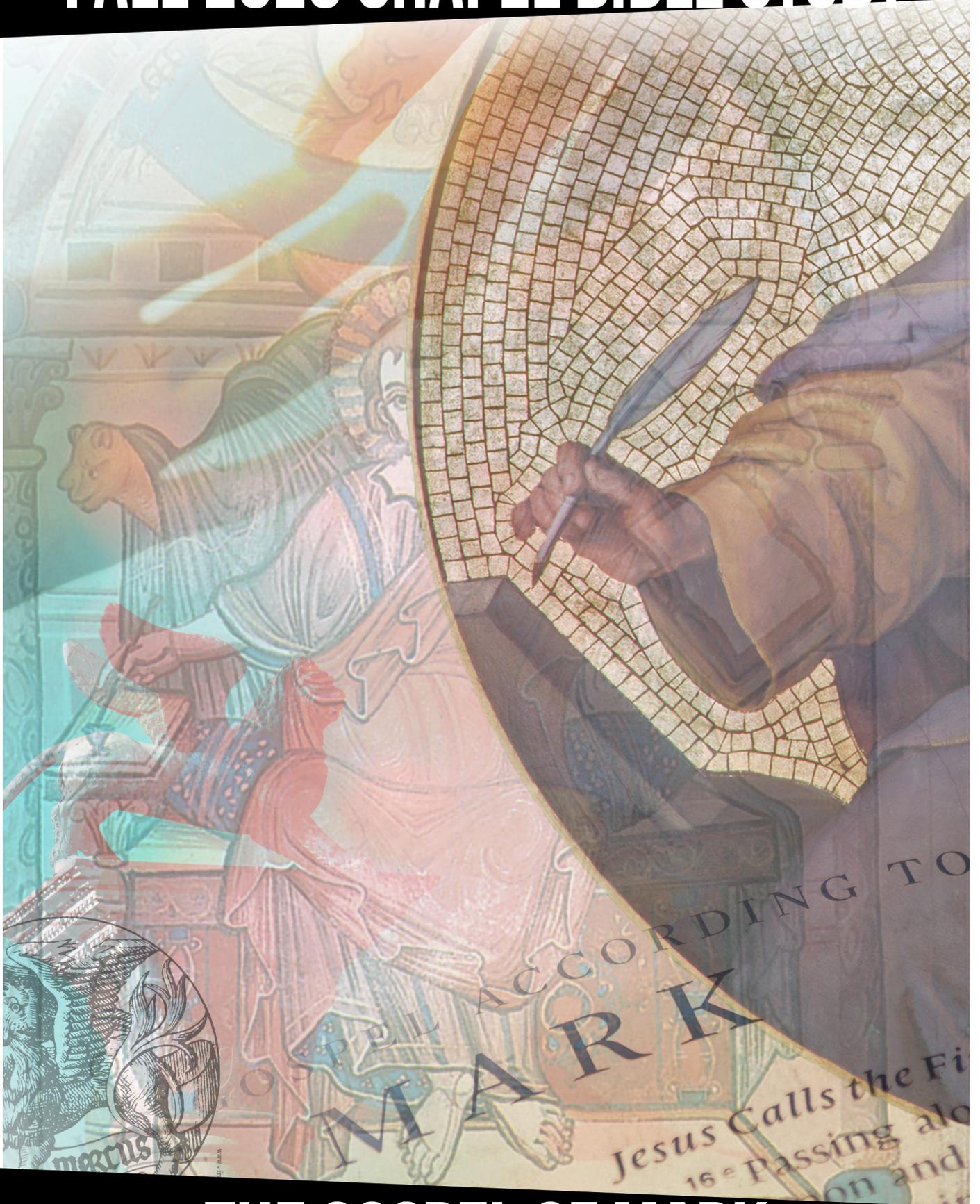


# FALL 2020 CHAPEL BIBLE STUDY



## THE GOSPEL OF MARK



Master/Teacher Model at Louisiana College

## **The Gospel of Mark Bible Study**

Fall Semester 2020

### **Abstract on The Gospel of Mark:**

The Gospel of Mark is believed to be the first Greek Gospel. This Gospel bears the name Mark because of its author John Mark, who was a travel companion of the Apostle Paul. The content for the Gospel of Mark is believed to be the memoirs of the Apostle Peter, which Mark wrote while Peter served out his final days in a Roman prison. The date for writing the Gospel of Mark is debated more than authorship. Dr. Daniel Wallace and other scholars composite that the Gospel of Mark was written probably in the 50's. However, Dr. Bill Warren and other scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was written probably between A.D. 65-70, which supports the date for Markan Priority. The Gospel of Mark reveals Jesus as the Suffering Servant and the Perfect Disciple and calls believers to remain faithful in light of suffering as followers of Christ. This Bible book offers the Louisiana College family a beautiful opportunity to search within for what the Lord is calling you to do but also to realize that suffering is just part of being an imperfect yet faithful disciple of Christ Jesus. I invite you to join the journey this academic year and learn more about Jesus through the heart of Mark, a disciple of Jesus and the Apostle Peter.

## Session 1: Mark 1:1-13

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 1:1-13

<sup>1</sup>The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup>As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, <sup>3</sup>the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight," <sup>4</sup>John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup>Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup>And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." <sup>12</sup>The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup>And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

### Original Meaning:

The opening section of the Gospel of Mark assumes a great deal about the life of Jesus. Mark assumed his audience knew about the immaculate conception of Mary, the virgin birth of Jesus, the genealogy or background of Jesus, along with his early years as a young boy. These assumptions by Mark for his readers is based on the fact that the Gospel of Mark opens with the public ministry of Jesus and the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God from the perspective of Simon Peter, through the writing ability of John Mark. From the beginning of Mark's gospel, the biblical writer connected the life of Jesus with the Old Testament, probably showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. This task is completed as Mark "blends Exodus 23:20 (LX X) and Malachi 3:1 (Heb.), and Mark 1:3 is from Isaiah 40:3 (LXX). Mark adopted a traditional understanding of these verses so he could use them without explanation (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 103).

These verses are to introduce the ministry of John the Baptist, provide a way for the baptism of Jesus, and finally reveal the temptation of Jesus. Through

the ministry of John the Baptist, the role of the forerunner was completed as he preached in the wilderness, even calling the religious leaders from the religious centers, showing that a new day and a new kingdom had arrived. Through the baptism of Jesus, Mark revealed this new day and kingdom centered on Jesus Christ and this observation was confirmed by God the Father. Yet, through the temptation of Jesus, the Father provided a way for future believers to have a way to connect with Him, although the pathway to true worship of God would not come without temptation and suffering by the faithful followers of Christ.

### **Bridging the Context:**

Seeking to bring this Bible passage into a 21<sup>st</sup> century world does not come without problems. The serious Bible student must study through these Bible verses observing that an Ancient Near Eastern context is far different from the Western mindset that we bring to the biblical text. We must understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Yet, we must also understand that Jesus is Son of God in the New Testament, who has ushered into existence the glorious Kingdom of God. Therefore, Mark was calling believers to take the gospel of Christ into a multi-cultural 1<sup>st</sup> century world that was lacking a true Christian worldview. Yet, we are called to bridge the gap for Christ in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world noting how these important events are to shape our understanding of the Kingdom and furthering His kingdom on earth.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

As you work to apply these Bible verses in your life, discuss the role of John the Baptist's ministry for our context. Also, discuss the role of Jesus' baptism for believers in our world, and finally how does the temptation of Jesus give us hope for times in our lives when we will face temptation and trials.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What does it really mean to repent since John the Baptist shared a message of repentance during his ministry?
2. Do you think that people today understand the true message of repentance? Why or why not?
3. Is repentance essential for salvation according to Scripture? Why do you hold the view that you do?
4. Why was Jesus baptized?
5. How does the temptation of Jesus offer 21st-century Christians hope?

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 103.

## Session 2: Mark 1:14-20

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 1:14-20

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." <sup>16</sup> Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

### Original Meaning:

The biblical author moved the reader immediately into the context of Jesus' earthly ministry. John the Baptist had been arrested, which meant that context for Jesus' Kingdom being introduced would not be welcomed well. Yet, Mark shared that Jesus went into Galilee "preaching the gospel of God." Mark used the term "preaching" to mean that Jesus went into Galilee to herald or shout forth the gospel or the good news of God. While the gospel of God was certainly good news, Jesus' introduced the kingdom of God, which would be a threat to Judaism and to the Roman government. Furthermore, his message called religious people and others to a state of repentance and to proclaim their loyalty or allegiance to Jesus rather than Judaism, which would have caused the Jews a problem. Furthermore, the pledging of one's loyalty to Jesus would have caused the Gentiles concern because were fearful of the Roman government. Yet, Mark wanted his Roman audience who were believers to understand that pledging one's faith in Christ for salvation would not come without a cost whether Jew or Gentile. Furthermore, Mark revealed this position by sharing where Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to the ministry or to Follow Me, as Jesus stated. The calling to follow Christ would call the disciples of Jesus to leave their occupation, families, comfortable living, and future to follow Christ and enhance the Kingdom of Jesus.

### **Bridging the Context:**

This Bible passage will call the reader/interpreter to wrestle with what it means to be a Kingdom citizen while still living within one's contemporary context. The reader will need to remember that the Ancient Near Eastern world is much different than the contemporary western way of thinking. This Bible passage will also teach the reader/interpreter to not lose sight of the blessing of being a follower of Christ. While rabbi's in the ancient world would seek out their disciples, Jesus sought out his disciples, seeking to help them embrace a new worldview and to gain the proper perspective as Kingdom's citizens. Finally, the reader/interpreter will wrestle with what it means to be a follower of Christ, even being willing to pay the cost of a Christ follower. This awareness should help everyone realize that being a Christ follower is a serious commitment that should not be taken lightly.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

As you work through these Bible verses, please discuss how being a Kingdom citizen should impact us in our contemporary setting and note the differences in being obedient to the call of God in the 1st century and in the 21st century.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. How would you respond to Jesus calling you to serve in a setting where it was not comfortable or maybe it might even be hostile to the message of Christ?
  2. How would you describe to someone in your ministry setting the word "believe" after learning that Jesus was calling his disciples to a state of complete loyalty to him rather than to Judaism or to the Roman government?
  3. Discuss one significant lesson learned in this portion of the study that you did not know before it.
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## Session 3: Mark 1:21-28

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 1:21-28

<sup>21</sup> And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. <sup>22</sup> And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup>“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup> And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

### Original Meaning:

Capernaum was on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which was the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Therefore, it was logical for Jesus to use this town as the hub for his Galilean ministry. While there Jesus joins a synagogue worship service on the Sabbath. Mark shared that the synagogue attendees were astonished at his teaching because of his authoritative presentation, which was far different than the teaching of the scribes. Suddenly, a man with an unclean spirit became aroused due to the teaching of Jesus and the demon began to speak or cry out to Jesus, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” Mark pointed out this demonic occurrence to show that Jesus was not only Lord of the Sabbath but also that Jesus was Lord over the demons. This observation is proved by two important observations.

The first observation is that Jesus heals this demonic man on the Sabbath, which normally would not have been done because the Pharisaical Law prohibited anyone from healing another on the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus had called for the demon to leave the man on the Sabbath in the synagogue worship service. The second observation is that Jesus called to the demon and the demon responded by submitting to the command of Christ. These two teaching moments encouraged Mark’s audience to embrace for eternal life, which addressed issues in the present but also for the future.

### **Bridging the Context:**

To understand this context, one must take into consideration of the demands of the Law concerning healing and the fact that Jesus was able to heal a demonic man. Further, one must consider how these observations are to be interpreted in the Christian church which may not be the same type of setting as the Jewish synagogue within the first century worldview.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

This Bible passage calls us to understand our role as a member of the church in making Jesus Lord over our lives. Additionally, this Scripture passage helps us to understand the importance of receiving salvation and living out our salvation among people who are hurting and need help.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

In a group discussion, please answer the following questions and state how they apply to your individual life.

1. What does it mean for Jesus to be both Savior and Lord for an individual within a 21st century context in light of this Bible passage?
  2. Do healings still occur in our context or did the healings of Jesus found in Scripture stop when the Apostles died? Which answer to hold to be true and why?
  3. What is the difference between a Jewish Sabbath and the Christian day of worship?
  4. What is the Scriptural background for Sunday being the Christian day of worship?
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## Session 4: Mark 1:29-34

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 1:29-34

<sup>29</sup> And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. <sup>31</sup> And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. <sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

### Original Meaning:

Mark used the word "immediately" in this Bible passage to move the reader to the next movement following the worship service on the Sabbath. It was common after the worship service to gather for a meal, which is the reason for Jesus going to the house of Simon Peter, which likely became Jesus' place for gathering when he was in Capernaum. Upon entering the house, Jesus noticed that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a fever. In those days, an individual with fever was considered to be sick rather than fever being a symptom of a greater sickness. Jesus took her by the hand, the fever left her, and Peter's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus. This news spread rapidly. Therefore, after sunset people began to bring all who were ill and those demon possessed for Jesus to heal them.

### Bridging the Context:

According to Leviticus 26:16 and Deuteronomy 28:22, a fever could be interpreted as a punishment sent by God to those who violated his covenant. According to custom, only God could intervene in such cases.<sup>1</sup> This observation is important to remember as Jesus is showing himself to be God in this Bible passage. The use of Greek language and the use of the imperfect tense with Jesus helping her up renders that as Jesus took her hand the healing was instant and not to be considered to be any type of process.

**Contemporary Significance:**

The contemporary significance of this Bible passage communicates the instant healing that Jesus brought to this situation. This biblical account also makes us wrestle with the question of has this type of healing stopped with the end of the apostolic era. A further thought is does healing through medical means discount the healing observed in this Bible passage. I would argue that God uses modern medicine to bring healing and sometimes Jesus heals people instantly. The point of the passage is that Jesus heals for the glory of the Father and the advancement of the Kingdom.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Based on this teaching and the biblical background do you believe that Jesus uses doctors and modern medicine instead of this type of miraculous healing account in our world? Why or why not?
2. How can we be involved in the process of healing within the circle of our influence?
3. What do you believe is considered healing in our world?

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney L. Cooper, Mark, vol. 2, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 14.

## Session 5: Mark 1:35-45

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 1:35-45

<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons. <sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." <sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. <sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." <sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

### Original Meaning:

The two stories before this passage demonstrate Jesus' authority to do the miraculous. In 1:21-28 he drives out a demon and in 1:29-34 he heals a woman of an illness. This miraculous power becomes known quickly throughout the surrounding towns and Mark even states that "the whole town gathered at the door" (1:33)! What's different here is that Jesus isn't just some nomadic miracle-worker who relies on magic or some other divination to perform the miraculous, "his authority, strength, and power come from God alone." The evidence for this comes in Jesus' need for solitary prayer and reflection that we see in our first passage, 1:35-39.

As Jesus' popularity begins to rise, notice the balance in how he handles his humanity and divinity. On one hand, he knows he cannot engage in his mission without the help of God the Father, so he actively seeks a place where he can get away from the crowds so that he can focus on prayer. But on the other hand, he doesn't shy away from the mission by staying in a place of solitude. In 1:38-39, now replenished from his time of communion with the Father, Jesus calls his disciples to follow him to the other towns so that he can preach the good news.

When we encounter the story of the leper who is healed, we must keep in mind that in their culture a disease or illness was thought to be a result of some sin that person committed. This leper was not only unclean but considered to be under God's punishment. As a result, only God could heal this person. So when Jesus comes along and does just that, it is evidence that Jesus has this same power and authority. It should come as no surprise, then, that in the very next story (2:1-12), Jesus proclaims forgiveness of sins for a paralyzed man.

### **Bridging the Context:**

Both short stories in this larger passage present Jesus as fully human and fully divine. Jesus' humanity is on display in the first story (1:35-39). We see his need for communion with the Father in prayer as he embarks on his mission. In fact, three times in Mark's Gospel we see Jesus seek out a solitary place so that he can pray. In all three cases, these times of prayer are followed by something miraculous or significant in the course of Jesus' ministry.

In the second story (1:40-45), Jesus' divinity is on display. Mark's design here is intentional. As you read through the Bible it is important to notice its marvelous literary design. Mark wants us to remember the uniqueness of Jesus in that he was both fully human but also fully divine. He can identify with us in our weakness and frailty, but as God he helps us overcome our weaknesses as we grow to become more like him. We should take comfort in the fact that he is more than willing (as he said to the leper in the text) to heal us.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

1. If times of solitary reflection and prayer were necessary for Jesus, how much more so are they for us? We cannot underestimate the significance of prayer for our spiritual walk. It is the fuel that drives our mission of reaching all people with the gospel message.
2. The message of the gospel is always accompanied by evidence of the gospel's power to change lives. Jesus demonstrates this for us in 1:38-39. However, we must not assume that if we don't see something miraculous happen when the gospel is proclaimed that God is not at work. At the very least, we are the evidence of the power of the gospel as we live out its message and as we faithfully proclaim it to those around us. Our lifestyle must match our message.
3. Early in Jesus' ministry, the crowds actively sought him out not because of his message but because of his miracles. As Christ-followers, we must be careful not to emphasize one over the other or we risk miscommunicating to non-believers what Jesus' ministry is all about.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. When was the last time you spent a considerable amount of time in solitary, uninterrupted prayer? Commit to making this practice a regular part of your week. Schedule it and stick to it. If Jesus needed it, so do we!
2. How can you be faithful this week to proclaim the gospel message? Think about someone (friend, peer, family member, co-worker) who not only needs to **see** the gospel lived out but **hear** the message as well. Pray for that person and pray for the opportunity this week to talk to them about this.
3. Do some self-evaluation: Are you following Jesus because of his message or his miracles? Be honest before God about this, and make the necessary changes in your thinking and in your lifestyle.

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<sup>1</sup> David Garland, *Mark* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 73.

<sup>2</sup> See Garland, 81–83 for more information on this concept. For an Old Testament example of evidence of the belief that only God could heal leprosy, see 2 Kings 5:7.

## Session 6: Mark 2:1-12

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 2:1-12

<sup>1</sup>And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. <sup>2</sup>And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. <sup>3</sup>And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. <sup>4</sup>And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. <sup>5</sup>And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." <sup>6</sup>Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, <sup>7</sup>"Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" <sup>8</sup>And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? <sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— <sup>11</sup>"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." <sup>12</sup>And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

### Original Meaning:

Gospel stories are like all stories. They contain the basic elements like characters, setting, and sometimes a lengthy plot. When we read the Gospel stories we need to take all these features into account in order to discover the meaning of the text. This passage about the paralytic who was healed is a wonderful example of this. The characters (or character groups) in this story are the crowds, the paralytic and his friends, and the teachers of the law. The setting is the Gentile town of Capernaum and the event takes place in someone's home which is packed full of people. Remember that there were Jews and non-Jews present, so the tension in the house is thick. Everyone who is present may have different motives for being there, but all are curious as to what Jesus might say or do.

Jesus' primary critics in the Gospels are the Jewish leaders and teachers. Verse 6 tells us that these folks are present. After Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness

of sins, the teachers of the law thought to themselves and determined Jesus was committing blasphemy. And then Mark tells us that Jesus knew their thoughts. The fact that Jesus oftentimes perceives someone's thoughts shows up a good bit in the Gospels. It is almost always negative and results in Jesus challenging this wrong way of thinking. In verse 8 we read that Jesus "knew in his spirit" what they were thinking.

Another background item that surfaces in this passage is their understanding of miracles. Unlike our post-Enlightenment, scientific age, they didn't ask the question of whether or not the miraculous could happen. For them it was a question of what power was at work and to what end. So, when Jesus heals the paralytic, notice that they attribute this power to God (2:12 - "They praised God."). The rest of the Gospel story will address the question of "to what end?"

### **Bridging the Context:**

Another important aspect of stories in the Gospels is that they often contain a "twist." The twist functions to direct our attention to the true issue at hand or the primary message Jesus seeks to convey. In this passage, Jesus performs two "miracles": he forgives the sins of the paralytic and he physically heals the paralytic. Notice the order: the forgiveness happens first, followed by Jesus' healing of the man. The order of events is significant. In the context of a large group of people, think about which of the two was actually harder. Was it the declaration that the man's sins were forgiven or the healing of man? We would probably all agree that forgiving someone's sins would be the harder, especially since only God can do this. But in their culture someone could very well make that proclamation and no one really know if it took place or not. However, if you tell a paralytic to get up and walk, it will be evident immediately to all whether that person has the power and authority to heal. Therefore, the healing was in fact the more difficult of the two. <sup>1</sup> In our text it is evidence that Jesus indeed has the authority to forgive sins. Finally, we see from the crowd's response of amazement that they recognize Jesus' authority not only to heal but to forgive sins.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

1. The primary human dilemma is not sickness but sin.
2. More often than not, Jesus interrupts the status quo of our lives. He doesn't always do or say what we expect. Many times this is because our perspective is misplaced and he is trying to realign it to fit the worldview of the gospel.

## Questions for Discussion:

1. We see how the crowds responded to Jesus' miracle. We don't see immediately in this passage, however, how the Jewish leaders responded. What about you? How do you or will you respond to Jesus' authority to perform the miraculous in your life? Have you recognized his authority to forgive your sins and has this led to a life of continual praise and gratitude? Is it difficult to respect leadership that you do not find to be equitable?
2. 2020 has been a year of interruption after interruption. During this crazy time where nothing seems certain, how should we respond to what life throws at us? How might we gain God's perspective on our situation so that we can fully trust him and serve despite how difficult life gets?

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<sup>1</sup> In the Old Testament, the people were instructed how to distinguish between a true prophet and a false prophet; it was based on whether what the prophet proclaimed came true or not (see Deuteronomy 18:22). Thus, Jesus' healing of the paralytic confirmed his authority as prophet and, in this passage, also his power/authority to forgive sins.

## Session 7: Mark 2:13-22

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup> He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. <sup>14</sup> And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. <sup>15</sup> And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup> And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>17</sup> And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." <sup>18</sup> Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. <sup>21</sup> No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. <sup>22</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."

### Original Meaning:

This Bible passage has several movements within it that need to be considered. First, Mark highlighted Jesus calling Matthew as a disciple. As already noticed in previous studies, Jesus sought out his disciples rather the traditional means of a first century disciple seeking out their particular rabbi for mentorship. Mark noted that Matthew was a tax collector, which is important because tax collectors were not people who were liked by the majority of the common folk.

However, the second movement presents Jesus associating with sinners. Naturally, the religious leaders were troubled with Jesus eating and drinking with the social outcasts, which led to Jesus saying, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick." With the religious leaders being called out, they shifted the conversation which led to the third movement: the question on fasting.

The idea of fasting usually revolved around the annual Day of Atonement where it was seen as an act of repentance. However, the Pharisees promoted voluntary fasting on Monday and Thursday as an act of their piety. The point

here is that Jesus was enjoying a festival type setting when in the minds of the Pharisees, they should have been fasting too.

Yet, the fourth movement emerged in the latter part of 20 where the disciples of Jesus would be fasting in a metaphorical sense, which is the first hint of the cross event in the gospel of Mark. Thus, Mark recorded where Jesus used two parables which had a broader application for the Jewish audience: Jesus' presence with his people would replace the old religion of Judaism.

### **Bridging the Context:**

When we seek to bridge the gap of a first century world and our 21st world, we need to embrace the difference in calling a disciple in that world than in our world. It is much different. We are to embrace Christ as he comes searching for us in our lost condition. Yet, we also must identify with the fact that Jesus has called us to associate with sinners rather than being isolated from them. It is through our embracing sinners that we are able to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Finally, we need to understand the radical difference of embracing the gospel rather than seeking to carry out the rituals of a religion.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

The contemporary significance of this Bible passage speaks to the need for Christians to understand one's purpose of calling. We are called to take the gospel to the ends of the world. Additionally, we are called to love people like and unlike us. We are to embrace the hurting and social outcast with the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, we need to practice spiritual disciplines like prayer and fasting, but we must also avoid allowing our Christian experience to become like a mundane religion. Christianity is not a religion but a choice to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to share his life with others.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What has God called you to do according to this Bible passage?
  2. How are you taking the gospel to the ends of the earth right now?
  3. What can you do to improve on this responsibility of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth?
  4. What spiritual disciplines do you practice daily and weekly?
  5. How can you improve your Christian life so that you can make a greater impact on this culture and your community?
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## Session 8: Mark 2:23-3:12

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 2:23-3:12

<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>26</sup> how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" <sup>27</sup> And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

<sup>1</sup> Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." <sup>4</sup> And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. <sup>5</sup> And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. <sup>7</sup> Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. <sup>9</sup> And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, <sup>10</sup> for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. <sup>11</sup> And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." <sup>12</sup> And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

### Original Meaning:

While we could take this Bible passage and divide it into three distinct periscopes, this passage actually has a common theme that connects all three: Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath. The statement that Jesus is Lord over the Sabbath is found in Mark 2:23-28 where they picked grain on the sabbath, which was not acceptable according to the Pharisees. Yet, Mark

gives us the summary statement in Mk. 2:28 right before Jesus goes into the synagogue and heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The man with the withered hand would have been a social outcast but usually it was unacceptable to heal on the Sabbath also, according to the religious leaders. With Jesus picking grain and healing on the Sabbath, naturally, the religious leaders felt threatened and started to work with even political groups to destroy Jesus. Yet, the healing on the Sabbath caused great crowds to follow Jesus, which is found in the last part of the Bible passage. With the demons addressing Jesus as the Son of God, Jesus furthered instituted the Messianic Secret, go and tell no one.

### **Bridging the Context:**

When we seek to bridge the context on the Bible passage, one will need to study some Old Testament passages Deut. 23:25ff along with 1 Sam. 21, 2 Sam. 8, 1 Chron. 24 and Leviticus 24. Additionally, one might want to read Exodus 27 to get a better understanding concerning the Sabbath.

One will also want to study divine healing from a first century perspective. You can look in commentaries as you prepare to teach this lesson and you should also look in NT background books for help.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

In our post- modern culture and pluralistic society, the idea of Lordship being equated with salvation brings challenges for people to embrace. Yet, Mark clearly identified Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath using OT Bible passages to show that Christ was the fulfillment of the OT. Mark also revealed that as Lord, Jesus was able to heal, which should cause people today to migrate toward Christ for both spiritual and physical healing. Yet in our society, we do not see large crowds following after Christianity or the gospel. Therefore, we must seek to understand how to better communicate the gospel; thus, pointing people to Christ.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What is your view of Lordship being associated with true biblical salvation? Why do you hold this view?
  2. Do you believe in divine healing? Why do you hold your position?
  3. How can we better reach people with the gospel when culture is arguing for their many ways to God?
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## Session 9: Mark 3:22-35

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 3:22-35

<sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." <sup>23</sup> And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup> But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— <sup>30</sup> for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." <sup>31</sup> And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. <sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

### Original Meaning:

Jesus' fame in Galilee has obviously reached down south into Jerusalem. It is still early in his earthly ministry but word has gotten out about his miracles and his teaching. It speaks volumes that scribes from Jerusalem would travel to that region just to try to discredit Jesus' authority. Notice the claim they make as to how Jesus is able to cast out demons: "'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons'" (3:22). To understand the dynamics at play, we need to remember that miracles were a common part of religious and spiritual belief in the first century. The primary difference between their understanding of the miraculous and our 21st-century, post-Enlightenment perspective is that we either believe miracles happen or we do not; they believed, for them it was a matter of what power was at work and why. So the scribes' answer as to what power was at work in Jesus was that it was Satan. Jesus' response to this claim is simple: that makes no sense! This leads to his primary rebuttal in verses 24-26: a kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus continues by informing them of the power at work behind his miracles: the Holy Spirit. He then chastises them for blasphemy because they have spoken falsely against the Holy Spirit in their claim that Satan was at work.

Go back and read 3:20-21 and jump straight to 3:31-35. We discover that there's something going on with Jesus' family in the background. Kinship was

a vital part of the cultural values in Jewish culture. It was how one identified oneself and one way in which honor/shame was conveyed. I discuss this part of the text in the next section (Bridging the Context).

### **Bridging the Context:**

Even at this early stage in Jesus' ministry, the crowds and the Jewish leaders recognize Jesus' authority to perform miracles and to teach with an authority they hadn't yet witnessed. As a result, they are seeking an explanation as to the source of this power. Even though the discussion between Jesus and the scribes centers on the spiritual forces at work in his miraculous healings, that exchange is actually bracketed by what's going on within Jesus' own family. In 3:20-21, his family is coming to the house to "take charge of him" because they thought he wasn't in his right mind. It is clear that they do not fully understand who Jesus is because they are more concerned about any shame that might come upon them rather than supporting his ministry. Then, at the end of the passage (3:31-35), the family arrives and Jesus makes the declaration that his true family are those who do God's will. In short, a bird's-eye view of the text reveals that this is a lesson in what the true family of God is all about.

The point of Jesus' illustration is that a kingdom/house that is divided cannot stand. While this clearly indicates that Jesus wasn't casting out demons by the power of Satan, it also teaches us that the kingdom of God cannot stand if members of that kingdom (or "family") aren't on the same page. Understanding this helps clarify why Jesus calls the people in the house his family while his actual family was standing outside. They got it, Jesus' family—at least at this point in his ministry—didn't fully get it. What about you?

### **Contemporary Significance:**

1. Jesus is not a lone ranger or a one-shot wonder when it comes to his miracles. He's not seeking to wow the audience to produce an emotional response that is void of any long-term change or commitment. He always joins his actions with foundational teaching about God, God's people, or—as is the case in our text—the Holy Spirit.
2. The kingdom of God is not characterized by division.
3. Whoever does God's will is part of the family of God.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are some ways you would respond to someone who tries to explain away Jesus' miracles? What are some barriers we have today in understanding Jesus' miracles?
  2. How is the family of God like a biological family? How is it not? How does disagreement and division affect the mission of God's people?
  3. What does it mean to do the will of God?
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## Session 10: Mark 4:1-20

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 4:1-20

<sup>1</sup> Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. <sup>2</sup> And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: <sup>3</sup> "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup> And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." <sup>9</sup> And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." <sup>10</sup> And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, <sup>12</sup> so that " 'they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.' " <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word. <sup>15</sup> And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. <sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. <sup>18</sup> And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

### Original Meaning:

The parable of the sower (or seeds) is a familiar one to most Christians. What is unique about this parable, though, is that it is only one of a few that Jesus actually interprets for us. (And that's important because the Gospels contain around 42 parables!) The structure of the text is straightforward: parable of the sower (4:3-8), a statement on the purpose of parables (4:9-12), and an explanation of the parable (4:13-20).

In the parable we are presented with four different types of "soil" on which the seed falls. When we observe the parable and its interpretation by Jesus, it is evident that

a good crop depends on the type of soil which receives it. As Garland states, "The sowing of the seed reveals the nature of the soil, whether it will produce a harvest or not." In the central part of the text (4:3-8), Jesus informs the disciples that what he desires for them to "hear" is not just any word/message, but the message about the kingdom of God. And this is an important reminder of the main teaching of all parables: the kingdom of God. The parables reveal to us either the nature of the kingdom, the people of the kingdom, or the King of the kingdom.

The primary point of this parable is the connection between hearing and obeying. People will respond variously to the message of the gospel, but the intended response is that true hearing of the message leads to obeying the message and its ethical implications. In verse 9 Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That final phrase "let him hear" is actually a command. This reinforces for us the urgency of hearing, understanding, and obeying the gospel message. In Jesus' explanation of the parables in verses 13-20, we also see that genuine hearing should result in production of a crop. There should be a natural byproduct of us living out the word of the kingdom that impacts our moral decisions.

### **Bridging the Context:**

While the agrarian setting of this parable might not connect with everyone, the simple teaching of how we receive and respond to the message of the kingdom does. We are provided with four different ways people could respond to this message, with the last option of the good soil being the intended type of reception/response. Seed that falls on good soil will produce a lasting, quality crop. Likewise, if we "hear" the message of the kingdom and put it into practice it will yield a crop in our own lives and in the lives of others. This crop is described as fruitful, yielding many times more than what was sown.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

1. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of the Word.
2. The kingdom of God is a challenge for us to reorient our perception on life by adopting God's perspective.
3. The kingdom of God is presently at work and is established as people respond positively to the message.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Consider the three examples of negative responses to the kingdom message and how they are impacting your obedience and fruitfulness for the kingdom of God:
  - a. Have you allowed Satan to steal away the word the Lord has for you? Our enemy wants nothing more than to prevent the kingdom message to take root in your heart.
  - b. Have you allowed trouble or difficulty to prevent you from hearing the word?
  - c. Have you allowed material things to make you spiritually unfruitful?
2. What does "bearing fruit" right now in your life look like as a student?

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<sup>1</sup> Garland, 155.

## Session 11: Mark 4:30-34

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 4:30-34

<sup>30</sup> And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, <sup>32</sup> yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." <sup>33</sup> With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. <sup>34</sup> He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

### Original Meaning:

The parable of the mustard seed is one of the most familiar parables in the New Testament. It is a simple analogy between a mustard seed (and the resulting plant) and the kingdom of God (and the resulting growth of the kingdom). The contrast in the parable centers on something small that has an unexpected and large impact. One author says "the mustard seed is one millimeter in diameter and is so tiny it requires from 725 to 760 seeds to equal one gram" and it "grows quickly to a height of about ten feet and has large leaves, especially at its base."

If this is what the mustard plant is like, then what does Jesus mean by comparing the kingdom of God to it? Simply put, he seems to be referring to both the present kingdom and the future kingdom. The present kingdom is what Jesus was sharing with the people during his earthly ministry. It is represented in the parable by the mustard seed. The message and teaching of Jesus may go unnoticed by some or may seem insignificant in light of the larger Roman Empire, but the point is that it is beginning and it is powerful. As for the future aspect of the kingdom, as Jesus' words are carried on by his followers the kingdom will continue to grow and become more impactful than anyone can imagine. This aspect of the kingdom is represented in the parable by the mustard plant with its large branches and leaves.

### Bridging the Context:

When interpreting this parable we must avoid two pitfalls and remember two themes. First, we need to guard against comparing our day to Jesus' day. In our day, many believers associate Christianity or the church as the thing that Jesus spoke of when he referenced the large branches and leaves of the mustard plant. This line of thinking is arrogant and fails to take into account what was happening in Jesus' ministry. Moreover, in Mark's Gospel up to this point Jesus' ministry is not portrayed as small or having minimal impact; Jesus is always surrounded by large crowds and sometimes he cannot even eat or move around because of the people. As Garland puts it, "We too

quickly identify the kingdom of God with our own human aspirations and institutions that 'reach unto heaven' and 'make us a name.' We tend to be overly impressed with mass movements and high-powered organizations." <sup>1</sup>

Second, we must not combine this parable's teaching with that of the parable on having faith like a mustard seed. The two are different and teaching different lessons about the kingdom and our faith. While personal, spiritual growth is important, our text is speaking to the reality of the kingdom at large.

The two themes to remember are: 1) the hiddenness of God's kingdom and 2) confidence that the kingdom is working to produce a harvest. <sup>2</sup>

### **Contemporary Significance:**

There are other parables like this one in the New Testament, parables that speak of the large impact of something small. Consider the following points of application from parables like these: <sup>1</sup>

1. They instill confidence that overcomes despair.
2. They make the case that the seed's success does not depend on our feeble efforts but on our powerful God.
3. They encourage patient faith.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. How does the parable of the mustard seed encourage you in your walk with Christ? How does it help you overcome feelings of smallness, unworthiness, or despair?
2. If God brings about kingdom growth, then what is our role in the kingdom?
3. Why is waiting difficult for us? How can you cultivate patience this week?

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<sup>1</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 220.

<sup>2</sup> Garland, 182.

## Session 12: Mark 4:35-41

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 4:35-41

<sup>35</sup> On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. <sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" <sup>39</sup> And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

### Original Meaning:

The Lake of Galilee was notorious for its storms. They came literally out of the blue with shattering and terrifying suddenness. A writer describes them like this: "It is not unusual to see terrible squalls hurl themselves, even when the sky is perfectly clear, upon these waters which are ordinarily so calm. The numerous ravines which to the north-east and east debouch upon the upper part of the lake operate as so many dangerous defiles in which the winds from the heights of Hauran, the plateaux of Trachonitis, and the summit of Mount Hermon are caught and compressed in such a way that, rushing with tremendous force through a narrow space and then being suddenly released, they agitate the little Lake of Gennesaret in the most frightful fashion." The voyager across the lake was always liable to encounter just such sudden storms as this.

Jesus was in the boat in the position in which any distinguished guest would be conveyed. We are told that, "In these boats...the place for any distinguished stranger is on the little seat placed at the stern, where a carpet and cushion are arranged. The helmsman stands a little farther forward on the deck, though near the stern, in order to have a better look-out ahead."

It is interesting to note that the words Jesus addressed to the wind and the waves are exactly the same as he addressed to the demon-possessed man in Mark 1:25. Just as an evil demon possessed that man, so the destructive power of the storm was, so people in Palestine believed in those days, the evil power of the demons at work in the realm of nature.

When the disciples realized the power and the presence of Jesus, He not only calmed the storm around them, but also within them. Once they knew he was there fearless peace entered their hearts. To voyage with Jesus was to voyage in peace even in a

storm. Now that is universally true. It is not something which happened once; it is something which still happens and which can happen for us. In the presence of Jesus we can have peace even in the wildest storms of life.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

- i. He gives us peace in the storm of sorrow. When sorrow comes as come it must, he tells us of the glory of the life to come. He changes the darkness of death into the sunshine of the thought of life eternal. He tells us of the love of God.
- ii. He gives us peace when life's problems involve us in a tempest of doubt and tension and uncertainty. There come times when we do not know what to do; when we stand at some cross-roads in life and do not know which way to take. If then we turn to Jesus and say to him, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" the way will be clear. The real tragedy is not that we do not know what to do; but that often we do not humbly submit to Jesus' guidance. To ask his will and to submit to it is the way to peace at such a time.
- iii. He gives us peace in the storms of anxiety. The chief enemy of peace is worry, worry for ourselves, worry about the unknown future, worry about those we love. But Jesus speaks to us of a Father whose hand will never cause his child a needless tear and of a love beyond which neither we nor those we love can ever drift. In the storm of anxiety he brings us the peace of the love of God.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. During this season of uncertainty, what are some of the things that you are most anxious about?
  2. How do you deal with anxiety and fear?
  3. What are some passages of scripture or songs that you like to read or listen to during storms and trials of life?
  4. What are some ways that you can minister to students around you that are struggling with or going through a storm?
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## Session 13: Mark 5:1-20

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 5:1-20

<sup>1</sup> They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>2</sup> And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, <sup>4</sup> for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. <sup>7</sup> And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." <sup>8</sup> For he was saying to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" <sup>9</sup> And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." <sup>10</sup> And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup> Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, <sup>12</sup> and they begged him, saying, "Send us to the pigs; let us enter them." <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. <sup>14</sup> The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup> And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. <sup>17</sup> And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their region. <sup>18</sup> As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. <sup>19</sup> And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." <sup>20</sup> And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

### Original Meaning:

Here is a vivid and rather eerie story. It is the kind of story in which we have to do our best to read between the lines, because it is thinking and speaking in terms quite familiar to people in Palestine in the days of Jesus but quite alien to us.

If this is to be taken in close connection with what goes before--and that is Mark's intention--it must have happened late in the evening or even when the night had fallen. The story becomes all the more weird and frightening when it is seen as happening in the shadows of the night.

Mark 5:35 tells us that it was late in the evening when Jesus and his friends set sail. The Lake of Galilee is 13 miles long at its longest, and 8 miles wide at its widest. At this particular part it was about 5 miles across. They had made the journey and, on the way, they had encountered the storm, and now had reached land. It was a part of the lake-side where there were many caves in the limestone rock, and many of these caves were used as tombs in which bodies were laid. At the best of times it was an eerie place; as night fell it must have been grim indeed.

Out of the tombs there came a demon-possessed man. It was a fitting place for him to be, for demons, so they believed in those days, dwelt in woods and gardens and vineyards and dirty places, in lonely and desolate spots and among the tombs. It was in the night-time and before dawn "Before the Cock-Crowed" that the demons were specially active. To sleep alone in an empty house at night was dangerous; to greet any person in the dark was perilous, for he might be a demon. To go out at night without a lantern or a torch was to court trouble. It was a perilous place and a perilous hour, and the man was a dangerous man.

How completely possessed this man was is seen in his way of speaking. Sometimes he uses the singular, as if he himself was speaking; sometimes he uses the plural, as if all the demons in him were speaking. When asked his name he said his name was Legion. There were probably two reasons for that.

A legion was a Roman regiment of 6,000 troops. A very common sight were Roman regiments clanking along a road, and that image was one that immediately conjured up fear and terror in their eyes. The Jews believed that no man would survive if he realized the number of demons with which he was surrounded. There was a Jewish saying, "A legion of hurtful spirits is on the watch for men, saying, 'When shall he fall into the hands of one of these things and be taken?'" No doubt inside this wretched man, a mass of those demons had taken up their residence in him. The word Legion conjured up a vision of terror and death and destruction.

### **Contemporary Significance:**

This is one of the most riveting accounts in all of Scripture; nothing like this display of power over demons is recorded in Scripture since God Himself threw Satan and all the evil, rebelling angels out of heaven. That was a massive upheaval. That was a sweeping act by God, in which He vacated heaven of Satan and a third of the angels. Thousands, and thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, innumerable angels were thrown out of heaven in one moment by the power of God.

There has been no display like that until this. And there won't be another display like this until the time of the tribulation comes to an end, Christ sets up His Kingdom, and binds Satan and all the demons for a period of a thousand years, and then throws them into the lake of fire. This kind of power over the kingdom of darkness is only possible when God is wielding it. Whether it's in the casting out of heaven, or the casting into the lake of fire, or here, casting thousands of demons out of one man, this is the power of God on display.

This is the most extreme encounter with the powers of supernatural wickedness anywhere in Scripture. There are no such accounts in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, this is far and away the most extreme, and the most extensive. Our Lord, throughout His ministry, vanquished demons. He did it regularly. He did it repeatedly. He did it often. But there was no such display as this one. This, to indicate that He is, in fact, the Messiah, that He is the Savior, that He is the Son of God.

That He is God in human flesh, who wields absolute, limitless power over the forces of hell, Satan and all his realm. Now, this is part of Mark's proof. If you go back to his purpose - chapter 1, verse 1, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" - Mark is writing the history of Jesus to prove He is the Son of God.

John sums up that objective for all four writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, when at the end of the fourth gospel, the gospel of John, written last of all the four, he says, "These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you might have life in His name." So, the purpose of this is evangelistic, but in order to get you to believe in Christ, you must know who He is, and here is more powerful evidence that He is, in fact, God the Son. He is deity.

If He is the true Messiah, if He is the Lord of heaven come down, He must be able to conquer Satan, or He cannot bring the everlasting Kingdom. He must have power over the natural world, because the promise of the prophets is that He, the Messiah, is going to come and restore the earth, and lion will lie down with lamb, and the desert will blossom like a rose, et cetera, et cetera. There will be a restored, rejuvenated, restructured earth, that will approximate the Garden of Eden.

Does He have the power to do that over nature? We just saw in the last incident how He controlled the wind and the waves. Yes, He has the power to do that. The Kingdom to come and the assembly of saints in heaven are those whose lives have been transformed by His power. Does He have the power to transform people's lives? He has demonstrated that again, and again, and again. He can overcome everything. The curse - He can overcome the curse in terms of nature, He can overcome the curse in terms of illness and disease, He can raise the dead.

He has all the power required to establish an everlasting Kingdom. And as part of that, He has demonstrated the power over Satan and all his hosts, and here, in a way that has no parallel. His divine power vanquishes, by a command, thousands of demons. Remember now, it was said, first of all, of the Messiah, in Genesis 3:15, that He would crush the serpent's head, so whoever this Messiah is, he has to wield mighty power over Satan and his hosts, and here it is on exhibit again. There are ultra-fastidious people who will blame Jesus because the healing of the man involved the death of the pigs. Surely it is a singularly blind way to look at things. How could the fate of the pigs possibly be compared with the fate of a man's immortal soul? We do not, presumably, have any objections to eating meat for dinner nor refuse pork because it involved the killing of some pig. Surely if we kill animals to avoid going hungry, we can raise no objection if the saving of a man's mind and soul involved the death of a herd of these same animals. There is a cheap sentimentalism which will languish in grief over the pain of an animal and never turn a hair at the wretched state of millions

of God's men and women. This is not to say that we need not care what happens to God's animal creation, for God loves every creature whom his hands have made, but it is to say that we must preserve a sense of proportion; and in God's scale of proportions, there is nothing so important as a human soul.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Do you believe in Demons? What are Demons? Are they Real?
  2. Do you think that Christians can "over-sensationalize" issues concerning the demonic and evil realm?
  3. Is this a topic that needs to be addressed more frequently? Why do you think that we are hesitant and reluctant to do so?
  4. Read Ephesians 6:12-17. What kind of tools does this passage give us concerning the war that wages in our world?
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## Session 14: Mark 5:21-43

### Text of The Gospel of Mark 5:21-43

<sup>21</sup> And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. <sup>22</sup> Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet <sup>23</sup> and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." <sup>24</sup> And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. <sup>25</sup> And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, <sup>26</sup> and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup> She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. <sup>28</sup> For she said, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well." <sup>29</sup> And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. <sup>30</sup> And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my garments?" <sup>31</sup> And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, 'Who touched me?' " <sup>32</sup> And he looked around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." <sup>35</sup> While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" <sup>36</sup> But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." <sup>37</sup> And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. <sup>38</sup> They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. <sup>39</sup> And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." <sup>40</sup> And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup> Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." <sup>42</sup> And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup> And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

## Original Meaning:

There are all the elements of tragedy here. It is always tragic when a child is ill. The story tells us that the ruler's daughter was twelve years of age. According to the Jewish custom a girl became a woman at twelve years and one day. This girl was just on the threshold of womanhood, and when death comes at such a time it is doubly tragic.

The story tells us something about this man who was the ruler of the synagogue. He must have been a person of some considerable importance. The ruler was the administrative head of the synagogue. He was the president of the board of elders responsible for the good management of the synagogue. He was responsible for the conduct of the services. He did not usually take part in them himself, but he was responsible for the allocation of duties and for seeing that they were carried out with all seemliness and good order. The ruler of the synagogue was one of the most important and most respected men in the community. But something happened to him when his daughter fell ill and he thought of Jesus.

- i. His prejudices were forgotten. There can be no doubt that he must have regarded Jesus as an outsider, as a dangerous heretic, as one to whom the synagogue doors were rightly closed, and one whom anyone who valued his orthodoxy would do well to avoid. But he was a big enough man to abandon his prejudices in his hour of need. Prejudice really means a judging beforehand. It is a judging before a man has examined the evidence, or a verdict given because of refusal to examine it. Few things have done more to hold things up than this. Nearly every forward step has had to fight against initial prejudice. When Sir James Simpson discovered its use as an anaesthetic, especially in the case of childbirth, chloroform was held to be, "a decoy of Satan, apparently opening itself to bless women, but in the end hardening them, and robbing God of the deep, earnest cries, that should arise to him in time of trouble." A prejudiced mind shuts out a man from many a blessing.
- ii. His dignity was forgotten. He, the ruler of the synagogue, came and threw himself at the feet of Jesus, the wandering teacher.
- iii. His pride was forgotten. It must have taken a conscious effort of humiliation for this ruler of the synagogue to come and ask for help from Jesus of Nazareth. No one wishes to be indebted to anyone else: we would like to run life on our own. The very first step of the Christian life is to realize that we cannot be anything other than indebted to God.
- iv. Here we enter the realm of speculation, but it seems to me that we can say of this man that his friends were forgotten. It may well be that, to the end, they objected to him calling in Jesus. It is rather strange that he came himself and did not send a messenger. It seems unlikely that he would consent to leave his daughter when she was on the point of death. Maybe he came because no one else would go. His household were suspiciously quick to tell him not to trouble Jesus any more. It sounds almost as if they were glad not to call upon his help. It may well be that this ruler defied public opinion and home advice in order to call in Jesus. Many a man is wisest when his worldly-wise friends think he is acting like a fool.

Here was a man who forgot everything except that he wanted the help of Jesus; and because of that forgetfulness he would remember for ever that Jesus is a Saviour.

The woman in this story suffered from a trouble which was very common and very hard to deal with. The Talmud itself gives no fewer than eleven cures for such a trouble. Some of them are tonics and astringents; but some of them are sheer superstitions. No doubt this poor woman had tried even desperate remedies. The trouble was that not only did this affect a woman's health, it also rendered her continuously unclean and shut her off from the worship of God and the fellowship of her friends (Leviticus 15:25-27).

Mark here has a gentle jibe at the doctors. She had tried them all and had suffered much and had spent everything she had, and the result was that she was worse instead of better. The physicians had had no success with the treatment of this woman's case, and she had heard of Jesus. But she had this problem--her trouble was an embarrassing thing; to go in the crowd and to state it openly was something she could not face; and so she decided to try to touch Jesus in secret. Every devout Jew wore an outer robe with four tassels on it, one at each corner. These tassels were worn in obedience to the command in Numbers 15:38-40, and they were to signify to others, and to remind the man himself, that the wearer was a member of the chosen people of God. They were the badge of a devout Jew. It was one of these tassels that the woman slipped through the crowd and touched; and, having touched it, she was thrilled to find herself cured.

Here was a woman who came to Jesus as a last resort; having tried every other cure that the world had to offer she finally tried him. Many and many a man has come to seek the help of Jesus when he himself was at his wits' end. He may have battled with temptation until he could fight no longer and stretched out a hand, crying, "Lord, save me! I perish!" He may have struggled on with some exhausting task until he reached the breaking-point and then cried out for a strength which was not his strength. He may have labored to attain the goodness which haunted him, only to see it recede ever farther away, until he was utterly frustrated. No man should need to be driven to Christ by the force of circumstances, and yet many come that way; and, even if it is thus we come, he will never send us empty away.

5:30-34 Jesus was well aware in himself that the power which issued from him had gone out of him; and immediately, in the middle of the crowd, he turned and said: "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples said to him: "Look at the crowd that are crushing you on every side--what's the point of saying, 'Who touched me?'" He kept looking all round to see who had done this. The woman was terrified and trembling. She knew well what had happened to her. She came and threw herself down before him, and told him the whole truth. "Daughter!" he said to her, "Your faith has cured you! Go, and be in good health, free from the trouble that was your scourge."

This passage tells us something about three people.

- i. It tells us something about Jesus. It tells us the cost of healing. Every time Jesus healed anyone it took something out of him. Here is a universal rule of life. We will never produce anything great unless we are prepared to put something of ourselves, of our very life, of our very soul into it. No pianist will ever give a really

great performance if he glides through a piece of music with faultless technique and nothing more. The performance will not be great unless at the end of it there is the exhaustion which comes of the outpouring of self. No actor will ever give a great performance who repeats his words with every inflection right and every gesture correct like a perfectly designed automaton. His tears must be real tears; his feelings must be real feelings; something of himself must go into the acting. No preacher who ever preached a real sermon descended from his pulpit without a feeling of being drained of something.

If we are ever to help men, we must be ready to spend ourselves. It all comes from our attitude to men.

The greatness of Jesus was that he was prepared to pay the price of helping others, and that price was the outgoing of his very life. We follow in his steps only when we are prepared to spend, not our substance, but our souls and strength for others.

- ii. It tells us something about the disciples. It shows us very vividly the limitations of what is called common sense. The disciples took the common-sense point of view. How could Jesus avoid being touched and jostled in a crowd like that? That was the sensible way to look at things. There emerges the strange and poignant fact that they had never realized that it cost Jesus anything at all to heal others.

One of the tragedies of life is the strange insensitiveness of the human mind. We so often utterly fail to realize what others are going through. Because we may have no experience of something, we never think what that something is costing someone else. Because something may be easy for us we never realize what a costly effort it may be for someone else. That is why we so often hurt worst of all those we love. A man may pray for common sense, but sometimes he would do well to pray for that sensitive, imaginative insight which can see into the hearts of others.

- iii. It tells us something about the woman. It tells us of the relief of confession. It was all so difficult; it was all so humiliating. But once she had told the whole truth to Jesus, the terror and the trembling were gone and a wave of relief flooded her heart. And when she had made her pitiful confession she found him very kind.

5:35-39 While he was still speaking, messages came from the household of the ruler of the synagogue. "Your daughter," they said, "has died. Why trouble the teacher any more?" Jesus overheard this message being given. He said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Don't be afraid! Only keep on believing!" He allowed no one to accompany him except Peter and James and John, James' brother. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue. He saw the uproar. He saw the people weeping and wailing. He came in. "Why," he said to them, "are you so distressed? And what are you weeping for? The little girl has not died--she is sleeping." They laughed him to scorn.

Jewish mourning customs were vivid and detailed, and practically all of them were designed to stress the desolation and the final separation of death. The triumphant victorious hope of the Christian faith was totally absent.

Immediately death had taken place a loud wailing was set up so that all might know that death had struck. The wailing was repeated at the grave side. The mourners hung over the dead body, begging for a response from the silent lips. They beat their breasts; they tore their hair; and they rent their garments.

The rending of garments was done according to certain rules and regulations. It was done just before the body was finally hid from sight. Garments were to be ripped to the heart, that is, until the skin was exposed, but were not to be rent beyond the navel. For fathers and mothers the rent was on the left side, over the heart; for others it was on the right side. A woman was to rend her garments in private; she was then to reverse the inner garment, so that it was worn back to front; she then rent her outer garment, so that her body was not exposed. The rent garment was worn for thirty days. After seven days the rent might be roughly sewn up, in such a way that it was still clearly visible. After the thirty days the garment was properly repaired.

Flute-players were essential. Throughout most of the ancient world, in Rome, in Greece, in Phoenicia, in Assyria and in Palestine, the wailing of the flute was inseparably connected with death and tragedy. It was laid down that, however poor a man was, he must have at least two flute-players at his wife's funeral.

The wail of the flutes, the screams of the mourners, the passionate appeals to the dead, the rent garments, the torn hair, must have made a Jewish house a poignant and pathetic place on the day of mourning.

### **THE DIFFERENCE FAITH MAKES (Mark 5:40-43)**

There is a very lovely thing here. In the gospel itself, "Maid! Arise" is "Talitha Cumi", which is Aramaic. How did this little bit of Aramaic get itself embedded in the Greek of the gospels? There can be only one reason. Mark got his information from Peter. For the most part, outside of Palestine at least, Peter, too, would have to speak in Greek. But Peter had been there; he was one of the chosen three, the inner circle, who had seen this happen. And he could never forget Jesus' voice. In his mind and memory he could hear that "Talitha Cumi" all his life. The love, the gentleness, the caress of it lingered with him forever, so much so that he was unable to think of it in Greek at all, because his memory could hear it only in the voice of Jesus and in the very words that Jesus spoke.

## **Contemporary Significance:**

This passage is a story of contrasts.

- i. There is the contrast between the despair of the mourners and the hope of Jesus. "Don't bother the Teacher," they said. "There's nothing anyone can do now." "Don't be afraid," said Jesus, "only believe." In the one place it is the voice of despair that speaks: in the other the voice of hope.
- ii. There is the contrast between the unrestrained distress of the mourners and the calm serenity of Jesus. They were wailing and weeping and tearing their hair and rending their garments in a paroxysm of distress; he was calm and quiet and serene and in control.

Why this difference? It was due to Jesus' perfect confidence and trust in God. The worst human disaster can be met with courage and gallantry when we meet it with God. They laughed him to scorn because they thought his hope was groundless and his calm mistaken. But the great fact of the Christian life is that what looks completely impossible with men is possible with God. What on merely human grounds is far too good to be true, becomes blessedly true when God is there. They laughed him to scorn, but their laughter must have turned to amazed wonder when they realized what God can do. There is nothing beyond hope, and there is nothing beyond conquest--not even death--when it is faced and conquered in the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Is a desperate faith a good faith? Have there been moments of desperation that The LORD intervened and made Himself real to you?
  2. Why does it seem that The Lord doesn't display physical miracles like this anymore?
  3. What if the Lord doesn't answer our requests in the way we wished or hoped?
  4. True or False: Salvation from Jesus is THE greatest miracle of all? In what way?
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