and the Book of Daniel. Yet it was a cryptic allusion and surely unique to hear someone refer to

themselves that way. However beginning at his baptism and then in the following exorcisms, Jesus is frequently given titles such as "Beloved Son" (1:11; 9:7), "Holy one of God" (1:25), "Son of God" (3:11) and "Son of David" (11:47). There is a middle point in the book where Jesus actually asks his disciples for their thoughts on his identity. Peter's confession "You are the Christ" (8:29) forms the first climax to this theme. But there is a final climax just before the crucifixion in the council meeting when they ask Jesus "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, 'I am'" (14:61-62). The final person to testify to Jesus' identity is the centurion who witnesses his execution and exclaims "Truly this man was the Son of God." (15:39).

Mark structures the beginning of his story in many ways around the Sea of Galilee. Frequently in the first part of the gospel before Jesus enters Jerusalem we are told that Jesus is on a boat (4:36, 8:10-13) or walking by the sea (5:21, 6:46-47,53). By the sea Mark tells us there are generally great crowds that Jesus is teaching and calling to become his disciples. In

connection with the crowds and the discipleship teaching there are also many physical healings and exorcisms. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand (3:5), frees a man from demons (5:13) heals a woman from bleeding (5:34) resurrects a dead girl, casts a demon out of a little girl (7:31) heals a deaf man with a speech impediment (7:35) heals a blind man (8:26) casts a demon out of a boy (9:25), and restores Bartimaeus' sight (10:52). Each powerful healing is unique and yet contains similarities with the others. Interestingly enough the first two compassionate healings are of an unclean leper who Jesus sends to the temple (1:44) and of a paralytic on whom Jesus explicitly bestows forgiveness of sin (2:5). These help us recognize that physical healings also had a deep spiritual component of wholeness, even forgiveness, involved in them as well. Jesus is not just flexing his muscles he is demonstrating his identity as God's agent of restoration.

The healings and exorcisms are also done as part of Jesus' discipleship plan. Early on he calls twelve disciples to follow him and to join with him in his ministry. They witness the compassionate healings and listen intently as Jesus teaches them about the kingdom of God using parables and stories. By including these blocks of teaching Mark shows that Jesus did more than heal. He also taught. Finally a prominent theme which Mark uses to portray Jesus is his powerful demonstrations of authority over the created order.

Twice Mark tells us about Jesus miraculously multiplying food for thousands of hungry people to eat. In addition to this, Mark also tells of Jesus calming a storm and walking on the raging sea. This power, in word and deed, puts fear into his disciples ("they were afraid" 4:41, 5:15, & 16:8) and raises the suspicions of the people in power.

Jesus did astounding things and this often got him into conflict with the elders, Pharisees, scribes and teachers of the law. The conflict begins in chapter 2 when people are scandalized by his promise of forgiveness to the paralytic. It continues with concern over Jesus' practices of Sabbath keeping and fasting. It progresses so far that by the middle of chapter three we read "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him how to destroy him" (3:6). The conflict continues as the leaders accuse him of casting out demons by the prince of demons and finally by using one of Jesus' own disciples against him. The culmination of the conflict comes at the council meeting and in the crucifixion. Even on the cross they make fun of him.

In fact, another theme you will see emerge in the book of Mark, mainly in the second half, is the theme of the cross. After Peter's confession, that he is the Christ, Jesus teaches frequently that he will be killed and on the third day rise again (8:31, 34; 9:12, 31; 10:33-34).

Mark's gospel keeps this focus til the end where the themes of conflict and Jesus' identity as King of the Jews and Son of God are welded together on the cross. His final demonstration of power over the created order is his resurrection. His resurrection scandalizes his disciples and it leaves them as afraid as when he walked on water. Both the walking on the water

and the empty tomb lead us to ask "What kind of man is this?" Who else have we seen in the pages of the Bible who provides miraculous bread in the wilderness, who commands the waters to obey his voice and who holds the power of life and death. That is the real scandal of Mark's gospel. You have to read it to believe it.

Week 1

“Behold you are present, and you deliver us from all wretched errors, and you put us on your way, and you console us, and you say to us, *“Run forward! I will bear you up, and I will bring you to the end, and there also will I bear you up!”*

Saint Augustine

An Explosion

Like an explosion upon the ancient world, this short 16 chapter document turned the Roman Empire and the Jewish faith upside down. Like a manifesto that started a revolution, this scandalous document has been provoking a response for almost 2,000 years. And though we find ourselves today hearing it in a different tongue and in a different context it is still as powerful as it ever was.

What is it? It is the Gospel According to Mark. At first glance it appears to be a rough, fast-paced, relatively sparse narrative about Jesus' life. But upon closer investigation it turns out to be a masterful narrative with many subtle and powerful themes.

We should pay attention to the fact that we are not holding in our hands a set of rules or a dictionary of theological terms. When God wanted to reveal himself to us he did it by coming to live a remarkable life and then inspiring others to tell and retell the story. The Gospel According to Mark is a story. A true story. A powerful story. It is not a bullet pointed list of facts or a set of numbered theorems or proofs. It is a story about a man who said and did things that no one had ever seen before, because he was more than a man.

Mark: The Power of Story



In her book, *Story Juice: How Ideas Spread and Brands Grow*, Lisa Johnson and Julie Fuoti write, “Stories shift our thinking from what is true to what is truly possible. They innovate. They paint a picture of a finish line that we can cross together, and they inspire us to see how we

can participate in the narrative.” Their research has shown that the human brain is hard-wired to respond to stories. It is part of the way God made us. And so we should not be surprised when God uses a story to reveal himself to us.

It is one thing to make the claim that God is merciful and powerful. It is another thing to tell the story of Bartimaeus who sat begging blindly on the road to Jericho and

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who was healed just by the spoken words of Jesus.

Mark was inspired by the Holy Spirit to record the amazing life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He was writing theology to be sure but it was theology encased in a story. He knew what he was doing. He was telling a true story about one of history's most compelling and influential figures. And his work has stood the test of time.

There is no doubt who the main character is in Mark's story. It is Jesus Christ the Son of God. But the real question is where do we fit in? Which person in this story are you most like? Are you like one of the people in his hometown who thought Jesus was out of his mind? Are you like the wealthy young executive who had high hopes of following Jesus but ended up not following through? Are you like one of the twelve close to all the action, familiar with Jesus words and yet clueless about the cross? Are you like Bartimaeus, struggling to make it, constantly ignored by others but singled out and healed by Jesus?

If the truth be told there is a little bit of each one of us to be found in each one of them. These people who Jesus taught and helped and touched and lived with were real people like us. They had real questions and real difficulties and real pain. And Jesus

came to share in that pain and to enter into their stories. Or rather, to bring them into his story.

And this, in the end, is the goal of Mark's gospel. It is to bring us all into God's great story. It is the story of a good creation gone haywire; of a lost people who cannot save themselves; and of a secret rescue mission and a secret messiah who gets killed for admitting who he really is...God in the flesh. Yes God wanted us in his story so intensely that he took on flesh and walked among us.

And just as those women were amazed and too afraid to speak at the empty tomb, so are we. We may go to church or even serve in the church. But if we are honest with ourselves we would admit that we are just like those women. We are scared. We do not have all the answers. And we are often silent when we should speak. But the good news is that eventually this great story so changed and transformed their hearts that their fear was turned to joy. Then they opened their lips and told person after person after person. And one of those people they told about the empty tomb was Mark. And now Mark has turned around and told you.

Your story has now been caught up in God's story. He is putting you on his way. And we know that in the end death will lose and there will be a resurrection.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. As you listened to Mark in its entirety what specific incident jumped out and grabbed you the most?
2. What did you hear Jesus say that was particularly meaningful for you and why?
3. What person in the story could you most easily relate to and why?
4. Why do you think Mark ended his story the way he did?

Week 2

“The marker of those who understand the gospel of Jesus Christ is that, when they stumble and fall, when they screw up, they run to God and not from him, because they clearly understand that their acceptance before God is not predicated upon their behavior but on the righteous life of Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death.”

Matt Chandler

The Unlikely Rescue

The gospel is the good news of God’s unlikely rescue of lost humanity.

It was July 2013 and five-year-old Jocelyn Rojas was playing in her front yard in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, when she vanished. Authorities believe she was abducted by a man who lured her by offering ice cream. The story did not end tragically though. In fact, Two teenage boys are being hailed as heroes after they chased the car carrying the kidnapped girl -- on their bicycles.

For two hours, neighbors and police scoured the area and asked if anyone had seen her.

About a half-mile away, Temar Boggs, 15, and his friend spotted Jocelyn in a sedan. But the driver was elusive. The two teens chased the alleged kidnapper on their bikes for 15 heart-pounding minutes. The driver apparently knew he was being followed and gave up.

“He stopped at the end of the hill and let her out, and she ran to me and said that she needed her mom,” Temar said.

Jocelyn’s relatives and neighbors took turns hugging Temar. “He’s our hero. There is just no words to say,” Jocelyn’s grandmother Tracey Clay said.

Just like Jocelyn had been taken, humanity had also been taken. We had been taken away from a close relationship with God by our sin and rebellion.

We were lost.

And yet God decided to come and rescue us and he did it in the most unlikely way. He did it through a man named Jesus who turned out to be way more than a man. He turned out to be God in the flesh. And He is the true hero of this book.

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Mark 1:1



Mark was one of the earliest followers of Jesus and he wanted to ensure that we knew the details of God's unlikely rescue plan, so he wrote it down. Like a good author he tells us in this first verse the main point of his book. His main point is the gospel. And what is the gospel about? It is not about rule-following, or trying hard. No, it is about a person, and his name is Jesus.

Jesus Christ, the promised one, the chosen one, the Son of God, the Messiah. He is the centerpiece of the good news. He is the main actor in this whole drama. He is the one on whom the spotlight falls. And when he comes on the scene he creates quite a stir. In fact, the word Mark uses is "Scandal".

In chapter 6 he tells us, "they scoffed, 'He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us.'" They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him." The Greek

word behind "deeply offended" is skandalizo and it means just that, to be scandalized.

It is scandalous to think that God would care enough to take on flesh and come walk among us. It is scandalous to think that God would suffer and die like a criminal on a cross. And yet that is exactly what happened.

This is the heartbeat of Mark's scandalous story. God is radically more gracious with us than we could have ever imagined. Just when we thought all hope was lost here he comes riding on a bike as it were, ready to take us back and save us. He does this by laying his life down on the cross and by coming back from the grave three days later. Mark is not ashamed to tell this story. For as Paul says in Romans 1:16

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

Believe that Jesus is the Promised One. Believe that he is the Son of God. Believe that he is God in the flesh. Because he has come to rescue us and it is good news.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. How has Jesus shaped your thoughts and beliefs about God?
2. How has Jesus shaped your feelings with regard to God?
3. How has Jesus shaped your desires?
4. What changes in your thoughts, beliefs, feelings and desires do you want to occur so that Jesus becomes a greater source of joy and goodness in you?

Week 3

“The Gospel reveals to us how willing God is to save.”

J.D. Greear¹

Mark 1:1-13



Gospel is one of those words that we throw around so often that we are in danger of forgetting what it actually means. The word ‘gospel’ simply means good news. The book of Mark is not mainly a history lesson or a collection of moral advice but is first and foremost the announcement of good news. But in order for news to be good, it has to be spoken into a bad situation.

Pretty much everyone agrees that there is something deeply wrong with the world. People have wildly divergent ideas on what exactly is wrong and how to fix it, but I’ve yet to hear anyone say “I think the world is fine just the way that it is.” The news gives us a fresh reminder every day of the scope and severity of the problem. Wars, genocide, natural disasters, poverty and financial ruin, corruption and injustice, are brought to our attention so regularly and so relentlessly that we become numb to it until it hits too close to home to ignore. On a personal level we experience our own never-ending stream of bad news. We are let down and betrayed by the people that we care about and trust,

we are treated harshly, unjustly, or indifferently by our neighbors, coworkers, and the people in power over us, we get sick or injured, we have sleepless nights and sleep-deprived days, we battle loneliness, despair, anger, and anxiety. We long for the world to be different, to be better, but nothing that we try seems to put a dent in the problem. We trade out jobs, friends, spouses, cars, homes, towns, and hobbies, but the joy brought by the new is fleeting and soon the old frustrations and pains return. In spite of all of our planning, spending, sweating, and worrying, we can’t seem to fix what is broken.

The good news speaks directly to this untenable and seemingly unfixable situation. The good news is that God sees how broken the world is, even better and more clearly than we do, and he is not indifferent to our plight. The good news is he has a plan for fixing things, for rescuing us from the brokenness and bringing about a perfect restoration of everything that has gone askew. And he has not just assigned this restoration project to a mere man, someone merely really smart, charismatic, and capable. No, someone even greater than a great man like John the Baptist is

¹J.D. Greear, *Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Pub, 2011), p. 174

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on the job. The good news is that God the Father has sent his dearly loved Son, Jesus, who brings him great joy, to rescue us.

Whatever your current state, whatever pain and brokenness is currently raging around you, you don't need more advice, more instruction on how to try to pull yourself up by your bootstraps, or more guilt trips to get you to try harder so that God will like you. You need the good news that God has already seen your situation and acted on your behalf to fix the brokenness through his beloved Son Jesus.

The good news has some hard news in

it, though. John the Baptist called people to confess their sins. You see, part of the good news is that we aren't mere victims in the brokenness around us. We are contributors to the problem. We all are not just victims of sins, but we also commit them. We are co-conspirators in the great cosmic rebellion against the Creator of the Universe. The good news does not end with our rebellion, as God has a plan to conquer it once and for all through Jesus, but it does start with the hard news that we need to own our contributions to the brokenness around us.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Jesus is called the Son of God by four beings in Mark: by Mark himself in 1:1, by God in 1:11 and 9:7, by demons in 3:11 and 5:7, and by a Roman soldier at the cross (15:39). How is Mark trying to shape you through this?
2. In Mark the road (the way) of God is the way of Jesus to the cross. What emotions do you feel about Jesus' intentional journey to the cross?
3. Do you desire to, in some way, imitate Jesus' journey to the cross? How?
4. What are some characteristics of people who please God with a lifestyle of repentance?
5. What objections do people you know have about being a follower of Jesus?
6. If you were one of the Jerusalem folk, what battles would you have to overcome in order to travel to the Jordan to be baptized for forgiveness of sin?
7. What changes need to occur for you to think and feel about Jesus as God the Father thinks and feels about Jesus?
8. In what ways are you in the wilderness?
9. If you were in the wilderness being tempted by Satan for forty days, what would be the temptations Satan would place before you?

Week 4

*“...because we were dead in our trespasses (Eph. 2:5)
...The next move had to be his.”*

Tullian Tchividjian¹

Under a Curse

What's the worst pain that you have ever experienced? What is the sickest that you have ever been? One of the more obviously broken parts of our world are all of the different ways someone can get injured or sick. None of us make it through life without getting some ailment. Diseases and infections, sprains and tears, breaks and bruises, surgeries and physical therapy, cancers and syndromes, birth defects and injuries that you never bounce back from. Some of us suffer every day from things beyond the ability of our doctors and nutritionists to cure or even slow down. We have all been touched by illness, even those of us who have never had to go to the hospital. We all know what it is like to suffer from illness on some level.

When I was a new believer I was a part of a church that often shared prayer requests at the end of the Sunday gathering. Our congregation had a large number of elderly people, and they often asked for people to pray for the different ailments, illnesses, and surgeries that were a regular part of their advanced years. To be honest, I got tired of how often their prayers focused on their physical circumstances. “Why don't they ask for prayer for something spiritual?” I would wonder.

Then I went on a mission trip to Venezuela with some other people from my church. I stayed healthy while I was in Venezuela, but I caught something at the tail end of my trip and got very sick on the way home. I think I left my stomach somewhere over Kansas. In the middle of the plane ride I started throwing up, and I couldn't stop. I was more ill and felt worse than I ever had in my life. It continued on for a whole day. At one point I was in a bathroom in the Salt Lake City airport, wrapped around a toilet, having lost count at how many times I had thrown up somewhere in the thirties, feeling miserable and I thought “I am never making fun of anyone for asking for healing ever again.”

We are prone to falling into the frame of mind that says that spiritual things are important and physical things are unimportant. This is due in part to the large influence that Greek philosophy has on our Western mindset. The Greeks believed in a strict separation of the physical world from the spiritual world where

¹Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), p84

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the spiritual was good and the physical was evil or irrelevant. This is not what the Bible teaches, though. The Bible teaches that the physical world was created by God and he called it good. It was put under a curse because of our rebellion, so it is now broken and causes pain and death, but he intends to restore all of creation to the way it was originally intended to work, not just our spiritual souls.

Mark 1:14-45



As Jesus began his earthly ministry, he preached the good news to repent and believe, he called people to follow him, and he healed the sick and the demonically oppressed. He was “moved to compassion” by those that were physically afflicted and miraculously healed them (Mark 1:41). This demonstrated not only his power over creation as God but his merciful and compassionate heart towards us and our

broken condition, both spiritually and physically. He came to bring healing and restoration to every part of creation. It is comforting to know that Jesus cares about our physical circumstances, too, and that part of the good news about him is that he is both willing and able to heal sickness now and he is in the process of working towards restoring every single nook and cranny in creation to perfect peace, so that it will work exactly the way it was created to work.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. If Jesus would have chosen you to be one of his inner circle of followers, what temptations would you have faced?
2. What challenges would you face if Jesus asked you to live missionally in ways you do not want? In ways that provoke feelings of fear, anxiety and insecurity?
3. Amazement at Jesus without faith in him probably reflects a huge desire to remain in control. What do we gain by surrendering control to Jesus? What do we lose?
4. If Simon and his companions sinned when they said to Jesus “Everyone is looking for You,” what was their sin? How are you like Simon and his companions?
5. What’s it like to be abnormal? What battles have you faced over fear of being a social leper?
6. Meditate on the leper’s statement, “If you will, you can make me clean.” (Mk. 1:40)

Week 5

“We modern people think of miracles as the suspension of the natural order, but Jesus meant them to be the restoration of the natural order. The Bible tells us that God did not originally make the world to have disease, hunger, and death in it. Jesus has come to redeem where it is wrong and heal the world where it is broken. His miracles are not just proofs that he has power but also wonderful foretastes of what he is going to do with that power. Jesus’ miracles are not just a challenge to our minds, but a promise to our hearts, that the world we all want is coming.”

Timothy Keller, The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism

What is a need?

Back in 2011, Netflix raised their prices and it was met with harsh criticism across the Internet. People were outraged. Many felt that their rights were being infringed upon. Has the ability to stream movies anytime and anywhere been elevated to a need? Do we really need movies?

Not long ago, Verizon’s service went down here in the Willamette Valley (Oregon) and it was down for hours (to many, it seemed like days). Again, the Internet was flooded with complaints, rants and demands. It was as if the public was being denied oxygen and/or water. What does the word “need” mean anymore? How are we to define it today if culturally the need for cell coverage and streaming video is no different then say, the need for a heart transplant? Do we even know what the word means anymore?

Mark 2:1-12



Mark is the master of time gaps. In his account of Jesus’ life and ministry, he skips wholesale from Jesus’ ministry “out in desolate places” and returns to Capernaum, which is likely his base for ministry throughout Galilee. He left the town while the crowds

were hunting for him, wanting to see more miracles. He knew that he needed to be elsewhere (see Mark 1:38).

When he returns, it is without fanfare or announcement. Nonetheless, the word gets out, and people crowd into and around the house where he is staying and teaching. No one can get through the crowds to be near him.

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Four very determined individuals bring their paralyzed friend for Jesus to heal. Very determined, indeed. When they can't get near, they start tearing up the roof so they can lower their friend to where Jesus can reach him. They have no idea what is going to happen next.

Is Jesus startled? Is he taken aback by the sound of the tiles being torn up, and the feeling of dust and pieces of the ceiling falling on his head? Maybe. Whatever his reaction, Jesus' first words to the man are, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Not, "Rise, get up and walk." And then the show really begins.

Some scribes, experts in the law, are in the room. To them, Jesus' words are explosions of blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins! Who does this man think he is?

Jesus, showing a supernatural ability to read people, knows they are fuming over this. He addresses them directly,

posing a question for which there is no need to answer. It is, of course, infinitely easier to heal the body than to forgive sin. At least, it is unless Jesus is in fact the Son of Man, divine, God. And if that is true, then the scribes are in real trouble. Instead, they are simply confounded. They cannot understand. Jesus doesn't fit into their theology.

And then, Jesus does what the man and his friends were hoping he would: he heals the man of his paralysis. He has pronounced forgiveness, and now he heals a broken body. His divinity as the Son of Man gives him the authority to forgive sin, and the power to heal bodies.

Notice, though, the response of the rest of the people in this account: "...they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

In this one event, Jesus wins the hearts of many followers. He also alienates a handful of deadly enemies.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Do you have four friends who would go this far for you? Who would defy convention, throw caution to the winds, and do whatever it takes for your benefit?
2. Are you that kind of friend to someone? Do you wish you were?
3. What does Jesus' response to the paralytic in forgiving his sins reveal about the man's true need?
4. Does your understanding of your needs go deep enough?
5. How is Jesus the answer?

Week 6

“Let us, in heaven’s name, drag out the divine drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set it on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction. If the pious are the first to be shocked, so much worse for the pious—others will pass into the kingdom of heaven before them. If all men are offended because of Christ, let them be offended.”

Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Dogma is the Drama”, *Creed or Chaos*

A Story from Everyday Life

When I was in high school, a friend of mine dated a girl who had a reputation. He took a lot of heat for it. Guys ribbed him about her past, assuming that she was being true to her presumed nature and that he was having a good time. “Good” people warned him that he was ruining his life by being associated with her.

Yes, she did have a past. It wasn’t pretty, either. But that wasn’t why my friend spent time with her. He genuinely cared about her. He wanted her to see herself as Jesus saw her. What other people thought simply wasn’t important.

Mark 2:13-3:12



Mark continues to bounce us through short, no-frills accounts of events in Jesus’ life. Four of the five vignettes in this section can be summed up in one word: scandal. In each, Jesus does something that offends the religious leaders of the day.

First (Mk 2:13-17), we see Jesus calling Levi from his occupation of collecting taxes from the Jewish people. Here is one of their own, but in cahoots with the Romans, taking money from their pockets. And Jesus even goes so far as to sit down to dinner with Levi,

along with “many tax collectors and sinners.” The religious establishment is scandalized by this. But Jesus knows why he came, and he is going to reach those who need him the most.

The next offense (Mk 2:18-22) comes as the Jews are observing one of their regular fasts. These events were an essential part of the rhythm of their relationship to God, and were not open to question. But the disciples of Jesus aren’t fasting. Why aren’t these men and women following the Law? As he often does, Jesus turns the whole issue around.

When the bridegroom is with you, he says, you don’t fast—you party! And you don’t force the new into the old. You don’t

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use new cloth to mend old garments. You put the new wine into fresh wineskins that can carry it. And you don't try to force Jesus into the old ways and forms of religion.

Many of Jesus' confrontations with the religious establishment were over the latter's penchant for taking God's Law and weighing it down with rules and requirements, interpretations and more rules. And few subjects were as touchy as the Sabbath. The commandments were clear; the Sabbath was a day of rest, and no work was to be done on it. The sticking point came on the definition of "work."

Here (Mk 2:23-28), the Pharisees are offended because Jesus' disciples are plucking the heads of grain and eating them. Not only does this look a lot like work to the nit-picking Pharisees, it also looks like outright thievery. Jesus reminds them of a well-known act taken by King David, and uses that to declare the true relationship of the Sabbath to God's people. The Sabbath, he says, was made for man—not the other way around. And while he's at it, because Jesus is the Son of Man, he

is the lord of the Sabbath. He is in control, not some hoary set of rules.

The last of these four vignettes (Mk 3:1-12) combines the issue of the Sabbath with Jesus' authority to heal. A man with a useless hand comes to Jesus, who uses the occasion to address the proper understanding of the Sabbath. Is it better to obey a long list of rules and regulations, or is it better to do good when the opportunity presents itself (even on the Sabbath)? The religious establishment does not respond. Perhaps they know there is no answer that will not show them as the callous legalists they are.

Jesus is angry. He is mad. He heals the man's hand, and in that act makes more enemies, while at the same others believe in him.

The scandalous Jesus isn't a problem for the crowds that follow him. Even as he attempts to find some quiet space, they press in on him until he has to make plans to escape the crush. And he continues to heal, to restore, and to make people whole. His authority commands even evil spirits.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Have you ever done anything scandalous in your life? How did the people around you react? How did they treat you?
2. Have you ever been falsely accused of something scandalous? How did you feel? How did you react?
3. Do you think Jesus would choose to dine with you? Why, or why not?
4. What would you ask Jesus if you had the chance to sit down with him and share a meal?
5. Are you ever embarrassed by Jesus? Do you sometimes find him too scandalous to associate with? Why?

Week 7

“If we realize that Christ was organizing a genuine ‘company’ many points immediately become clear. Herein is the significance of the cryptic ‘Follow me.’ He was not advising people to go to church, or even to attend the synagogue; He was, instead, asking for recruits in a company of danger. He was asking not primarily for belief, but for commitment with consequent involvement.”

D. Elton Trueblood, The Company of the Committed

An Example from American History

Abraham Lincoln was arguably one of America’s greatest presidents. Part of his political genius was the way he carefully selected his inner circle. In *Team of Rivals*, author Doris Kearns Goodwin tells the story of how Lincoln recruited the men who would become his Cabinet. He chose strong men, some of whom had been rivals or even enemies in the past. One of them, William H. Seward, had been the clear choice for the Republican presidential nomination, only to be defeated by Lincoln in the primary election. During the tumultuous time of the Civil War, as the nation was in the agonizing conflict that threatened to tear it apart, Lincoln shaped these men into a group who would be his closest friends as well as most trusted advisors. Seward, who had seen his political aspirations dashed by Lincoln, would become his strongest ally. As Lincoln lay dying from a fatal gunshot wound, these men were at his bedside. Their grief told everyone of the deep respect that each held for their leader.

Mark 3:13-35



This series of events in Mark’s gospel begins with Jesus selecting a few men to be his inner circle, his “apostles.” Jesus chooses men whom he can teach, test, and to whom he can transfer his power. These men would be his committed company, to whom he would entrust his message and his ministry

after his death and resurrection. He gives nicknames to those who would become his closest companions: “Rock,” and “Sons of Thunder.” Mark tells us that he even calls one who would later become an instrument for his enemies.

Once again, Mark takes on a sudden jump in the story. This time, we see a series of incidents that revolve around one theme: Who is this Jesus, and from where does

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his authority originate? His family thinks him mad, out of his mind. The religious leaders accuse him of being in league with Beelzebul, with the prince of demons. We can even guess that when his family comes seeking him out again, it is because they want to take him into “protective custody.”

Jesus makes strong statements here. They’re warnings, really. And they all center on the accusations that he is either crazy or in the service of evil. This isn’t for the faint of heart or weak of will.

We hear the scribes’ accusations that Jesus’ miracles are diabolically motivated. Perhaps they are jealous of Jesus. His popularity is growing. Crowds are following him. Their authority is crumbling, and their future is in jeopardy.

Or maybe they are simply trying to explain something that they can’t understand. It’s a common reaction. What we don’t comprehend, we vilify. What frightens us must be our enemy.

There is anger in Jesus’ response. Of

course there is. He begins with a parable, as is his custom. If a house, or a kingdom, even a strong one, is divided against itself, it cannot stand up to any challenge from outside. And if you want to rob a strong man, he says, you have to make sure that that man can’t interfere.

The scribes’ accusation strikes to the core of Jesus’ identity. Think of it. Jesus is the eternal Word, the Son of God and Son of Man, the second person of the Triune God. The Spirit by which he accomplishes his work is the very Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity. Father-Son-Spirit, three natures of the one God. When the scribes make their accusation, they are indeed committing blasphemy of the highest order. Jesus has no patience with this.

And when his family seek him out again, he makes clear where the true authority lies. Those who do the will of the Father are truly his brothers and his sisters and his mother. They are his chosen.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What does it mean to be “chosen?” Are there expectations that come with being chosen?
2. Why do you think Jesus is so forceful in responding to the scribes?
3. Think again about the American Civil War. What would have happened if an outside force, or another nation, had attacked the U.S. while the country was so deeply divided? What does Jesus teach us in this parable?
4. What is “blasphemy?”
5. How does Jesus’ statement about an “unforgivable sin” make you feel? What is he telling us?

Week 8

“To a world long befooled by false messiahs and enslaved by false loyalties, the Church proclaims its ancient gospel of salvation. It places its hope squarely with the biblical hope, because it knows there is nowhere else to place it; it announces the Kingdom of God as the goal of history and the only hope of man’s redemption... The Church does not announce the Kingdom of God merely as a possibility, or as a thing to be wished for; she announces it as a fact made present in Jesus Christ, even now at work in the world building its structure in the hearts of men. And it is a victorious Kingdom! All history tends toward it; all the future belongs to it: it is a Kingdom that comes! It is as the emissary of that Kingdom that the Church makes bold to speak.”

John Bright, The Kingdom of God

Examples from Everyday Life

Story-telling is all around us. Teachers in kindergarten and preschool frequently use “story time” to convey important ideas to children. The best songwriters are able to tell a story through their lyrics, and able to put those lyrics to a melody and musical arrangement that fit the story. Great public speakers know how to use the right illustrations to communicate their messages. Professionals from doctors to auto mechanics explain technical situations or concepts using analogies, word pictures.

Difficult ideas are easier to understand when they are presented by way of stories. We identify with the characters, we can see how things work, and we understand the results better when common, familiar language is used. Stripping out the jargon and relying upon word pictures makes it easier for the message to get across.

Mark 4:1-34



In this section we listen in as Jesus uses stories, parables, and analogies to describe the Kingdom of God. Its word is like seeds sown in various places. It is like a lamp. It is measured out according to the way it is received. It grows in ways

we cannot understand. And it is as though the most insignificant seed produces the most significant results.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus tells us of man who has a bag of seed to plant. The sower seems to be indiscriminate in where he scatters his seed. The side of the road, rocky terrain, tangled weeds, or fertile soil—all re-

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ceive the same seed. He is universal in his planting. He doesn't hold back just because the ground doesn't look promising. This picture prefigures Jesus' command at the end of Mark's gospel: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This is God's economy in action. Rather than sow the seed selectively, in only the best soil, God spreads his grace throughout the world.

The growing, the production from the seed, is individual in nature. Each type of soil receives the seed differently. We see this all around us, as each person responds differently to the gospel message. People are individual, and the way they receive the gospel cannot be stereotyped or prejudged. Finally, the reaping, which is the harvest from the message, is selective. Only the seed in the good soil produces a harvest. In all others, it is lost. This is eternal truth, and Jesus reinforces it: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

After telling this story, one which resonates with the people of the day, Jesus takes his inner circle aside and explains the parable. He identifies the point of the story, explains the story in detail, then expands on its con-

tent. He conducts a training seminar here, preparing his disciples for more learning.

The course continues with three additional parables, these adding meaning to the story of the sower and seed. In the parable of the lamp, we see that the truth of the Kingdom is now open and revealed to all. And when it is placed where it belongs, it illuminates every corner of the room. The parable of the growing seed shows us that the way that the Kingdom of God grows is mysterious. We don't control it, and we can't look into the hearts of people and watch exactly how the gospel works to produce its fruit in individual lives. Finally, the parable of the mustard seed reminds us that the results of the gospel are expansive. The word doesn't just produce a little, it produces a lot. What was small becomes great, and the nations of the world will come to rest in its shade.

Mark closes this part of the story by re-emphasizing how Jesus takes his disciples, his chosen ones, aside to explain the parables. Once again, Jesus conducts his training session, preparing the disciples for their own ministry.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Why do you think Jesus uses parables to teach the masses?
2. How do you respond to Jesus' method of teaching through stories? If you were one of those who heard the parables, but not one of the inner circle for whom they were explained, would you have understood what Jesus was teaching?
3. What is the "soil" like in your life? Are you receptive to the gospel and its meaning for you?
4. How do you respond to the term, "Kingdom of God?" Is this a comfortable idea to you, or is it threatening?

Week 9

“There is an activity of God displayed throughout creation, a wholesale activity let us say which men refuse to recognize. The miracles done by God incarnate, living as a man in Palestine, perform the very same things as this wholesale activity, but at a different speed and on a smaller scale. One of their chief purposes is that men, having seen a thing done by personal power on the small scale, may recognize, when they see the same thing done on the large scale, that the power behind it is also personal—is indeed the very same person who lived among us two thousand years ago.”

C.S. Lewis, Miracles (St. Jude's Gazette, October 1942)

An Example from Everyday Life

Sometimes, instead of contempt, familiarity breeds inaccurate assumptions about another person. When I was in my twenties, I moved to a new town to take a full-time position in youth ministry. Not long after, I returned to my former church to preach one Sunday. Following the service, several people remarked that they “didn’t know you could do that!” They thought they were familiar enough with me to know what I could or could not do.

We all assume that we know a person well enough to understand him or her completely. Then something happens, and that person says or does something that we completely do not expect them to be capable of. We all find ourselves caught off guard, and we all have to rethink our assessment of others.

Mark 4:35-6:6a



In this series of incidents, we see Jesus in conflict with forces that are among the most formidable we face: wild and untamed nature, tormenting demons, incurable illness, and death. Mark tells these accounts to show that Jesus is in fact the Christ, the very Son of God.

After an exhausting day of teaching, Jesus needs some time away from the crowds. Calling for a boat, he takes the place of honor at the stern to curl up with a pillow and get some sleep. Once under way, the full force of a violent storm unleashes itself upon the hapless crew. Even experienced fishermen (Peter, James and John) are frightened. They interrupt Jesus’ rest with a challenge:

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“Don’t you care that we’re about to die?” We can imagine that he was more than a little perturbed by this. He doesn’t appreciate their insistence, and he doesn’t soothe their fears. He chides them for their lack of faith, then he speaks to the storm and it is calmed. Their response? “Who is this man?”

The next confrontation is with demonic forces. A man has been tortured by these forces for years, leaving him an outcast. Jesus orders the demons to leave the man, and he is restored. Unfortunately for some local pig farmers, Jesus is less concerned about livestock than people. Once again, people around don’t see the truth behind the event, that Jesus is the Son of God and has authority over even supernatural forces.

In what has been called “the miracle within a miracle,” we see Jesus walking down the road. He’s on his way to restore a daughter to her father. As the journey proceeds, a woman who’s suffered for years from an incurable condition press-

es forward to touch Jesus’ robe. She believes that all she needs is to do is place her hand on the cloth to know healing. Does the garment heal her? Of course not; it is her faith in the person and authority of Jesus. Here we see someone who knows who Jesus truly is, and who know that he has the power to overcome disease.

The journey continues, and Jesus comes to the house where a father has just lost his precious daughter. Once again, people around have no idea that Jesus has the authority to even overcome death. They are amazed when they see it here, and would be dumbfounded when they see it again when he conquers death once for all.

The series of accounts closes with another instance where people assume that they know exactly who Jesus is, but who are completely ignorant of his true nature. And their lack of faith makes it nearly impossible for Jesus to act.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Imagine being in the boat with Jesus and the disciples, or in one of the other boats making the trip across the sea. How do you feel when you see and hear Jesus calm the storm?
2. In the various responses to Jesus’ miracles, we see fear, rejection, despair, and disbelief. As you read these stories, do you feel any of these affecting your response?
3. Do these accounts bother you in any way? What does that say about your idea of God (your theology)?

Week 10

“The evangelistic efforts of John Wesley and the early Methodists are well known. The simplicity of their lifestyle gave integrity to the Gospel they preached. Wesley is reported to have told his sister, ‘Money never stays with me. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it find its way within my heart.’ He told everyone that, if at his death he had more than ten pounds (about \$23) in his possession, people had the privilege of calling him a robber.”

Richard Foster, Freedom of Simplicity

An Example from Christian History

Francis of Assisi lived from 1182 to 1226. He was born into a wealthy family, and knew all of the privileges of having money at hand. He was popular with his peers, and loved to party with them.

A series of disappointments and difficult events turned Francis toward God. Dedicating himself to knowing God’s will and way more deeply, he began to renounce his lifestyle and possessions. In 1206, he was disinherited by his father, and left with nothing.

Instead of despair and dejection, Francis became a joyous messenger for the Gospel. He wandered the land, spreading the word and calling others to his ministry. His followers adopted the same simple way of living. They were known for their exuberant joy, their devotion to God, and their carefree lives unburdened by the weight of possessions.

Mark 6:6b-30



Jesus has been teaching, training, and challenging his disciples. Now, he sends them out in ministry with the authority to defeat all manner of spiritual adversaries. Dividing them into teams of two, he tells them to live simply, without excess possessions, traveling light.

He also gives them instruction in how to conduct themselves in the towns and villages they would visit. Find a host, and stay with them until you leave the area, he tells the twelve. But if they won’t listen, if they won’t welcome you into their midst, move on.

The results are dramatic. Spiritual enemies are defeated, and physical ailments are healed. Once again, Mark

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tells the story in a no-frills, just-the-facts manner.

The results of their ministry, and of Jesus' own work, don't go unnoticed. The political powers of the day are threatened by the success of this new movement. In Herod's case, an uncomfortable spotlight is aimed into his personal life along with the challenge to his position.

Herod is not only concerned about what is going on in his region, he's carrying a personal guilt over ordering the execution of John the Baptist. In Herod, we see someone whose excesses get the best of him, with disastrous results. He's

already taken his brother's wife, although we can surmise that she went willingly. Herodias doesn't like that Herod keeps John alive, and even listens to his preaching. When the opportunity comes to rid herself of the irritating evangelist, she pounces. Herod's hand is forced by his own stupidity, and John is killed.

Returning from their missions, the disciples give Jesus a full report of their efforts and results. The Good News has spread, and the ones to whom Jesus will entrust his message have had their first experience in what would become their lives' work.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What do you have that would be most difficult for you to give up and do without? Why?
2. Why do you think Jesus instructed his disciples to go without money or extra clothing, or provisions? What does this say to us about our lives and ministry?
3. How do you feel when you read Jesus' instructions to "shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony" against those who don't welcome the disciples and their message?
4. What does the story of Herod and John the Baptist tell us about our relationship to the powers around us?
5. Both of these events address the cost of being a disciple, whether it be abandoning possessions or life itself. How do you feel about paying a price to share the message of Jesus?
6. When have you seen the Gospel reaching into the world with success? What was the reaction of those around the situation? How do others react when you tell them the story?

Week 11

*“To love you, God must give you what is best for you.
And God is what is best for you.”*

John Piper

The Roadmap of Discipleship

“**I**n September 2012 Apple dropped Google as its map provider when it launched iOS6 software for the iPhone. Apple now supplied their own map application touting its capabilities. Only one month later CEO Tim Cook issued a public apology for the poor quality of their program. Some of the problems with the new mapping program were so bad that Apple had to update a section of Australia due to the danger that it was placing numerous people in. People were getting hopelessly lost in the Australian bush while trying to locate the city of Mildura which has a population of roughly 30,000. One man was stranded for 24 hours in temperatures of up to 115F. At least three more people had to be rescued after following the directions given on Apple’s new maps, which located Mildura among the dusty, sun-baked trails of Murray-Sunset National Park, the second-largest in Australia and far from the town’s actual position. The map program was taking people 45 miles from the location where they wanted to go. ‘Getting lost near Mildura is dangerous. There’s no water, and you can get bogged down in the sand,’ explained Toby Prime, a reporter on the local Sunraysia Daily. ‘Temperatures go up to 115 degrees. Not only that, people may also have to walk some distance in the heat to get phone reception.’”¹

Mark 6:31-56



In this last half of Mark 6, Jesus shows us where the roadmap for discipleship begins and where it ends. His roadmap to discipleship is scandalous. As desperate and needy disciples, we plug in our destinations and follow the route to Jesus,

yet he often leads us through areas that we never expected to go. In fact unlike Apple, Jesus intentionally leads his people to dangerous and desolate places to strand them in the middle of nowhere. This is scandalous! What mapping programmer would do such a thing? Only a Mapping Programmer who knows exactly what is best for us. A Divine Programmer

¹<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/dec/10/apple-maps-life-threatening-australian-police>

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who leaves us stranded with nobody else but God himself. Mark leaves us with a choice. Do we trust the difficult routes he often takes us on and look to him or do we demand for a new update to the map program?

Previous to this section of Scripture, Mark shows us the cost of discipleship. Jesus is rejected in his hometown of Nazareth, he sends out his disciples on mission, and then he shows us the cost of following Jesus by telling us the narrative of John the Baptist's beheading. Jesus' disciples didn't just hear about John being killed, they physically took John's body and buried him. They laid hands on a lifeless body and were emotionally, spiritually and physically confronted with the cost of following Jesus.

Mark continues to build upon this cost of discipleship theme by showing us the roadmap of a disciple and the Designer of the route.

Jesus performs four miracles in this

section showing his people that he is YHWH in word and deed. The miracles include the feeding of the 5000 from a few bread and fish, walking on water, ceasing the wind, and healing those who touch the fringe of his garment.

Mark makes it a point to use the word "desolate" three different times and shows us that there are only two kinds of people in these narratives. There is Jesus and there are desperate/needy people.

Jesus shows us that his scandalous rescue plan for the life of the disciple is to lead them to desolate places and give them nothing but himself.

A true follower of Jesus is one who understands that Jesus is God, and is willing to following him to the desolate and stormy places of life trusting that he loves us by giving us what is best for us – namely himself. Will we trust his plan or will our hardness of heart prevent us from understanding who he is and what he can accomplish?

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

What desolate places has Jesus led you to in your life?

1. In what ways have you/do you struggle to believe that these difficult circumstances were/are God's plan to give you more of himself?
2. How can we know whether or not our hearts are hard to the person and work of Christ?
3. How has Jesus had compassion and continued to pursue you in your hard heartedness?
4. Discuss some ways that we can bring others who are sick and needy to the healing presence of Jesus.

Week 12

“You can clean up a pigsty, but if the creatures in it still have pig-minds and pig-desires, soon it will be the same old pigsty again.”

Catherine Marshall, Christy

Hypocritical Lawbreakers

“Police officers get some decent perks. They’re always invited to ride in parades. They can turn on their lights and sirens to speed through traffic. They get to go on high speed chases. They are treated like super heroes by all the kids around town. Really, who wouldn’t enjoy occasionally having some of these perks?

Apparently a Florida man named Luis Mario Vega allegedly also wanted to get the same kind of perks. According to the Sun Sentinel, Vega put a flashing blue light in his car and flipped it on whenever he got tired of sitting in traffic. The scheme of confronting and yelling at people to pull over worked fine for a while until the fateful day when someone questioned his authenticity. A curious woman decided to follow Vega and take a picture of his license plate as evidence. Vega reportedly exited his car and approached the woman, who told Vega that it was unlawful to impersonate a police officer. Vega laughed and said ‘good luck with that.’ That would’ve been a great kiss-off line if Vega was actually a police officer. But he wasn’t, and the woman called the real police to report the impostor who was eventually arrested.”¹

Mark 7:1-23



Luis Vega isn’t the only one who regularly policed others for his own benefit. The Pharisees did the same thing. They were constantly forcing people off the road only to make sure that they were obeying a standard of the law that God did not

even require. In this section of Mark, the Pharisees try to use their super spiritual traditions as leverage to show how defiled and dirty Jesus and his disciples were. Jesus, the law giver, confronts their hypocrisy by taking an evidentiary snap shot of their true spiritual state out of the book of Isaiah. After presenting the evidence, Jesus defines what true

¹http://www.slate.com/blogs/crime/2013/06/21/dumb_criminal_of_the_week_luis_mario_vega_the_guy_who_allegedly_impersonated.html

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defilement is and where true defilement comes from.

Luis Vega and the Pharisees aren't the only ones who struggle with spiritual hypocrisy and defilement. We also suffer from the same defilement. Where will we turn for cleanliness? Will we turn to the traditions of men in an attempt to get our act together or will we turn to Jesus?

Jesus has just finished performing many different miracles in the last chapter and attempts to reveal himself as YHWH to his disciples.

Now we see Jesus and his disciples being accused of defilement by the most "spiritually clean" people of all - the Pharisees.

The Pharisees confront Jesus about not following the tradition of the elders which requires a good law abiding Jew to wash their hands before eating. With authority, Jesus declares that there are two different traditions. One is the tradition of men and the other is the tradition of God. Jesus shows his audience that following the tradition of men is self-serving

and merely looks good on the outside. It's only there to put on a good show for others. Jesus explains to his audience that following the tradition of man fails to address the heart where true defilement comes from. Jesus is always more concerned with heart issues than outward appearances.

Jesus pits this tradition of man against his very own word by saying, "Hear me all of you and understand." Jesus put his word on par with God's word!

Jesus shocks the Pharisees by explaining to them what really defiles a man. He gives his audience a lengthy list of defilement's that come from the inside as opposed from the outside of a person.

Jesus leaves us in the dirt of our defilement begging us to answer the most significant question of all. Where will we turn for purification and cleanliness? Will we turn to external traditions that only deal with outward appearances or will we turn to Jesus who is the only one who can produce the inner transformation that the law requires but cannot effect.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Share some of your most memorable family traditions now and as a child.
2. Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites. How do we really know if we are putting on a religious show for others or if we truly love and trust Jesus?
3. Do you ever feel like the filth of your soul is too dirty for Jesus to clean?
4. Is there anyone in the group that is a converted Pharisee? If so, how did you come to know Christ? Share your story about how Jesus exposed you for who you really were?

“No matter how low down you are; no matter what your disposition has been; you may be low in your thoughts, words, and actions; you may be selfish; your heart may be overflowing with corruption and wickedness; yet Jesus will have compassion upon you. He will speak comforting words to you; not treat you coldly or spurn you, as perhaps those of earth would, but will speak tender words, and words of love and affection and kindness. Just come at once.”

D.L. Moody

The Overflowing Compassion of a Savior

“A man slips behind someone else into a packed elementary school with a rifle. He goes into the office and shoots at the ground, then darts between there and outside to fire at approaching police. So what do you do? If you’re Antoinette Tuff, who works in the front office at Ronald E. McNair Discovery Learning Academy just outside Atlanta, you don’t run. You talk.

You divulge your personal struggles to the gunman, you tell him you love him, you even proactively offer to walk outside with him to surrender so police won’t shoot. And then the nightmare ends with the suspect, later identified as Michael Brandon Hill, taken into custody and no one inside or outside the Decatur school even hurt, despite the gunfire.

Antoinette, called 911 and was a go-between for the suspect and the police. And what’s touching about Antoinette is that when you listen to the call, you get the sense that she wasn’t just saying things in order to convince the suspect to put the gun down. She seemed to truly believe it all in her heart. She was authentic and genuine.

‘It’s going to be all right, sweetie,’ she tells Hill at one point. ‘I just want you to know I love you, though, OK? And I’m proud of you. That’s a good thing that you’re just giving up and don’t worry about it. We all go through something in life. We’re not going to hate you, baby. It’s a good thing that you’re giving up, so we’re not going to hate you.’¹

¹<http://www.myfoxla.com/story/23268574/compassion-may-have-saved-lives-antoinette-tuffs-story>

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Mark 7:24-8:9



It was Antoinette's compassionate words and overflowing love for the seemingly unlovable that saved the lives of hundreds of people that day including the gunman.

Antoinette Tuff isn't the only person to love the unloveable. She isn't the only person to have compassion on the sick and hurting. She isn't the only person whose words bring salvation to people. In this section of Mark, Jesus travels into Gentile territory pursuing an unclean and outcast people. He intimately identifies himself with them and shows them that only he can meet their deepest longings, desires, and needs. He embodies compassion in word and deed that is overflowing and more than enough for all people, in all places, and throughout all generations.

Up until recently Jesus has been journeying throughout Jewish territory. But now he does something different. Now he takes his disciples to pagan Gentile territory. Was Jesus lost? Did he take a wrong turn somewhere? Why in the world would a good Jewish person ever intentionally go to an unclean land and contact an unclean people?

Jesus certainly didn't take any wrong turns in his life. He was very intentional in everything he did and he certainly was intentional in taking his disciples to this particular location.

What Jesus is doing is foreshadowing the future ministry of his disciples to the Gentiles. Jesus is communicating something extremely important and significant to his ministry and what it means to be his follower.

What Jesus is communicating to everyone is that it doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Gentile, friend or foe, the gospel is for everyone. He loves you and has overflowing compassion for you. The mess you have made of your life is never beyond the overflowing compassion of Jesus. He is the only one who will bring true satisfaction to the hungry and liberate a people in bondage.

There is a recurring theme Mark wants us to see. From the feeding of nearly 9,000 people in the last couple of chapters to the crumbs under the table for a desperate Syrophonecian - Jesus is the Bread of Life whose love and compassion for us is so abundant that it spills over the table and onto the ground and satisfies all.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Who would be the modern day outcasts in our culture?
2. How would our family/group be different if we pursued each other and outsiders with the compassion of Christ?
3. Are you facing a problem in life that needs the compassion of Christ?
4. In what way would you like Jesus to make you more compassionate this week?

Week 14

“There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn’t true; the other is to refuse to believe what is true.”

Søren Kierkegaard

The Tommy Edison Experience

Tommy Edison’s video vignettes (The Tommy Edison Experience) have seen hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube. His webisodes offer a perspective and an experience that is quite unique. You see, Edison is blind and has been since birth. He uses his website and his YouTube page to attempt to answer some of the FAQs that sighted people have about those who are blind. One particular question stood out... How does someone who has been blind from birth understand color? How would you attempt to explain color to a blind person? Edison says that color is a concept that is completely foreign to him. He doesn’t understand, for example, how something like color can be used to describe both the look of something and the feel of something (e.g. The color blue can be used to describe the sky as well as someone who is feeling sad or down). Edison says he doesn’t understand how that works. As well, he confesses that he doesn’t understand how water is both clear and blue. His conclusion, “Color is hard. How do sighted people keep ‘em all straight?”

Mark 8:10-30



This particular section is the mid-way point of the Gospel and serves as a climax in regards to the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah. The curtain is drawn back on who Jesus truly is. Is he just a prophet? Is he just a rabbi, a teacher? Or is he the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God? The answers to these questions have serious implications for our lives. How would we respond? Would we respond in belief

or disbelief, acceptance or rejection (i.e. blindness and sight)?

In this particular passage, Jesus is confronted by the disbelief of the religious leaders, the Pharisees. Clearly, they are blind to the true identity of Jesus. You would think that they would be the more likely to receive Jesus as their long awaited Messiah, being those most familiar with the topic, but they are not. They are blind. So Jesus, along with his disciples, leaves that place. Along the way, Jesus overhears a conversation among

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his disciples, which prompts him to warn his disciples against a similar disbelief of that of the Pharisees. Jesus is astonished that they could be concerned about not having enough food for the journey not days after Jesus' miraculous provision of food for 4,000 people (and the 5,000 before that). He asks, "Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?" (8:17).

Then we read one of the more obscure stories in all of the Gospel accounts; we read about Jesus' partial healing of a blind man. What a bizarre account. Why was the man only partially healed at first? Was it a faith problem? Did he only have enough faith to go from blindness to bifocals? What if Mark is using this story as an illustration? What if the partial healing is meant to illustrate to process of revelation regarding the true identity

of Jesus? The story that follows appears to support that thesis. In the verses that follow, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" (8:27). They respond by saying, "John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets" (8:28), revealing their blindness. They see Jesus as someone of significance, but his true identity is still fuzzy. Then Jesus makes it personal and asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (8:29). And Peter responds in belief, "You are the Christ" (8:29)... demonstrating, by God's great grace, his sight.

Jesus is a scandalous character and demands a response; there is no passive position. Would you reject Him as the Pharisees did and ultimately experience Jesus' departure? Or, by faith, would you heed His warning and confess Him as the Christ as the disciples did?

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What do you think would be the most difficult part about being blind?
2. How does spiritual blindness impact a person? How has it impacted you?
3. What difference does sight make? What difference does Jesus make?
4. Who do you say Jesus is?

Week 15

“A wrong view of Messiahship leads to a wrong view of discipleship.”¹

J. R. Edwards

The Role of the Quarterback

Imagine for a minute that you were mistaken on the role of a football quarterback. Maybe you thought he was the one on the sidelines coaching the team. Maybe you thought he was the one assigned to haul in all the player’s gear (more a kin to a pack mule). Maybe you thought the quarterback was the guy at the concession stand between game quarters selling nachos and giant pretzels. Or maybe he’s just the guy assigned to filling water bottles. Whatever. You see, how you understand a role directly impacts your expectations of the one in that particular role. If you think the quarterback is the guy selling huge pretzels, you’re going to be shocked to see him geared-up and running out on the field. If you think he’s the water boy, it’s going to be hard for you to watch him get sacked by some oversized outside linebacker. Your misunderstanding of the role of quarterback would lead you to be quite confused (and likely concerned) as you watched the game unfold.

Mark 8:31-9:29



At this point, the disciples have identified Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah, but as things unfold here the text we learn that their understanding of who the Messiah was to be and do was off. Their sight was about as clear as the blind man’s sight in 8:24; they saw Jesus, but not clearly... Not yet. The blinders were still coming off.

Just moments after Peter confessed Jesus as “the Christ” (8:29) he is found confronting and rebuking Jesus for even suggesting that the Messiah would suffer at the hands of the religious leaders, be killed and ultimately rise again (This is the first of three times where Jesus foretells his death and resurrection in the Gospel of Mark). Peter’s understanding of the role of Messiah was mistaken; he had no concept of a suffering Messiah. His rebuke is met with a stronger one.

¹James R. Edwards, *PNTC: Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 256.

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To oppose the reality of a suffering Messiah is to oppose the very mind and will of God, so Peter is rebuked harshly. If he misses on the Messiah, his understanding of what it means to be a disciple of the Messiah will be directly affected. Jesus responds, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (8:35).

A week later, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up on a mountain where he is transfigured right in front of the eyes. Jesus is going to pull the veil back a bit more in regards to his true identity. Jesus was a bigger Messiah than they had originally thought him to be. During Jesus’ transfiguration in glory, a voice spoke and said, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (9:8).

They return from the mountain to find the rest of the disciples engaged in Jesus’ ministry... only without Jesus. There is frustration in the crowd at the disciples’ lack of ability to heal a man’s son who has been possessed by an evil spirit for some time. Jesus’ presence appears to bring some relief to the tension and they approach him with the issue. Jesus is burdened by the initial lack of faith. The man comes to Jesus and says, “If you can... help us;” to which Jesus exclaims, “If I can!” (9:23). He continues, “All things are possible for one who believes.” The man responds by crying out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (9:24).

As the veil comes off on who the Messiah is and what he has been sent to do, it changes the game and has huge implications for those who would follow him.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. How do you suppose Peter felt after being rebuked by Jesus? (Confused, disappointed, etc...)
2. Identify a time in your life when your understanding of the person and work of Jesus needed corrected or experienced correction.
3. Who is Jesus?
4. What does it mean to set your minds on the things of God rather than the things of man?
5. Identify the hope in the account of Jesus’ transfiguration.
6. Can you relate with the cry of the father, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (9:24)?

Week 16

“Worldliness is whatever makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange.”¹

Kevin DeYoung

Irony is All Around Us

Irony is defined as the use of words to convey meaning that is directly opposite of its literal meaning. Or maybe as an event or an outcome that is contrary to what is expected. Examples of irony are all around us. Take the iPhone 4 for example. The iPhone 4 was the epitome of technological advancement back in 2010; the picture of innovation. And yet... not long after its release a hardware problem was detected. It had to do with where the antenna for the device was placed. The antenna was located in the bottom left corner of the device and depending on how you held the phone you would have poor reception. Here's the irony, the recommended fix was to place duct tape over the antenna to boost reception. Technological precision meets a junk-drawer staple. Another example of irony would be “Black Friday.” It is ironic that not minutes after a meal set aside to express gratitude to God for his great provision, we have the ads spread out all over the table wanting more. And by midnight we are standing in line for the “door-busters.” Other examples of irony would be a fire station of fire, or the cause of the fire being a “stress-relief” candle. Or what about choking on a “Life Saver?” Irony is all around us and can be used to make a powerful point.

Mark 9:30-37



At a glance it appears that we have two narratives that have nothing to do with each other. However, true to form for Mark, there is more in here than can be seen at a cursory glance. Mark's use of irony in this passage is perfect, bringing great contrast

and meaning.

In this section, Jesus is traveling with His disciples and uses the opportunity to speak again of His forthcoming death and resurrection (This is the second of three times in Mark where Jesus does this). Like before, Jesus' disciples fail to understand what He is talking about, but are afraid to ask him about it this time

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), p. 37.

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around after what happened to Peter back in 8:31-33. Again, they have specific hopes regarding the Messiah and Jesus talking about death does not fit.

The scene abruptly changes to their arrival in Capernaum. Again, at a glance it appears to be a complete change of subject, but it is likely meant to serve as a contrast between the will and purpose of the Messiah and the will and desires of his disciples. After their arrival, Jesus asks His disciples what they were talking about back on the road. No answer. The disciples are immediately met with a bit of shame in regards to the content of their conversation because they were arguing among themselves as to who among them was the greatest. In Jewish culture (Not unlike our own, really) position was important (e.g. Lk. 14:7-11) and they were likely chatting about the pecking order once Jesus rose to power, according to their mistaken view of the Messiah and

his role (See week 15). Jesus calls the twelve together for a moment of teaching, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (vs. 35). Likely the disciples were squirming in the seats at this point.

The irony in this passage is seen in the contrast between Jesus’ understanding of His role as the Messiah and the selfish actions of His disciples. He came to give himself for others in suffering and ultimately death and here His disciples are talking about who is the greatest among them. One theologian suggested that while Jesus was counting the cost of discipleship, his disciples were counting the assets.² Jesus then lifts a child up into his lap and says to them, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.” (vs. 37), illustrating his understanding of true greatness.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. (Fun) Identify other examples of irony.
2. Identify the contrast between the way of Christ and the way of the world.
3. As a disciple of Jesus, where do you still find traces of the way of the world in your life? Where do you find yourself counting the assets rather than the cost?
4. What would be one step towards greater servant hood that you could take this week? What will this cost you? How can Jesus help?

² James R. Edwards, *PNTC: Mark (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002)*, p. 285.

Week 17

“It is better to be honorable than to be honored.”

Thomas Aquinas

Clint Eastwood and Jesus

In 2009 the American Film Institute awarded *Gran Torino* the title of “Movie of the Year.” In this award winning movie, Clint Eastwood play Walt Kowalski, a disgruntled and racist war veteran. He is indignant when his neighbor, a young Hmong teenager, tries to steal his prized 1972 Gran Torino. Walt is a typical ugly American. He is so self-righteous and so focused on himself that he looks down on everyone else.

But as Walt reluctantly gets to know his neighbors he grows attached to them. He once hindered them. He was a scandal to them. But he changes his tune and becomes their greatest ally. In the end he lays down his life for them in order to free them from the tyranny of a local gang. Walt “repents” and saves their lives.

Mark 9:38-50



This scene in Mark’s gospel shows us that John, a member of the inner circle of Jesus’ followers, also needed to “repent” and stop looking down on others. When he sees an unnamed person do a wonderful act of freeing somebody from demonic influence. His immediate reaction is one of blind self-importance. He cannot see that this unnamed person was actually follower of Jesus who was doing what Jesus did.

John does not welcome this unnamed person, because he is not a member of John’s “Jesus group.” John, probably is acting out of ambition to be “first” (9:35),

and so he hinders this unnamed person by treating them as “last” (9:35).

Jesus reprimands John for “hindering” by his small-minded, elitist behavior. It is important to understand that “hindering” (9:38) someone who does a “large” public display of Jesus or someone who does a “small” private display of Jesus is called “scandalizing” in 9:42-50. The New Living Translation renders “scandalize” as “cause to fall into sin” and the New Revised Standard renders it as “puts a stumbling block before.” To hinder is to block movement by putting a stumbling block before or by causing one to fall (into sin).

Jesus teaches John that he had much in common with the person who had de-

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monic influence thrown out of him. John needed to have his hellish hindering thrown out of him!

If John would devote himself to putting to death his sinful wrong thinking, then John would become a living sacrifice of worship to God and he would serve the “last,” “the “children,” the suffering servants of Jesus who desperately need to be served.

If John would put to death his sinful wrong thinking and become a humble servant, then he would become a peacemaker instead of a roadblock.

The good news of the gospel is that eventually John does exactly that and becomes one of the strongest leaders in the early church.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. How have you been hurt by the pride, status consciousness and elitism of others?
Or....Have you ever been hurt by people who thought they were too good for you?
What was it like?
2. Learn the story of someone who (1) was unaware of an ugly blind spot, (2) became aware of it and (3) repented of it. With regard to the story, what interested you?
What challenged you?
3. What do we “gain” by remaining unaware of pride, of the desire to use power for personal gain and of status consciousness?
4. What do we lose by remaining unaware of pride, of the desire to use power for personal gain and of status consciousness?

Week 18

“The call to discipleship involves a cost of discipleship.”

Anonymous

Pride goes before a fall

Do you remember the unforgettable scene in *A Few Good Men* where Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson go toe to toe in the court room and Nicholson bellows out “You can’t handle the truth!” This dialogue and Nicholson’s ensuing punishment hinge upon his pride. He thinks that he is the number 1 in the room and that everyone should bend to his wishes including the judge. The defense did not have the evidence they needed and yet because of his pride they were able to extract a confession out of him.

This same insipid trait is found outside of the silver screen as well. In fact many people today are being undermined by their own pride, both in the marketplace and in the home. Pride can be seen in the way we treat others, especially those who we perceive as less important than we are. This could be our barista, our assistant at work, our kids or our spouse.

Mark 10:1-16



According to Jesus, true greatness serves.

True greatness does not seek social

status.

True greatness replicates Jesus.

True greatness is hospitable to those whom society does not value.

Those whom society does not value carry labels: “last,” “child,” “servant.” These people have no or little status. Little or no voice. In certain ways they are invisible people. In Jesus’ world, wives were people of little status. Evidence? They were easy to divorce.

Jewish religion had “hindered” or put

a roadblock in front of wives by turning a biblical concession with regard to divorce into an absolute.

Jesus taught that reinterpreting the Bible in order to minimize wives (and marriage) was a sinful, hellish stumbling block from which Jesus’ followers should repent. Women were not invisible to Jesus then and they are not invisible to him now. In fact the first witnesses to the resurrection at the end of Mark turn out to be women. Some have even argued that Christianity has done more to dignify and encourage women than any other religion in the world. Jesus is modeling here true greatness in the way he prioritizes them and commands men to do the same.

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In Jesus' world, children had little value and little status as well. They were to be hindered from receiving the attention of a socially important person. Yet Jesus taught his disciples to stop hindering them and to grant them access. Both with children and with women Jesus shows that he is truly great because they are not invisible to him.

In the last section of this passage Jesus goes one step further and holds up the children as an example for us to emulate. He teaches his disciples to see them-

selves as children—dependent, in some ways invisible, needy, without adequate resources. And he teaches us too to see ourselves the same way. Divorce is often a power play where one party seeks their own good above that of the other. Jesus commands us not to make such power play but instead to humble ourselves like children.

Jesus took time to honor and bless those without social honor or status. As his followers we will do the same by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Husband, in what ways have you made your wife delighted to be your wife? In what ways have you caused your wife's heart to ache? Or go numb?
2. Husband, what have you gained by loving your wife like Christ loves her? What has it cost you to love your wife like Christ loves her?
3. Women, tell of a time you felt invisible to others.
4. How have you done at helping children feel comfy and cradled by Jesus? Whatever answer you give, what are the reasons for what you have done?
5. What are the beliefs, emotions and desires that keep adults from asking kids interesting questions that generate interesting conversations?
6. Who do you treat as invisible and how does the gospel lead us to love and serve them in a new way?

Week 19

“Jesus would rather lose a possible follower than lower the standard for him.”

Alan Cole

A Penny for your thoughts

Once upon a time there was a little boy. The boy was raised in a wealthy family surrounded by many treasures and beautiful works of art. One day he came crying to his mother because his hand had gotten stuck in one of their most expensive vases. No matter how hard they tried they could not get his arm out of the vase. It was stuck. After many attempts to free him the boy began to weep and wail. Even though the vase was worth thousands of dollars the parents decided that they would have to break it to free their little boy.

Being very careful not to injure the child they grabbed a hammer and smashed the vase to pieces. To their astonishment, when the pieces fell away they noticed that the boy's hand had been made into a fist. They were dismayed to realize that if he had simply opened his hand he would have been set free and they would have been able to keep the valuable vase intact. Before they could ask him about it, the boy joyfully opened his fist to reveal a shiny new penny. “Whew!” he said “I almost lost it!”

The little boy was so determined to hold on to his penny that he sacrificed something much more valuable. Little did he know that if he had let go of the penny he could have had both.

Mark 10:17-31



In Mark, the road to Jerusalem is the road of suffering servanthood. In stark contrast to the low social status we have seen placed on wives and children earlier in this chapter, we now meet a man with great social status (due to great riches) and great interest in becoming Jesus' disciple. To the eyes of most he is a great candidate

to join Jesus' group of followers.

Jesus looks intently and lovingly into the man. And then Jesus tells the man that he may become his disciple under the condition that he relinquish what he most trusts in to give him happiness. The man wanted Jesus to be a very high good, but not the highest good. When forced to choose between Jesus and status acquired by wealth, the man reluctantly walked away from Jesus.

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Jesus' disciples were scandalized that the majority belief that the rich were the best candidates for discipleship was wrong. After all, they thought, what could be a clearer indication of God's favor and closeness than material wealth? Yet Jesus sees the picture differently. Jesus teaches that criteria for high status on earth are very different from God's standards for authentic greatness. This should affect

our view of money as well. True wealth is being able to see Jesus as he truly is, the greatest treasure. Unfortunately this man was blind to Jesus' worth and so he missed out on being his disciple.

In the same way today many people are blind to Jesus' true value and they miss out on being his disciple. They are holding on to pennies and missing out on the real treasure of knowing God.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. How would our evenings change if we lost 25% of our monthly income and could not get other jobs?
2. How would our relationships change if we lost a huge portion of our monthly income and could not regain it?
3. How would we cope with our emotions if we suddenly lost everything that we value more than we value God?
4. What are the pennies you are holding that Jesus is asking you to let go of to become his disciple?

Week 20

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”*

Robert Frost's The Road Not Taken

Level 5 Leadership

In his bestselling book *Good to Great* Jim Collins explains why some companies thrive and why some companies maintain the status quo. Among the companies that he researched he noticed a common trend of what he called “Level 5 Leadership.” In a video interview Collins defines level 5 leadership by saying it is, “the antithesis of the great ego-centric leader. The 5 was the leader who operated first and foremost with a genuine humility. But it was humility defined as a burning passionate obsessive ambition for the cause, for the company for the work, not themselves.”

When it comes to corporate leadership in the marketplace this is certainly the road less travelled. Instead of telling everyone to bow down and kiss their feet these level 5 leaders were not making everyone revolve around themselves. It is a selfless humility and strangely enough it inspires others to get behind you and follow your lead. Jesus was the greatest leader of all time and this passage in Mark shows that quite vividly.

Mark 10:32-45



Jesus here is displaying level 5 leadership skills at their best. He is casting vision with his followers as he leads the way upward to Jerusalem. And he is reminding his followers the incredible importance of humility.

Jesus' disciples follow him, but they are overwhelmed with surprise and fear, presumably because they sense that a wrong belief about what makes a person

happy and significant is about to blow up. Jesus does not coddle his overwhelmed followers. Instead he paints a vivid picture of the suffering and death he will experience. But Jesus gives hope, pointing to resurrection after his death.

Two of Jesus' disciples, James & John, fail to grasp that greatness is about humility and self-sacrifice. They still believe that the goal should be self-centered power and personal ambition. So they make a self-centered request, which is denied.

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Jesus explicitly corrects them, stating that their personal ambition is driven by beliefs, emotions and desires that are dead wrong.

Jesus clearly exposes the reigning belief about power. And Jesus clearly states that his disciples must reject the wrong belief and embrace Jesus' belief that greatness is about serving and self-sacrifice for the well-being of others.

As we look around us at the people in power it is easy to get sucked in to their type of thinking and to follow the crowd in climbing the ladder and amassing influence and power. Jesus takes us on the road less travelled. And it makes all the difference. He leads us the way of the cross. And it is only along that way that we will find true life and true resurrection.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Where do your dreams of glory take you? What are they about?
2. Have you ever walked with someone through the intellectual and emotional upheaval of deep change? What was it like?
3. What changes would need to happen for you to suffer undeservedly & beautifully for Christ?
4. How would your week be different if you lived by Jesus' statement in verse 45 and you went around not seeking to be served but to serve others and to lay your life down for them?
5. Pray for each other and ask the Holy Spirit to help you live that out this week.

Week 21

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus

The Blind See

Dr. Sanduk Ruit is an amazing doctor who has made his life goal: the restoration of eyesight to people who were unnecessarily blind. Born in Olangchungola, Nepal, a remote village in Eastern Nepal, he grew up in a place where the nearest school was a week’s walk away. And there were no health posts. Ruit’s sister died of tuberculosis when he was 17. That experience led him to become a doctor.

Ruit holds the conviction that all people with treatable blindness have the right to restored eyesight; and further, that people in developing countries deserve access to the same quality of care and technology as people in the developed world. He and his mentor Fred Hollows also share an ambitious vision: the elimination of avoidable blindness in the Himalayan region — driven by local people.

In Australia, Sanduk Ruit learned the latest cataract micro-surgery technique using implanted intraocular lenses. He was ready to take his knowledge to the poorest of the poor. Today he continues to trek through the most remote regions of Nepal conducting eye camps and restoring sight to thousands of the blind.

His work recently caught the attention of CBS News who ran a photo story in November 2012 at Putri Hijau military hospital in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. During the eight-day eye camps held in two towns in North Sumatra, more than 1,400 cataracts were removed.¹

Mark 10:46-52



Before cataract surgery was even on the radar, Jesus was out curing blindness with a simple touch of his hand or a word from his lips. Bartimaeus knew this and that is why he began shouting as the crowd start-

ed to pass him by. Unlike the patients in Sumatra who were carried to the clinics often on piggyback by their relatives, no one was there to encourage Bartimaeus. Instead of encouraging him they told him to be silent. Yet he shouted all the more. “Jesus Son of David have mercy on me!” He knew something about Jesus that the

¹ Adapted from cureblindness.org

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others did not. That is why he calls him Son of David.

Son of David was a title you would give to the long awaited Messiah king. All of Israel was waiting in anticipation for a descendant of David to come and sit on the throne pushing back the Romans and ruling Israel. There is clearly an irony here that the blind man “sees” who Jesus really is while the crowd of people who can “see” are actually blind. We have just encountered the blindness of the disciples James and John who wanted Jesus to promote them so they could be in charge of others. Jesus rebukes them because they have no clue the real character of the kingdom he has come to bring. It is a kingdom of love, humility, and mercy. A kingdom where the invisible and the marginalized are not ignored but cherished and helped, whether they be women, children, the poor or the blind. Jesus sees them all as made in God’s im-

age and so he has come to include them as his disciples.

Blindness is a theme in Mark’s gospel. But it is not so much physical blindness that Jesus is focused on but spiritual blindness. He wants people to see him for who he really is. He wants them to see his true identity as God in the flesh. That is why he is healing and teaching. It is to open people’s eyes to his true identity. He is the Son of David and he has come to have mercy, not only on blind Bartimaeus, but on me, and on you as well. When he opens our eyes like he opens Bartimaeus’ eyes then we will do what Bartimaeus does, we will get up and follow him as disciples. And following Jesus as a disciple means we will do what he did, having mercy on others and even healing the blind. I do not know if Dr. Ruit is a Christian but I believe he is having mercy on others just like Jesus calls us all to do.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Have you ever seen someone who was hurting and you tried to ignore them like the crowd tried to ignore Bartimaeus? Why did you try that?
2. Dr. Ruit is an example of someone who is using his talents and skills to show mercy to other people. How are you using your skills and talents to show mercy to others?
3. How did the crowd show mercy to Bartimaeus? Are you doing that for anyone right now?
4. If our eyes were opened to see that God came to earth as the man Jesus, how would that change our weekly routine?

Week 22

“The triumphal entry is a blatant public act which effectively throws down the gauntlet to the Jerusalem authorities and forces them to respond.”

R.T. France

Royalty Comes To Town

It was March 1954 in Southern Australia and her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the second, was about to appear. The people were excited because this was the first time a reigning monarch had been there and they were out to make a good impression.

The city was awash with an outpouring of patriotism as the Queen arrived at the Wayville Showgrounds. A hundred thousand people were shoehorned into the place to give the young Elizabeth and her husband a rousing welcome. The performances started impressively with children spelling out the word ‘Loyalty’. Hundreds of young girls then did the wattle dance, young boys ran around and did exercises, and then the finale, a living flag.

And, the first four words of her speech at this gathering went on to become legendary. “My husband and I, will long remember your enthusiastic welcome, and I wish to thank each of you for the way in which you have shown your loyalty.”

When Jesus came to Jerusalem he was also warmly greeted! People were cheering, shouting and worshipping. However the big difference between the streets of Jerusalem and the streets of Australia was that Jesus was claiming to be royalty and the Queen had already been crowned.

Mark 11:1-11



This section of Mark shows Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem amid shouts of Hosanna and people laying their cloaks on the ground. The scene tells us two things. First it shows us that people of his day hailed him as the coming king. But even

more telling than that, this scene shows us Jesus himself believed he was the coming king. After all, he is the one who sends the disciples to get the young donkey in the first place.

When Jesus chooses to ride a donkey into town he is intentionally fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusa-

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lem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,”

Jesus was undoubtedly familiar with this prophetic passage from Zechariah and chose intentionally to fulfill it. The crowds get the message loud and clear and respond with overwhelming shouts of joy.

Earlier in the Gospel of Mark when unclean spirits would shout Jesus' identity for all to hear, he would respond by commanding them to be quiet. And yet here on the road to Jerusalem Jesus is being as blatant as a Jew of his day could possibly be. He is intentionally fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 and 14:4 and he is not commanding people to be silent when they start to praise him.

Interestingly enough the crowds are actually shouting Psalm 118:26 “Blessed is he who comes on the name of the LORD.”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David!

When they shouted “Hosanna in the

highest” it was probably from Psalm 148 “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights!”

This is not the first time we have seen people shouting in the Gospel of Mark. The crowds are “shouting” just like Bartimaeus was shouting in the previous chapter. In both cases they are shouting to Jesus and calling out to him as their saving king.

In addition to shouting, the crowds also lay down their coats. Laying their coats on the ground beneath someone's feet was an Old Testament way of declaring someone King. As 2 Kings 9:13 says, “Then in haste every man of them took his garment and put it under him on the bare steps, and they blew the trumpet and proclaimed, “Jehu is king.”” When the people did this everyone in the crowd knew exactly what was going on.

Jesus is laying claim to the title of King. And just like the crowds we have an opportunity to lay our lives down before him and worship him.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. When did Jesus enter your life?
2. What areas of your life are you submitting to him as king?
3. What areas of your life are you still not submitting fully to him as king?
4. Take some time together to pray and to lay down those areas to Jesus as your king. Thank him for coming in to your life.

Week 23

***“Beware of no man more than of yourself;
we carry our worst enemies within us.”***

Charles Spurgeon

Hypocrisy is deadly

Lance Armstrong was a champion. After winning the Tour De France every year from 1999 to 2005 everybody loved him. Yet the tables turned in 2012 when the United States Anti Doping Agency concluded he was guilty of “the most sophisticated, professionalized and successful doping program that sport has ever seen.” He lost his titles and went from loved to disdained. In an article on CNN -“Why fans shouldn’t forgive Lance Armstrong,” Jeff Pearlman writes, “Armstrong apparently convinced himself that there was no other way. As the common athletic thinking goes: If everyone else is cheating, I need to cheat, too. That logic, now pervasive throughout all levels of sport, has turned our athletic endeavors into fraudulent clown shows.” Yes Lance was a hypocrite. On the outside he looked powerful and successful but in reality he was a fraud.

The same was true of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day. They had the Temple and all the power and prestige you could ask for. And yet they were really in it for themselves. Hypocrisy will not only cause you to lose fans and lose titles. It will also leave you fruitless and arouse Jesus’ righteous anger.

Mark 11:12-26



This is one of the most in-your-face prophetic actions Jesus took during his earthly ministry. He showed up at the center of the Jewish world (the Temple) and began driving people out and knocking over the tables.

Mark is intent to frame this incident with the cursing of the fig-tree using an

A-B-A construction (see Appendix A, p. 79).

A-Verses 12-14: Jesus curses the fig tree

B- Verses 15-19: Jesus clears out the Temple

A- Verses 20-26: Disciples notice the withered tree & Jesus explains

When Jesus is in the Temple he quotes two Old Testament verses. The

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first one he quotes is Isaiah 56:7 which predicts the future Messianic age of the new heavens and the new earth and Jerusalem as the city of the Great God and King who is worshiped by all nations. He quotes this because it clearly portrays God's design for the Temple and for the nation of Israel as a whole. They were to be a house of prayer that would bring all nations into relationship with the LORD.

The second verse he quotes is Jeremiah 7:11. Whereas the passage from Isaiah is a beautiful and glorious picture of what God intended for his people, Jeremiah 7 is a prophetic curse against the people. It is a rebuke against Israel for their empty religion which prioritized clinging to special buildings and performing rituals rather than loving or worshiping God.

A key to understanding this passage is the beginning when it tells us #1 Jesus was 'hungry' and #2 he was looking for 'fruit' but found none. The fruit Jesus is looking for in us today is the same he was looking for then. He is looking for us to be true worshipers of God and a house of

prayer for all nations, not a group of outwardly religious people who in reality are out for selfish gain.

Life lived in this religious way is doomed to wither and die. Jesus is enacting a prophetic warning to the religious establishment that if they do not repent then their 'holy place' will in fact be destroyed by none other than the LORD himself.

Look what happens when God comes home to his own house. The insiders, the ones who should have been most prepared to welcome him, are now shown to be phony outsiders actually obstacles to his plans and purposes

The final four verses are particularly difficult to fit with the rest of the passage. At first glance his words seem to promote "name-it claim-it" word faith theology. In reality though, they are about Jesus and his power over the world around him. He can curse the fig tree (and he can even clean God's house) because he is God and he created those things for his glory.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Why do you think Jesus was so angry?
2. What made you angry this week? Was it the same thing that made Jesus Angry?
3. Why do people like to be outwardly religious and yet fail to actually develop a fruitful praying life?
4. What do you think the fig tree is a symbol of?
5. Read John 15:1-8 what verse speaks to you most? Why?
6. Take some time to repent of being outwardly religious and yet prayer-less. Ask God to help you abide in him and bear fruit

“Don’t be scared by the word authority. Believing things on authority only means believing them because you’ve been told them by someone you think trustworthy. Ninety-nine percent of the things you believe are believed on authority. I believe there is such a place as New York. I haven’t seen it myself. I couldn’t prove by abstract reasoning that there must be such a place. I believe it because reliable people have told me so. The ordinary man believes in the Solar System, atoms, evolution, and the circulation of the blood on authority -because the scientists say so. Every historical statement in the world is believed on authority. None of us has seen the Norman Conquest or the defeat of the Armada. None of us could prove them by pure logic as you prove a thing in mathematics. We believe them simply because people who did see them have left writings that tell us about them: in fact, on authority. A man who jibbed at authority in other things as some people do in religion would have to be content to know nothing all his life.”

C.S. Lewis

By whose authority?

In December of 2005 the New York Times ran an article by the title “Bush Lets U.S. Spy on Callers Without Courts.” The article explained how George Bush had been allowing the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on Americans and others inside the United States to search for evidence of terrorist activity without the court-approved warrants ordinarily required for domestic spying. Such an action by the President was considered a “sea change” by one former senior official and it raises the question of authority.

Who has the authority to listen in on our phone calls or to read our emails? We live in a day where we feel the right to privacy and when someone claims the authority to invade that privacy it is alarming. It is even more alarming when they do it without our knowledge.

In our everyday lives we encounter people in authority all the time. We get bills in the mail from people who demand that we pay them. We are told by our boss that we have to meet certain deadlines. Or maybe we get pulled over by a state trooper. In most cases we accept their authority and do what they tell us. But sometimes they demand so much from us that we hesitate and start to ask “why?” This small section in Mark is just that. It is a snapshot of the people in Jerusalem

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who first watched the triumphal procession, and then watched the remodeling of the Temple beginning to ask “Why?” They want to know who Jesus thinks he is and why he is acting like he is charge.

Mark 11:27-33



They've arrived in Jerusalem! Jesus and his disciples have been on the way for a long time and now they are finally here. This arrival shows us that we are in new territory both geographically and thematically. This is a big climax moment for Mark's gospel.

The crux of this passage is the question of authority. “By what authority are you doing these things?” And what does “these things” refer to?

Maybe they are referring to Jesus riding into town on a donkey and the crowds shouting Hosanna. And surely they are referring to Jesus' action in the Temple. These were alarmingly bold assertions of power and authority. But maybe they are referring to more than these two events. Just maybe they are referring to his entire ministry. He had been healing lepers,

feeding the masses, walking on water and forgiving sins. His teaching and his actions had all been pointing to his identity, and to the SCANDAL that He was God in the flesh. God had skin on and he was walking and living among them.

“These things” were things that only God could do; the most recent being taking control and ownership of God's own house, the Temple. How audacious and preposterous for a man to act like he owned God's house, unless of course that man was God.

The religious leaders see this audacity and they want to know who this guy thinks he is. Jesus answers them by tying his ministry to John the Baptist. The readers of Mark already know that John the Baptist was sent by God. According to Mark 1:2-4 and in fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 John's authority came from God and therefore so did Jesus' authority. But these religious leaders are blind, they cannot see the obvious.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Which of Jesus' authoritative deeds in Mark so far is most impressive to you? Why?
2. Romans 10:9-10 says to “Confess Jesus is Lord” when was the first time you did that? What were the circumstances that led you to do that?
3. What area of your life today do you need to give Jesus authority over? Let's pray right now to give it over to him.

“Selfishness is the only real atheism; aspiration, unselfishness, the only real religion.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

An Example from Everyday Life

On February 7, 2010 in Super Bowl XLIV Drew Brees led the New Orleans Saints to victory beating the Indianapolis Colts 31 to 17. Brees tied a Super Bowl record with 32 pass completions and won the Super Bowl Most Valuable Player Award. It was the first league championship in Saints franchise history. In 2012 though his team started off the season 0-4 and ended with a losing record of 7-9. What happened?

Well according Adam Schein, a columnist with NFL.com, the reason their 2012 season began so bad was due to selfishness on the part of Drew Brees. Instead of accepting the Saints \$30 Million dollar signing bonus and an annual salary above \$18.5 Million, Brees decided to stall and make a counter offer asking for \$23 Million per year. His selfishness meant that the Saints lost key players before the season even began. His selfishness cost the Saints their all-pro guard Carl Nicks, who left to go to Tampa and Cornerback Tracy Porter.

Yet Drew Brees is not the only one who has moments of selfishness. We too suffer from the same disease. In this chapter of Mark, Jesus confronts selfishness and tells a stinging parable against his opponents who have fallen into the same trap.

Mark 12:1-12



Up until recently Jesus has been journeying to Jerusalem. Now he has arrived and he is confronting the leaders of the religious establishment with their hypocrisy and their selfish fruitless ways.

Jesus tells a parable again like he did back in Mark 4. Those parables also mentioned the importance of bearing

fruit. However this parable does not need Jesus to explain it to the disciples later, everyone already knew what it was about. It was an echo of Isaiah 5 where God describes Israel as a vineyard he had planted.

Now that he is in Jerusalem and he has done his provocative and prophetic action in the Temple Jesus is beginning to get scrutinized by those in power. So he tells them this interesting parable which

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basically sums up history of the nation of Israel from his perspective. The vineyard is Israel, the servants are the Old Testament prophets, God is the owner, the tenant farmers are the Pharisees and religious leaders and Jesus is the “Dearly loved Son” who is killed and thrown out.

This parable is striking for its ending and the scandalous treatment of the owner’s son. Even the listeners are scandalized by the ending and are quick to say the owner should kill those tenant farmers.

When you look at his action in the temple and listen to this parable you start to see how intense Jesus’ conflict with these people is. This is scandalous because if we lived back then we probably would have seen these guys as the most spiritual people among us. We would have seen them as really close to God and great teachers of God’s word. But Jesus calls them fruitless robbers.

There is a recurring theme here from the last chapter and the cursed fig tree. Jesus wants FRUIT from his vineyard and yet he has seen none.

Jesus also gives us a clue here to his identity. He is not just another “servant” or prophet sent by the owner. Jesus puts himself in a different category. He is not just a prophet, he is the Beloved Son!

Jesus then quotes Psalm 118:22-23 “the stone the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone” If they had understood who he really was, then they would not have rejected him. Instead they would have built their lives upon him like a cornerstone. When we understand who Jesus is we will build our lives upon him as well and we will gladly bear fruit for him and not ourselves. This parable tells us who he truly is. He comes like a prophet but he is more than a prophet, he is God’s beloved Son, and he is the cornerstone we are to build our lives upon.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What do people in our culture build their lives upon as their cornerstone?
2. How would our family/group be different if our lives were truly built on Jesus as the rock and nothing else? (read Matthew 7:15-27)
3. Why do you think the tenant farmers were so selfish with their fruit?
4. In what way would you like Jesus to make you less selfish this week? Pray for each other as a group and ask Him to do that.

Week 26

“Hypocrisy in anything whatever may deceive the cleverest and most penetrating man, but the least wide-awake of children recognizes it, and is revolted by it, however ingeniously it may be disguised.”

Leo Tolstoy

Let the match begin

In February of 2011, in Tehran, GM Ehsan Ghaem Maghami, 9-time Iran national champion, set a new world record. Up until this point in history the most chess boards involved in a simultaneous chess exhibition by an individual was 500. Maghami broke that record and set up 604 boards. After 25 hours, the final results were 580 wins, 16 draws and 8 losses for a total score of 588 out of 604 or 97.35 percent. Ten more boards were added which he won but which were not counted for the record. The opponents ranged from ages 5 to 85. Not only did he set a world record but he also proved that he is an amazing chess master.

In a similar fashion when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem all of the religious authorities and leaders come to put him to the test and to challenge him. Their challenges were political, theological and biblical. At each turn they were seeking to show their superiority to Jesus. Unlike Maghami though, Jesus did not lose a single match.

Mark 12:13-17



After aggravating everyone in the temple and then blasting them with a parable Jesus' enemies decide to go on the offensive.

Two groups, the Pharisees and Herodians, gang up together and go to Jesus to try and stump him with a difficult question.

To understand their question one must understand some of Israel's historical and political background. The Jews in

Jesus' day had been occupied by Rome since 63 B.C. which was a painful reminder that they were not God's free children in the land anymore. This pain was increased by the frequent taxing Rome laid on them. Every time a Jew paid a tax to Rome it was like a slap in the face that they were no longer in control of their own land.

God had allowed these unbelieving Gentiles to trample their land and their customs and the taxation was a reminder of their powerlessness

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Another difficult component to the taxation was that Jews were forbidden in the Law to make a graven image, and yet that is exactly what each coin was. Each one had the face of Tiberius Cesear and the words in Latin “Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus.” On the other side it says “High Priest”¹

The question posed in this passage is difficult because if Jesus opposed the tax then they would have something substantial to take to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, indicating that Jesus was inciting revolt. However all of his Jewish followers and listeners surely felt horrible about the tax and so if he simply affirms it he would alienate and disappoint them.

Jesus’ answer falls into neither of these traps. Instead, “The fact that Jesus has drawn attention to the blasphemous

image and writing gives his command the flavor of ‘send this filthy stuff back where it came from!’ It is contemptuous without opening Jesus to the charge of sedition.”²

Caesar not only demanded they pay a tax to him but he also wanted them to worship him. Jesus’ statement then also means, pay Caesar the money but do not give him worship. Worship belongs to God not to Caesar.

Jesus dazzles here with his brilliant response. Like a master chess player playing a hundred games at once. He sees their hypocrisy and they are no match for his wit and intelligence. If the coin made in Caesar’s image is meant to be given back to Caesar then human beings which are made in God’s image are meant to be given back to God in whole hearted worship.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What difficult question do some people today use as an excuse not to become a Christian? What difficult question keeps you from Jesus?
2. How did Jesus “See their hypocrisy”? What does that say about our hypocrisy?
3. Read Romans 12:1-2 as a family/group and talk about what that would look like if you all lived it out.

¹ N.T. Wright *Mark for Everyone* p. 162, 163

² N.T. Wright *Mark for Everyone* p. 163

Week 27

“The point of the resurrection...is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die... What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it...What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God’s future. These activities are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable, until the day when we leave it behind altogether (as the hymn so mistakenly puts it...). They are part of what we may call building for God’s kingdom.”

N.T. Wright

Answering the Big Questions

Every human being has to wrestle with the big questions of life at some point. How did we get here? Why are we here? What is the point? What happens after we die? As post-modern people we have the benefit of technology to keep us busy with mundane and shallow tasks so that we don’t have to think about these things. But we cannot get away from them. At some point, things will slow down, and we will come face to face with those questions. And the answers we come up with will affect every aspect of our lives. They will either fill our days with purpose or with emptiness. This week’s passage we encounter Jesus’ view of life after death. He tells us that death will not have the final word and that as believers we will one day be resurrected with new bodies like he was. Such a profound truth means that every day on earth has eternal implications.

Mark 12:18-27



Here we have Round 2 of Jesus being challenged by the religious leaders of Jerusalem. In the first round they asked him a political question about taxes and now they bring to him a theological question about life after death. Listening to this question feels like you are at Bible college with a bunch of young intellectuals who have no life experience yet but are debating minor

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random doctrines. However the resurrection was no minor doctrine.

Belief in resurrection was a major doctrine which had spawned a huge split in the Jewish establishment between Pharisees who believed in it and Sadducees who did not. This question is their way of trying to show Jesus why they find belief in resurrection unbelievable.

Jesus shows them from the Pentateuch, the very Scriptures they believe in most strongly, that the Resurrection is a real thing. To tell a Sadducee he “does not know the Scriptures” and to ask him “have you not read” is like telling a supreme court judge he has forgotten the constitution. It is an astounding and demeaning statement which is shocking because he has probably been a student of that text his entire life.

The Sadducees were the ultra-conservative priestly aristocracy of Jesus’ day whereas the Pharisees were more influential among everyday Jews. Sadducees saw the resurrection as a dubious doctrine for two main reasons. For beginners it was a revolutionary doctrine that had fueled some of the violent rebellions in second century B.C. . If the Jews believed they would be raised again after death it gave them greater courage to attack their oppressors like the Hasmoneans or the

Romans. Secondly they felt that the most authoritative books of the OT were not in support of the doctrine. The main verses that seemed to be in favor of resurrection were found in Daniel which they considered to be a late book and of uncertain origins.

The question they pose to him comes from Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Genesis 38:8. Where the Scripture commands brothers to marry their brother’s widow and to help carry on the family like. Jesus affirms the reality of the resurrection and shows that he is theologically aligned with the Pharisees on this point against the Sadducees

In the last round Jesus saw his opponents as Hypocrites. However in this round there is no mention of hypocrisy. This may have been a sincere question, one of those super difficult theological conundrums that they were truly hung up about.

They were hung up about the resurrection because they were trying to reason their way into it and the more questions they asked the more impossible the future glory seemed to be. Jesus corrects them by saying that instead of reason they need to rely on two things, the Scripture and the power of God.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Read Luke 24:36-49 as a group and discuss what do you notice about the Resurrected Jesus.

“You are told to love your neighbour as yourself. How do you love yourself? When I look into my own mind, I find that I do not love myself by thinking myself a dear old chap or having affectionate feelings. I do not think that I love myself because I am particularly good, but just because I am myself and quite apart from my character. I might detest something which I have done. Nevertheless, I do not cease to love myself. In other words, that definite distinction that Christians make between hating sin and loving the sinner is one that you have been making in your own case since you were born. You dislike what you have done, but you don't cease to love yourself. You may even think that you ought to be hanged. You may even think that you ought to go to the Police and own up and be hanged. Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained.”

C.S. Lewis

Neighbors

My wife and I lived in Ecuador in a small neighborhood. Our house sat halfway up a hill, about a 20 minute walk to the main bus stop and road. Most days, I had to walk down and catch the bus to get into town to pay our bills, buy groceries, or connect with our leadership team. Just the basic stuff of life. To get to work each day, I would walk down the street which rounded the corner house where my neighbor, Senor Martin, lived. He would greet me each time I walked by. As my Spanish slowly improved, I realized he was also asking me where I was going. A typical greeting would be “Good morning, neighbor. Where are you going today? Are you going down to town today?” Honestly, my first reaction, which lasted for a couple of weeks, was indignation at how nosy this guy was. What gives him the right to pry into my comings and goings? Why does he need to know where I am going? What a jerk. As time went on and the daily greetings followed by faltering conversations in broken Spanish, God began to reveal to me that our conversations consisted of only one jerk; me! In my American cultural analysis of his motives I interpreted his questions as nosy and intrusive. God helped me to understand partly by watching him interact with other neighbors that he treated everyone in the same way. In fact, I learned that he was actually being a good neighbor. He really cared about my life because I was his neighbor. In all the conversations I had with him it never occurred to me to ask if he needed anything from

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down in the town. It is a convicting thought. Here this man who grew up in this neighborhood was reaching out to me, the “missionary” who thought he was being nosy. I missed the point of his questions entirely. His questions were aimed at knowing me, while I thought they were about knowing what I did. In other words he wanted to know who I was. What I did only followed that. He was loving his neighbor as himself. I learned a big lesson about the messed up culture I am from, but also about the culture of the kingdom I am now a citizen of.

Mark 12:28-37



Jesus enters the fray of religious and theological debate as he spends more time in Jerusalem. The Teachers of the Law seek to trap Jesus with clever dilemmas designed to discredit Him and weaken His support. Jesus points out in this passage how they miss the point in all their questions. A teacher listening to the ease with which Jesus refutes these false dilemmas asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. Jesus not only answers his question, but takes the opportunity to redirect the hearts and minds of those listening to the main point. As their questions sub-

side, Jesus asks a question of His own about a Psalm of David which refers to the Messiah. How could David call his descendant his Lord? No one could answer him, but Jesus is connecting some important concepts. Jesus is the one David refers to. Jesus is the main point of the law and the giver of these commandments. These teachers and their followers missed the point while being unable to answer a question about the scriptures which they claimed to teach. Jesus is the point. God always intended the law to point to Jesus, the descendant of David. Inclusion in this kingdom is not about what you do, rather it is about who Jesus is.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Take some time to search your heart, asking, “What is the point of my religious activity and learning?”
2. How is Jesus the point of the Law?
3. Explain in your own words how the Law should point us to Jesus.
4. How would you explain this to a neighbor?

“No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter

Foreshadowing

The famous movie, Wizard of Oz, begins with Dorothy a small town Kansas girl, returning to her family farm. As the story begins, Dorothy interacts with various characters who pop up again later in the movie. Movie makers use reoccurring musical themes or characters to help us see the connections in the story. Foreshadowing subtly predicts events and plot points as the story unfolds. This literary device the author employs builds to the final revelation in the story, making sense of everything which came before. When the events foreshadowed take place the whole story becomes clear.

The incredible reality for followers of Jesus, which Mark brings out in this short account, is that we exist as real characters in God’s story and Jesus is the main character. Throughout God’s unfolding history, Jesus has been foreshadowed in pictures and stories which unlock the beauty and depth of God’s plans. Every aspect of the codes, rituals, sacrifices, festivals, and even structures God built through his people point to the coming Messiah. The Gospels announce his arrival, as Jesus’ life of obedience to the Father ties together the old and new covenants, culminating in his atoning sacrifice at the climax of the story, inaugurating the Church age. The structures and types and pictures no longer serve to announce Jesus. He is building a new temple; his people, who will be his witnesses.

Mark 12:38-13:2



At this point in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate and fulfill Passover with his disciples. Jesus sits in the temple to teach his disciples about the hypocritical religion of those who claimed to be teachers. Jesus contrasts the ostentatious religious practice of those who appear to be giving generously against the tiny gift of two small copper coins put in the offering basket by a contrite widow. Jesus is able to illustrate his teaching in real time as they observe this widow’s gift. What appears on

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the surface to be nothing in comparison with the large amounts of money the rich people put in, is actually in Jesus' estimation more than all the rich people had given collectively. Faith is not measured like currency. Giving money is a matter of faith and percentages. As people who have much give a little out of their surplus, Jesus points out to his disciples that God sees the gift of this poor widow as a precious act of faith. She gave all she had to live on. In the midst of age old traditional structures of worship and venerated religious practice, Jesus declares this will not stand. As they walk out, the

disciples point out all the beautiful stones and buildings. In a prophesy which would begin to be fulfilled some forty years later, Jesus declares not one of these stones would be left on another. Ostentatious religious practice and trappings intended to mask disobedience would be demolished. Faith flourishes on utter dependence, not man-made edifices and human efforts, no matter how impressive they are to human reckoning. The destruction of the temple plays the role of a sacrificial symbol instituting the new covenant and birth of the Church.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Why does Jesus say that this woman gave more than all the others?
2. Is it the woman's poverty Jesus is commending and the riches of the others Jesus condemns?
3. How would Jesus describe our religious practice?
4. Why did God destroy the temple in 70 A.D.? Where is the temple today?

Week 30

“There are two days, today and that day.”

Martin Luther

“The mischief caused by the misuse of eschatology –not least in contemporary America –has resulted in a virtual eclipse of eschatology in the life of the church. This unfortunate set of circumstances –both its abuse and its subsequent neglect –has weakened the church rather than strengthened it. If we dispense with eschatology, then the purpose and destiny of history fall into the hands of humanity alone. No one, I think, Christian or not, takes solace in that prospect. Unless human history, in all its greatness and potential as well as its propensity to evil and destructive-ness, can be redeemed, human life is a futile and sordid endeavor. The longing that things ought not to be as they are, and cannot be allowed to remain as they are, is essentially an eschatological longing”

James R Edwards Jr.

What are you waiting for?

“There is a sucker born every minute,” is a famous quote attributed to PT Barnum, but was probably a statement aimed at Barnum for his audacious claims and circus acts. Harold Camping was a Bible teacher with many followers, who began predicting the day Jesus would come back. In 1992, he wrote a book called “1994?” In this book, he speculated based on his fuzzy math and even fuzzier theological calculations, that Jesus could return in 1994, 98, or 2011, on May 21st, even predicting the hour. This type of deceptive teaching seemed to be exactly what Jesus predicted. Camping convinced many of his followers to sell much of what they owned in preparation for the second coming. The money would go toward advertising for Jesus in case he wouldn’t be able to get the word out to everyone in time. On May 22nd, 2011, reporters gathered outside Camping’s house, which had all the curtains drawn, just to see if he was left behind. Actually, no one had been raptured on the day or hour as he predicted and he promised to speak more the next day. Oddly enough, Camping himself apparently didn’t sell off all his possessions in preparation as he led others to do. When Harold finally gave a statement, he admitted the sinfulness of his teaching, promising no more predictions of the rapture. Camping actually stated that he had not taken Jesus’ teaching that no one knows the day or hour seriously enough, as others had warned him for years.

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Mark 13:1-37



The disciples' questions to Jesus about the future follow on the statement he made that no stone in the temple would be left on another. Some of these stones weighed tons. This utter destruction predicted by Jesus took place in 70 A.D., when the Roman army marched into Jerusalem to rid themselves once and for all of this turbulent city. One historical account describes the destruction to have been so complete that one could not even make out the outline of the old city. Jesus is answering two questions in this passage: first, when will these things happen referring to the destruction of the temple? Second, what will be the sign of Your coming at the end of the age? The two answers overlap but can be distinguished by two phrases. "These

things" refers to the immediate future and the temple and "those days" refers to the end times or the Day of the Lord. Jesus teaching does not focus on the specific details and dates in the future rather he seeks to warn the disciples not to be deceived and be led astray even when destruction comes. Second, he wants them to understand and be prepared for persecution, and to see it as a God-given opportunity to preach the Gospel. Lastly, he wants them to be alert and keep watch not for signs and events but for Him alone. Jesus gives them a message of hope in his sure return not the certainty of dates, to motivate action in the here and now. Jesus' message could be summed up as follows: don't be deceived, preach the Gospel, put your hope in his coming. All of Jesus' teachings about the future point us to attitude and action in the present. Be encouraged.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. If you knew something with certainty about the future wouldn't that change the decisions you made right now?
2. Is your perspective on the future best described by hope?
3. What parts of this chapter encourage you or give you hope?
4. How do Jesus' promises about the future change the way you look at the present?
5. What are some ways to live so that you are not led astray?
6. Has persecution ever turned into an opportunity for sharing Gospel?
7. What does it look like for followers of Jesus in 2014 to stay awake and be on guard?

Week 31

Only what is done for Christ will last.

“There are two types of people in the world...”

How would you finish that sentence? Here are some examples:
There are two kinds of people in the world: Pessimists and Optimists.

“The world is divided into two types of people: those who love to talk, and those who hate to listen.” - James Thorpe

“There are two ways to live: You can live as if nothing is a miracle; You can live as if everything is a miracle.” - Albert Einstein

This sometimes comical dualistic generalization is tempting to believe. If it were up to me, I would say there are two types of people who eat pepperoni pizza: those who say they like canadian bacon and pineapple and those who don't. People choose sides sometimes just for fun, like Apple people and PC people. Or Ford vs Chevy. This tendency can have tragic results when it comes to gang warfare. Even our political system is dualistic and the thought of a third party is a joke, to most. No offense to Ralph Nader. We choose sides. We make a conscious choice to be one or the other. People make these choices for many reasons. Sometimes it is just to go with the crowd, to jump on the bandwagon.

Mark 14:1-11



So far in Mark's Gospel, there have been two categories emerging: Jesus' disciples and everybody else. What grows more and more clear are the divisions caused by Jesus' teaching and miracles. At every turn now, people seem to be deciding which side they are on. Jesus is polarizing and intentionally so.

“Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring

peace, but a sword. 'I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!' “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give

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up your life for me, you will find it.” -Matthew 10:34-39

Jesus is saying there are two types of people in the world: those who keep their lives and then lose them and those who lose their lives for His sake and for the gospel and find them. This passage is a classic Markan Sandwich, meaning that Mark inserts a short story into a longer story. The short story is intended to highlight the lesson Mark is presenting. Here we see two types of people: those who believe and those who want to kill Jesus. The categories become more and more concrete as time goes on. When a nameless woman spends a whole year's wages on the anointing of Jesus for buri-

al, she responds in faith, but also points to the main point of the whole story; Jesus death. At this point, the distinctions between disciple and everyone else begin to break down. The priests and leaders plotting to kill Jesus are joined by Judas who brings them great joy in the midst of Jesus time of sorrow by agreeing with them to betray Jesus. Was it the money this woman “wasted” which set off Judas? The scripture is not explicit, but the disciples were not happy about what she had done, while Jesus praises her actions and includes them intentionally in his story. This story is inviting us to decide where we stand and revealing that there is no middle ground.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. How would you respond to someone pouring out a years wages like we see in this story?
2. Who do you relate to in the story? Share with one another who and why.
3. Jesus says “this’ good news,” or gospel. What good news is he referring to?
4. For further study: Take some time learning about the Passover and it’s significance in these passages.

Week 32

“Then your children will ask, ‘What does this ceremony mean?’ And you will reply, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt. And though he struck the Egyptians, he spared our families.’”

Exodus 12:26-27

“And he said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’”

Luke 22:15

Passover

Passover began in Egypt some two thousand years before Jesus time. The final plague in Egypt took the lives of every first born in the household of those who did not have a special sign on the entrance to their homes. God told the Israelites that He would pass over the land so they had time to prepare. God explains it this way. “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Exodus 12:7

The people did not always keep the Passover, but it has been almost continuously celebrated for nearly four thousand years now. By the time of Jesus, this feast God gave his people had grown in significance to include not only looking back to the deliverance in Egypt but looking forward in hope to the coming of the Messiah. Modern celebrations use the story of deliverance in Egypt to focus on the coming deliverance.

The celebration is an ordered set of prayers, songs, stories, questions, and eating, divided by drinking 4 glasses of wine. Each glass has significance in the celebration and hope. The first glass, called the cup of freedom, reminds us of the deliverance from Egyptian slavery. After this the feast is given. Then four questions are asked and answered, followed by the eating of select portions of food, which

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reinforce the story of deliverance. Next, the second glass, the cup of justice, is finished of. This is followed by a song entitled, “It Would Have Been Enough,” a song of deliverance. Now the third cup called the cup of redemption is taken. Finally after some prayer and song, the fourth glass ends the celebration: the cup of hope, looking forward to the Messiah’s return. Some will have an extra setting at the table for Elijah because he comes before Messiah. They will pause and open the front door in anticipation of Elijah joining them before this cup is taken.

Mark 14:12-31



Jesus earnestly desired to eat this Passover with his disciples. This passage describes Jesus very intentionally walking toward his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God, the fulfillment of the Passover celebration for all time. The hope of this celebration, Jesus leads his disciples, pausing before the bread is eaten to predict that he would be betrayed. Mark paints a clear picture: Jesus is in charge; he is not being tricked or taken anywhere he has not planned to go. The celebration of this Passover highlights God’s sovereignty. Jesus then takes

the cup of redemption. The Jewish people had been drinking this cup for thousands of years, in the hope of redemption. They were a people longing and looking for a deliverer. Jesus enters into this long story and says this cup is a new covenant in His blood. “He was telling them, in effect: “I am the true Passover Lamb who will be offered up for your redemption. This warm red wine that you drink tonight as a symbol of joy, is to remind you evermore of My life’s blood, which will be poured out as an atonement for you!”-David Brickner, “Christ in the Feast of Tabernacles.”

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Talk about some ways Jesus can be shown in your holiday celebrations.
2. Talk about what it must have felt like to be delivered from slavery in Egypt. Share something God has delivered you from.

Week 33

*Go to Dark Gethsemane,
Ye who feel the tempter's pow'r
Your Redeemer's conflict see
Watch with him one bitter hour
Turn not from his griefs away
Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.*

James Montgomery

“For you will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.”

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

Not my will but yours be done

C.S. Lewis is famously quoted as saying, “Either you will say to God, ‘Your will be done,’ or you will here God say it to you.”

“Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!” Jesus responded, “Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!” Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly all was calm.” Matthew 8:23-26

Sleeping through someone’s crisis seems to be the height of apathy. At this point, when the disciples feared for their lives, Jesus lay asleep in the back of the boat. How could he not care for them? What did they expect Jesus to do for them at this point? Did they even know what he could do? Jesus had taught them so much, but they were unprepared for this lesson. As Jesus calms the storm, they sit in wonder, asking themselves, “Who is this man?”

Mark 14:32-52



The disciples to death. James and John claimed they who followed most would drink of the cup he drank from. closely to Jesus Peter claimed that He would never abandon Jesus. swore loyalty even Jesus brings these three insid-

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ers along with him to teach them about prayer and dependence. They are instructed to be alert and stay awake as he went further to pray. Jesus demonstrates the source of strength for a person who trusts God, prayer. The disciples are unable to stay awake and alert because they do not pray. Jesus returns to them three times to wake them, indicating that they are unaware of the critical nature of this night. Their abandonment of Jesus begins as they sleep off his most passionately urgent hours of prayer. Jesus doesn't leave them to themselves no matter how much anguish he faces. Jesus cries out, "Not my will but yours be done!" Then He returns, fully in control of the situation, and ironically informs his lookouts that the betrayer is coming. Jesus goes

to meet his cup, trusting in the Father, as all His disciples turn and run. All have turned away. Jesus stands alone to face the sin of humanity. Everything was happening according to His plans, but the disciples could not yet learn the most important lesson. They had gone as far as their human understanding and effort could take them. Mark inserts the picture of a young man running away naked as they try to grab his cloak. This picture reminds us of the beginning of the story, when a young man ran away naked from God himself. The second Adam did not run. Empowered by prayer and knowledge of the Father's will, He is led like a lamb to the slaughter to take away the sins of the world.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Did Jesus and the Father actually have different plans? Did Jesus feel anguish about God's will for his life?
2. Does doing God's will mean we will always be comfortable and happy? When have you experienced discomfort but knew God sent you? Share your story.
3. What went through the disciples' minds as they ran away? Can you relate to their mindset?
4. How did Jesus treat his disciples... even those who slept while he was in agony? How does his grace draw you closer to him?

Week 34

*“For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar’s angel:
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
This was the most unkindest cut of all”*

William Shakespeare

Mystery Revealed

Secret identities are always enticing. Most of our superheroes have them. Clark Kent is really Superman. Bruce Wayne is really Batman. And Peter Parker is really Spiderman. These characters keep their super powers hidden so that they will not draw unwanted attention from their fans or their foes. And when they go to do good deeds most of our superheroes wear masks so we cannot see their true identity.

Even though Jesus has not worn an actual mask his true identity has been a thing of great confusion. He has been cryptic in some of his teachings, speaking to the crowds in parables while explaining things clearly to his true followers. In addition to that, he has frequently asked people to stay silent or to keep his mighty deeds to themselves. In fact, throughout Mark’s story there has been a constant division between people who knew his true identity and those who did not. To his disciples and his followers Jesus had been clear who he really was. But with his enemies he had been more vague, knowing that they would use anything they could to get rid of him.

Well now at the end we have Jesus revealing himself loud and clear for all to hear in the presence of his most agitated enemies. He knows the consequences of telling his opponents who he really is. And those consequences are actually going to be the highlight of his great superhero rescue of all humankind.

Mark 14:53-73



The trial scene of Jesus is told in stunning contrast here with the denial of Peter. We see Jesus and Peter both being questioned and threatened at the same time. Jesus stands his ground and courageously de-

clares the truth, while Peter is a coward and reveals his deep commitment to self-preservation.

Things are obviously very tense in this moment and a lot is riding on the line. Jesus has been brought before the high council which was like the Jewish Supreme Court. They have one goal in mind.

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Find evidence against him so they can put him to death.

We are not surprised by this turn of events. Way back in Chapter 3 after Jesus healed the man with the deformed man in the synagogue on the Sabbath people began plotting to kill Jesus. And shortly after that, on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus repeatedly predicted his rejection, crucifixion and resurrection. Mark 8:31 tells us, “Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of the religious law. He would be killed but three days later he would rise from the dead.”

In short, Jesus knew this would happen and he had been forewarning his disciples all along. He even predicted that Peter would deny him. This is interesting because one of the main charges brought against Jesus here is that he is a false prophet who is leading the people astray.

Ironically while they are accusing him and condemning him as a false prophet, outside in the courtyard his prophesy about Peter’s denial is coming true.

The climax of this section is verse 61 and 62 where the high priest asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

Jesus replies, “I Am. And you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

There is no secret identity here. At last Jesus feels the time is right to go on record in front of his enemies.

Peter on the other hand keeps his identity hidden. He is surrounded by enemies and instead of laying his life down for Jesus he decides to save his own skin. We see here that truly only Jesus is worthy of our praise. We are all like Peter in need of his grace and forgiveness.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. If you were Jesus, what thoughts would have dominated you when the Jewish leaders gave false testimony about you?
2. If you were Jesus, what feelings would have dominated you when the Jewish leaders treated you so cruelly?
3. What thoughts and emotions do you think Jesus had when he kept silent in 14:61?
4. What desires must have dominated Peter as he denied Jesus those three times?
5. Under what circumstances are you likely to treat people as big and God as small?

Week 35

*“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.
He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”*

Isaiah 53:7-8

The coming servant King

Isaiah prophesied over 700 years before Christ’s birth. He described a suffering servant that would come and be punished for the sins of the people of Israel. Jesus knew what kind of treatment he would endure, which makes his gift of love to us so much more precious.

Mark 15:1-20



As you can see by reading Mark 15:1-20 Jesus endured suffering in the exact manner that Isaiah predicted. Jesus knew what he was going to endure and still went through it because of his great love for us. What a savior!

Take a moment with your family, friends, or missional community/community group and list the different things that Jesus endured for our sake. After you are done **take communion** as a group specifically thanking Jesus for the things he endured willingly for us.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. If you were accused harshly and unjustly, what thoughts would you have? What emotions would you feel? What desires would you have? What would be your temptations?

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2. What was it that made Jesus' not answering the harsh accusations amazing to Pilate? Under what circumstances could you not answer an accusation and have your silence be amazing and full of faith?
3. What are the wrong beliefs that typically accompany jealousy?
4. What bad desires often accompany jealousy?
5. Few people who are man-pleasers know that they are man-pleasers. What do we gain by being a man-pleaser without knowing it?
6. What temptations do you believe Jesus faced when Pilate released Barabbas?
7. How would you like to respond when someone treats you with cruelty?
8. What would be your temptations if someone is cruel to you?
9. What do mockers want the people they mock to feel? What do they want them to desire?

Week 36

“For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. 19 It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.”

| Peter 1:18-19

Grown Gray in the Service of My Country

At the close of the Revolutionary War in America, a perilous moment in the life of the fledgling American republic occurred as officers of the Continental Army met in Newburgh, New York, to discuss grievances and consider a possible insurrection against the rule of Congress.

They were angry over the failure of Congress to honor its promises to the army regarding salary, bounties and life pensions. The officers had heard from Philadelphia that the American government was going broke and that they might not be compensated at all.

On March 15, 1783, Washington's officers gathered in a church building in Newburgh, effectively holding the fate of America in their hands.

Unexpectedly, General Washington himself showed up. He was not entirely welcomed by his men, but nevertheless, personally addressed them...asking them to not lead an armed revolt against the infant democracy of the United States of America.

Washington's speech was not very well received by his men. Fortunately for the country Washington had more to say. He then took out a letter from a member of Congress explaining the financial difficulties of the government.

After reading a portion of the letter with his eyes squinting at the small writing, Washington suddenly stopped. His officers stared at him, wondering. Washington then reached into his coat pocket and took out a pair of reading glasses. Few of them knew he wore glasses, and were surprised.

“Gentlemen,” said Washington, “you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country.”

In that single moment of sheer vulnerability, Washington's men were deeply moved, even shamed, and many were quickly in tears, now looking with great affection at this aging man who had led them through so much. Washington read the remainder of the letter, then left without saying an-

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other word, realizing their sentiments.

His officers then cast a unanimous vote, essentially agreeing to

the rule of Congress. Thus, the civilian government was preserved and the experiment of democracy in America continued.¹

Mark 15:21-39



It moves us to see our leaders share the burdens of the sacrifices that are asked of all of us. Even more so with Christ. We read in Mark 15:21-39 how Jesus bore our sins on a cross. Every time we consider this sacrifice it should remind us how much he loves us and how much it cost him.

Perhaps now would be a good time to stop and thank Jesus for the price he paid to set us free. Let that great price inspire us to put down our rebellious tendencies and follow Jesus closely.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. What thoughts does verbal abuse aim to generate? What emotions? What desires?
2. Do you admire Jesus for refusing to take the wine mixed with myrrh that was offered to him? If yes, why?
3. What do you think were Jesus' temptations when he felt God the father abandoning Him?
4. What do you hope will be your thoughts and your emotions just before you die?

¹ *Story adapted from the historyplace.com*

Week 37

“To finish a work? To finish a picture? What nonsense! To finish it means to be through with it, to kill it, to rid it of its soul, to give it its final blow the coup de grace for the painter as well as for the picture.”

Pablo Picasso

An Ending?

Apparently Picasso was not a fan of finishing his works. As an artist he was always open to new directions and new ways to look at things. And yet we all know that he finished many masterpieces which today sell for millions. His 1932 painting titled *Le Rêve* (the Dream) sold in 2013 for \$155 Million dollars, the fourth most expensive painting sale of all time. His aversion to finishing his works apparently did not keep him back from producing amazing masterpieces.

Mark 15:40-16:8



Mark's genius surpasses Picasso's in many ways. For one his writings have endured now for almost 2,000 years. And secondly they have been translated into hundreds of languages. The United Bible Societies in October 2011 said that there were 469 languages with a complete Bible, and 2527 with at least some portion of scripture translated. In all of these translations Mark plays a central role. And yet when you read his finish is seems strangely unfinished. The oldest and most reliable manuscripts that we have end Mark with verse 8. "The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing

to anyone because they were too frightened."

The women are seen running away amazed and afraid. On closer look this is not as unfinished as it may at first appear. Actually both of these words have been major themes all throughout Mark's gospel. The word "amazed" here comes from the Greek word *exstasis*, which is the same root for our word *ecstatic*. The word is used in only one other place in Mark's story. In a powerful scene in chapter 5 we read about Jesus encountering a dead little girl. "Holding her hand, he said to her, "Talitha koum," which means "Little girl, get up!" And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. Jesus gave them

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strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat.” (Mark 5:41-43)

Jesus is here demonstrating his power over death. It fills the witnesses with ecstasy and they are given strict order to stay silent and “not tell anyone.” Do you see the parallels here with Mark’s ending?

Here in Mark’s conclusion we have Jesus truly conquering death once and for all. He has been raised up by his Father and vindicated as the true King and the true Son of God. The only logical and rational response is to be amazed, ecstatic.

Mark has left us a masterful ending. It feels abrupt and unfinished and that

is on purpose. He has written a clear account of Jesus and his scandalous deeds and claims. Here was a man who was more than a man. He had healed lepers, provided bread in the wilderness and commanded the wind and the waves to obey him. And now he had done the most scandalous thing of all. He had undone death and triumphed in victory over sin and the grave. Who else could this be but God himself!

This is a beautiful scandal of a loving God who took on flesh and who died in our place so that we could be amazed by his glory. The story is not over. It is still continuing in each of our lives, and in each of our churches.

Discussion Questions

These are questions to be asked in your Missional Community/Community Group or around the dinner table as a family.

1. Describe what might have been the emotions experienced the night Jesus died.
2. Contrast that with the “trembling” and “astonishment” that “seized” the women when the tomb was found empty.
3. How does the resurrection change things?
4. What is your response?

“Sandwiches” in Mark

One afternoon, while finishing a new deck our company built, the kind woman who hired us asked if we would like some sandwiches. My foreman immediately accepted the offer. We cleaned up and sat around a small table. A question entered my mind, “What kind of sandwiches?”

Sandwiches come in all sizes and shapes, but generally the contents sandwiched define them. Describing a sandwich without this crucial piece of information only communicates a part of the story. Soon, she emerged, slowly carrying a plate piled high with sandwiches. At this point, I couldn’t escape. Not wanting to be rude or overly picky about free food, I tried to discern what she sandwiched between those two triangles of white bread. By the time the plate landed in the middle of the table, I could see she generously prepared more than enough to feed our small crew.

“These are my favorite,” she said with a smile. “I made plenty. Have as much as you like.” I could now see what her favorite sandwiches contained, but we will get back to that.

I share this little story to introduce a simple, but easy to miss, literary technique Mark employs in his Gospel. The Sandwich Technique, aptly named and understandable, becomes a reoccurring feature in Mark’s retelling of the Good News about Jesus. Scholars have discovered that the structure of some of Mark’s stories is assembled like a sandwich. The point is found in the middle. Mark highlights his lessons by sandwiching a story within a story.

Mark will begin a story, interrupt it by inserting another story right in the middle, and then continue the first story. This is not revealing Mark’s inability to write, but rather an intentional technique. Just as a regular sandwich is defined by the middle, so does the inserted story explain the surrounding story. Mark seems to be highlighting larger theological ideas and themes through this creative combination. Examining one of Mark’s sandwiches will shed light on how this works and help us understand the lessons.

A few guidelines for understanding Markan sandwiches are needed. They are most clearly seen when three parts are discernable. First, you see the beginning of a story; second, a different, but related story; and third, the original story continues to its conclusion. The structure could be outlined as follows A – B – A. The primary story is “A” and the inserted, or middle, story is “B”. B is one story, not many. The middle cannot be so long that the connection between the beginning and ending of the primary story is lost.

With these guidelines in mind, James R. Edwards identifies nine sandwiches in the Gospel of Mark. 1

Appendices

The stories of Jairus' daughter and the suffering woman serve as a clear example of what scholars call a Markan Sandwich. With characteristic irony, Mark weaves these two episodes together into the A –B –A structure, highlighting his intended meaning through the middle story. Mark focuses primarily on theological rather than chronological concerns in relating the Good News about Jesus. The story of Jairus and his daughter illustrate this aim.

Jairus, the local synagogue leader and a respected religious leader in his community, faced the death of his daughter. Jairus displayed his desperation by falling at Jesus' feet, pleading with him to come and heal his daughter. The first story begins here and Jesus went with him through a great crowd. Now Mark inserts a story, section B from our simple outline above. In this crowd stood a woman who suffered for twelve years with a hemorrhage, having spent everything she had to seek help from doctors who made things worse. She knew of Jesus and decided if she could touch his robe she would be healed. So, the woman pushed through the crowd and touched Jesus' robe as he walked by. Immediately, Mark says, she felt her body be healed. Jesus, knowing what had happened, stopped in the middle of the mob and asked who had touched him. His disciples were exasperated and asked how he could wonder who touched him in such a large crowd. But, Jesus waited. The woman eventually came forward and Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."² This ends the short, but poignant, middle story. This is the meat, so to speak, of Mark's sandwiched story.

Now the original story A continues:

"While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now."³

"But Jesus overheard them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."⁴

Jesus then sent the crowds away, taking Peter, James, and John to Jairus' house. Jesus again confronted a crowd, telling them the child was not dead. They left, laughing and mocking Jesus. Jesus took the little girl's hand and told her to get up. Immediately, Mark says, the 12-year-old girl stood up and walked around. Jesus gave her parents strict orders not to tell anyone and that the girl needed food.

An outline would look like this:

Jairus sought out Jesus to heal his daughter; Jesus went with him.

Jesus healed the suffering woman (12 years); commended her faith.

Jesus continued to Jairus' house; healed his daughter (12 years old).

Mark intentionally combines two stories about faith. Notice the connections between the stories. The woman suffered for twelve years and we are told the girl was also twelve years old. The woman's illness only became worse after she spent all she had on doctors. And, as Jesus was talking to her, Jairus was told his daughter had died. The woman was afraid to reveal herself and Jesus told Jairus to not fear, but only believe.

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The parts of the sandwich are connected in such a way to remind and reinforce the lessons.

Ironically, Jairus was a well-respected synagogue leader who approached Jesus from the front and asked Jesus to go with him. The unnamed woman snuck up behind Jesus hoping to be healed without imposing. Jairus and the woman were at opposite ends of the ritual cleanliness spectrum when it came to Jewish law.

Jesus was the last hope for both Jairus and the woman. When hope had died for Jairus, as Jesus was commending the woman's faith, he turned to encourage Jairus to have faith, the very faith demonstrated by this woman. "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."⁵ Jesus encouraged the man and continued on his journey.

"The woman's faith forms the center of the sandwich and is the key to its interpretation. Through her, Mark shows how faith in Jesus can transform fear and despair into hope and salvation. It is a powerful lesson for Jairus, as well as for Mark's readers."⁶

Look for Mark's sandwiches as you read and study. Let these discoveries illumine your understanding of Mark's Gospel. Try to discern what Mark put in the middle and its significance to his overall intention.

As she set the plate in front of me, I could see what kind of sandwiches we had agreed to share. One by one, we grabbed sandwiches filled with bologna, pickles, and a layer of mayonnaise thicker than the bread. She must have used a full jar of Mayo, one of those oversized restaurant jars. Not a fan of Mayo in any amount, I choked down a couple and chased them with lemonade, then made my escape.

The idea of sandwiches at first sounded great, but upon further reflection, it turned out to hinge on what the sandwiches contained.

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Appendices

Textual Criticism

To finally get to the end of the book after weeks and weeks of study is an exciting thing. You expect to come to the climax and to read The author's punch line and finishing statement. And yet when we come to the end of Mark's gospel we encounter a strange phenomenon. Apparently Mark decided to write a choose-your-own-adventure tale, because there is no punch line to be found. Instead we are left with multiple punch lines and multiple options for how Mark might have brought his work to its conclusion.

What is going on here? If this is your first time to read Mark all the way to end it can be quite disconcerting.

The reason the New Living Translation has included these various options at the end of Mark 16 is because the editors of our English Bibles don't know 100% how Mark actually ended his gospel. To understand the reasons behind this requires that you understand the discipline known as Textual Criticism.

When Mark sat down to write his gospel story he did it in the middle of the first Century around 55 A.D. and he wrote it in Koine Greek. Because there were no printers or Xerox machines at the time, Mark wrote his work by hand. And once he finished it, he had to rely on others to make copies of it, also by hand. As time went by, some of those copies were copied and then some of those copies were eventually carried to other places and spread all throughout the Mediterranean world and even into Africa. As those Greek manuscripts which were taken to new places and new people groups were translated into other languages like Latin, Syriac and Coptic. Today we have discovered 5,686 various New Testament pieces and manuscripts from different times and places. For an ancient document to have this many extant copies is really unheard of. Textual Criticism is the discipline of comparing and contrasting all of these different manuscripts in hopes of figuring out what was in the original. This is the work that lies behind the various endings of Mark 16. In most cases it is pretty obvious what was in the original and we have thousands of copies all in agreement. However there are some places where we find a higher level of variation. Yet the variations do not affect the main point of the story. The Holy Spirit was sovereign not only in inspiring the writing of the original but also in preserving the many manuscripts over the years,

Textual Critics look at these 5,000 + manuscripts and do their best to figure out what Mark wrote in his original. And Mark 16 just happens to be a place in the New Testament where there are many many variant readings. Textual Critics compile these different manuscripts and then weigh these different endings using an agreed upon method. The method they use generally looks at four main factors for each variant reading; 1)Date 2) Location 3) Internal evidence 4) External evidence.

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Date - In most cases Textual Critics assume earlier readings are more likely to be closest to Mark's original. So a Greek Manuscript of Mark that was written in the second century is usually considered more close to Mark's original than a manuscript written in the 4th Century.

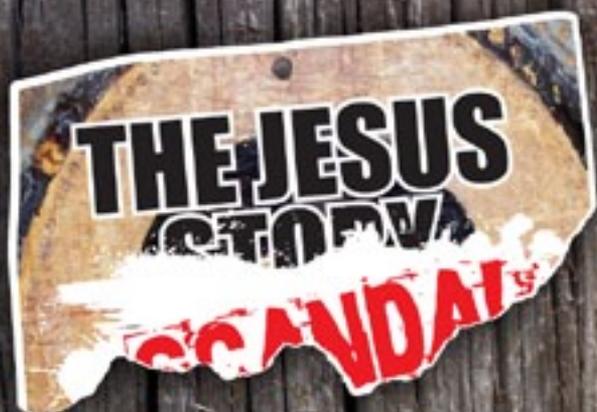
Location - Generally manuscripts that have been discovered nearby where the original was written are given more weight. So a manuscript of Mark from Palestine would be considered closer to the original than a manuscript found in Egypt or

Internal Evidence - Textual critics will look at a book as a whole and compare the variant manuscripts. So in Mark 16 textual critics look at the words and themes present in say the longer ending and they compare that with the words or themes present throughout the rest of Mark. The assumption is that Mark would not change his style or his tone in the last few verses, and that he would not introduce some brand new ideas or concepts.

External Evidence - When evaluating external evidence textual critics will consider the culture at the time that Mark was written as well as other writings either from the early church Fathers or from the rest of the New Testament.

Scholars who have studied Mark 16 have debated this question and made various arguments for either the shorter ending or the longer ending being the original. The editors of your English Bible simply wanted you to be aware of the discussion by showing you all the potential options out there. You can do your own research and come to your own conclusions. There is a helpful article at www.thegospelcoalition.org/mobile/article/justintaylor/an-interview-with-daniel-b-wallace-on-the-new-testament-manuscripts

When we weigh all these factors it seems most likely that Mark ended his story with verse 8 "the women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, and they said nothing to anyone because they were too frightened." This is the reading found in the oldest manuscripts and it contains themes such as "bewilderment" and "silence" that we have seen throughout Mark's story. And just because Mark says they were silent at first does not mean they stayed silent forever. After all how would Mark have known the story if those women had not told others. Maybe they are like the crowd in Mark 7:36 "Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news"



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