



COMMUNITY
BIBLE CHURCH

FOLLOW ME

Mark 8:34

6 Studies From Mark 1-5

Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

So maybe you're wondering: "Why Mark? What's the big deal about this book?" Here are five reasons we are captivated by this slim book about Jesus:

Early. Reading Mark should thrill us, for this compact gospel offers us the very earliest record of Jesus found in the New Testament. It's an astounding privilege to read and study the very first "gospel" ever written. It's a joy to see Jesus through the eyes of people like Peter, individuals whose lives had been transformed by their relationship with Christ.

Essential. Mark has been described as "the essential gospel" (W. Barclay). This is the shortest of the four Gospels. Yet within its 661 verses, we discover a powerful and concentrated survey of Jesus' ministry and a succinct synopsis of His teaching. Mark may be small . . . but it's mighty and it's memorable!

Exciting. Mark's writing style is vivid, punchy and direct. Its narrative is fast-paced, progressing rapidly from one episode to the next. Keep your eyes peeled for one of Mark's favourite adverbs, "immediately" (or "at once"), which will appear over 40 times within the book.

Evangelistic. Mark moves vigorously from one incident to the next. But there also is a powerful unifying centre to the book. That centre is Jesus Himself. Nearly every section of every chapter revolves around Christ (there also are two sections about John the Baptist) and points us to Him—Who He really is, what He has done, what He says, what it means to follow Him. Immerse yourself in Mark, and you will get to know Jesus better.

Exclusive. If a journalist were to review this Gospel, Mark's account would be billed as "exclusive!" For in these stories, we are privileged to witness Jesus' actions and words from an *insider's* perspective. Not only were these events recorded within a lifetime of Jesus' time on earth, they also were based on eyewitness evidence. Mark gives us access to moving and otherwise unknown details, such as the description of Jesus in the fishing boat sleeping with His head tucked on a pillow (Mark 4.38). We gain perspective as we learn that when Jesus taught about children, He actually had scooped a little one up and was holding it in His arms (9.36; 10.13-16). We learn that even as He was challenging the rich young man, Jesus looked at him and loved him (10.21). Our hearts are stirred as we witness, through Peter's eyes, that as the disciples were setting off for Jerusalem and the suffering of the Cross, *Jesus was walking ahead of them* (10.32). Such small yet vivid details not only corroborate the book's historicity, they also draw us into the world of the Bible's text and help us to feel near to our Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Author of Mark

When it comes to the authorship of this Gospel, the early and reliable records of the Church are unanimous in identifying Mark, or John Mark, as the writer. Early sources agree that this gospel was created as Mark drew on the preaching of the apostle Peter, and then—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—shaped those stories and accounts of Jesus’ teaching into a clear, concise, cross-oriented book. It’s fascinating to compare the shape and structure of Mark’s Gospel with Peter’s sermons (e.g., Acts 10.36-40).

Throughout the New Testament, we find numerous hints about how Mark’s early life was providentially shaped in preparation for the momentous task of writing his Gospel.

Read Acts 12.12. What do we learn about Mark’s mother’s home?
How would this prepare Mark for writing the Gospel?

Tradition has identified this home, where believers gathered and prayed, as also being the site of the “upper room” (Acts 1.13; 4.31). Interestingly, Mark’s is the only Gospel to mention this upper room (14.13-15), the Bible doesn’t explicitly state that it was Mark’s home. But what an intriguing possibility to consider!

Read Acts 12.25; 13.5 What major early church leader did Mark accompany on a missionary journey? (Curious about how this initial association ended? See Acts 13.13; 15.36-39)

Read Acts 15.36-39 How was Mark involved in his cousin Barnabas’ ministry?

Read Philemon 24 How does Paul’s later describe Mark (see also Col. 4.10)?

Read 2 Timothy 4.11 How did an elderly Paul evaluate Mark’s contribution to the church?

Read 1 Peter 5.13 How did Peter refer to Mark?

The Good News of the Kingdom

MARK 1.1-15

Study #1

Renew your acquaintance with Mark's Gospel by reading 1.1-15. Return to, and re-read, Mark 1.1, the opening sentence, which introduces us to the entire book. Notice how carefully it has been crafted, how each term is weighted with meaning for us.

1. As does Genesis, Mark's introductory verse refers to "the beginning." What great, new act of salvation from God will begin unfolding in the following verses? How will it, like the "beginning" of Genesis 1, be creative and cosmic in its significance?

2. "Gospel" is a key term in today's reading (see vv. 1, 14, 15). The English word "gospel" conveys the idea of "good news." Mark will demonstrate that this unfolding of "good news" is actually rooted in Old Testament prophecy. Read Isaiah 40.9-11 and 52.7. List everything which could be called "good news" (or "glad tidings," [NIV]).

Keeping this list in mind, can you offer examples of how Jesus fulfills Isaiah's "good news" prophecies? How has this gospel of Jesus been "good news" to you personally?

3. Now, return to Mark 1.1. The OT promises of "good news" start to be fulfilled and come to a focus in one individual, the individual around whom the Gospel of Mark revolves. This good news is, in fact, "the gospel of _____, the _____ of _____." Jesus is the very heart of the Gospel of Mark, and the very heart of the gospel, the "good news." All God's purposes from eternity express themselves in Him. A new age of salvation is launching in His teaching and ministry, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

4. Let's consider how Mark describes the central figure of his book:

Jesus. "Jesus" was the Greek form of the personal name "Joshua," a Hebrew name meaning "The Lord saves." See Matthew 1.20-21. Who chose this name for Jesus? Why?

OPTION: How does Jesus resemble Joshua of the Old Testament? How is He greater?

Christ. “Christ” comes from the Greek form of the Hebrew word for “Messiah.” It means “the Anointed One.” Read Luke 2.10-11. Why was the arrival of the Messiah “good news of great joy”(Matt. 5.17)?

Why was it vital for His followers to understand that Jesus was the Christ (see Mark 8.29)?

OPTION: Enjoy Isaiah 61.1-3, a prediction of the Anointed One.

the Son of God. The claims of verse 1 keep progressing. First we learn Jesus’ given name (common among boys His age). Next we encountered the title, “Anointed One” (Messiah). What staggering claim does verse 1 now make?

Discover who else in Mark also refers to Jesus Christ as the Son of God, an audacious claim that this man Jesus was fully God, equal to God, and of the same substance as Him:

1.11; 9.7

3.11

14.61-62

15.39

OPTION: Learn what Peter boldly proclaimed to “all Israel” in Acts 2.36.

One of the delights of Mark’s Gospel is that it beautifully portrays Jesus as both fully human and fully God (divine). Is your view of Jesus likewise balanced? Do you cherish both His full humanity and full divinity? What dangers lie in having an unbalanced view of Jesus? As you read and study Mark—how do you need to grow?

Lesson 1

5. While this gospel is new, it also is firmly rooted in God's past promises and ongoing purposes. How do vv. 2-3 portray the events of Mark 1 as a flowering of Old Testament prophecy? What (who) is predicted?

6 a. Scan verses 4-8 and 9-11. What two individuals are introduced, and how are they connected with each other?

b. Describe John the Baptist's forerunner ministry (vv. 4-6) and message (vv. 7-8).

c. What two key events launch and validate Jesus' ministry (vv. 9-11, vv. 12-13)? How do Mark's succinct accounts offer us a privileged "behind-the-scenes" perspective?

Consider Jesus' baptism and temptation. How do these two occasions prepare our hearts to listen to Jesus? What does he model for us, His followers?

7. Re-visit verses 14-15. How is Jesus' message described (v.14)?

What two statements summarised Jesus' first declaration of "the gospel of God" (v. 15)?

Jesus' life and teaching brought near the saving and sovereign reign of God. What two responses did Jesus demand (v.15)?

Jesus called for His followers to respond to God's saving initiative with repentance and belief. Do you consider repentance and belief to be one-time acts, occurring only at conversion? Or as ongoing in the believer's life?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1.15).
2. Invest 15 minutes in Isaiah 52.7. Read it several times. Think through each phrase. Use this jewel of promise as a template of praise to Jesus, Who perfectly fulfills these promises of “good news of happiness”.
3. As we approach this study of Mark, let’s bear these words in mind: *We think we know [what the Bible says] but we can be so wrong . . . It can be most exciting and stimulating to keep coming back to familiar passages with our minds genuinely open to new ideas and insights. That is what we are going to do with the gospel of Mark . . . What will it tell us about the message and the person of the great Servant King, Jesus Christ, the Son of God?* (A. Plass).
4. *The Gospel of Mark tells the Good News about Jesus Christ so simply that a child can understand it. Nevertheless, . . . like a pool of pure water, it is far deeper than it looks. Therefore we ought to approach the study of this book humbly and with due recognition of the need for wisdom from almighty God and enlightenment from the Holy Spirit* (W. Wessel). Commit your study of Mark to the Lord, relying on His Spirit for humility, wisdom, and enlightenment.

All Authority

MARK 1.16-34

Study #2

Jesus calls His disciples to Himself. Mark 1.16-20

1. Re-read vv. 14-15, a summary of Jesus' message, then turn to vv. 16-20 to watch Jesus begin His ministry. Notice that this *is not something sensational—a spectacular miracle or mighty sermon—but a simply summons of four common labourers into fellowship with himself* (J. Edwards).

a. Describe what we can learn about those whom Jesus met and then summoned to Himself (vv. 16, 19, 20).

b. What are these ordinary men doing when they encounter Jesus? Why is it significant that this critical encounter didn't occur at their local synagogue?

c. Describe Jesus' call (v. 17). Why is it extraordinary? OPTION: Read 3.13-14.

d. What do we learn from the disciples' responses to Jesus' call?

...and _____ they left their nets and _____ Him (v. 18) . . . He called them, and they left their father in the boat with the hired servants and _____ Him (19).

OPTION: See 2.14 for Levi's call.

Let's not race through this seemingly familiar passage. Consider: what did following Jesus actually involve for these men? Read Mark 10.28; how did the disciples perceive their discipleship? A recent conversation in our evangelical culture asks the question: "Are you a *fan* of Jesus? Or a *follower*?" How does this text clarify our ideas about "following" Jesus?

DIG DEEPER OPTION: Read Jeremiah 16.14-21. How does the Old Testament background of "fishing for people" enrich our appreciation of this passage?

A Day in the Life of Jesus: Showdown at the synagogue. Mark 1.21-28.

2. Read vv. 21-28. Where does Jesus begin His ministry, according to Mark, and what does He begin to do (v.21)? How do vv. 14-15 & 38 shape your understanding of this initial ministry?

3. What is the public response, first to His words (teaching; v. 22) and then to His work (exorcism; v. 27)?

4. What was it about Jesus' teaching that people found so amazing, even astonishing (v.22; cf. v. 27)?

Throughout Mark, we'll repeatedly witness Jesus teaching. Being His disciple meant listening to Him. Does our relationship with Jesus include this component? How can we allow Him to teach us? What have you found helpful?

5. How is the authority which Jesus displayed in His teaching immediately validated, right there in the synagogue (vv.25-26)?

Authority. It's not a popular word or concept in the 21st century. Yet Mark leaves us in no doubt that we must acknowledge the authority of Jesus. Why does our culture rebel so against authority? How does this influence us in our spiritual lives? What significance does Jesus' authority have for our daily lives?

Lesson 2

6. Mark teaches that Jesus has sovereign authority to control demons. He even has the power to restrain their speech. Why did Jesus' muzzle this unclean spirit (cf. v. 34)? What did evil spirits unwillingly confess about Jesus' identity?

1.24

3.11 (&12)

5.2, 6-7

7. Jesus is vividly portrayed as authoritative and powerful, superior to even satanic forces. How do Jesus' early conquests over demons (1.23-25, 32-34; 5.1-20; 9.14-27, etc.) point ahead to His work on the Cross? See also Col. 2.15.

A Day in the Life of Jesus. Lunchtime at Simon's. Mark 1.29-31

7. The scene shifts from the public arena of the synagogue to the privacy of Simon's and Andrew's home. What happens here and how does it deepen our insight into the breadth of Jesus' authority?

8. Look carefully at this brief episode. How does v. 31 help us to see the tenderness of Jesus also? If you have the time, skim also vv. 40-42.

To which do you tend to gravitate: the sovereign authority of Jesus? Or His tender, healing kindness? Why do we need to embrace Jesus' full identity? What can help us keep our view of Him in balance?

A Day in the Life of Jesus: Later that evening . . . Mark 1.32-34

9. The Sabbath may have officially ended at sunset, but not Jesus' day. How did He spend the evening?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: *And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him (1.17-18).*
2. Return to vv. 16-20 and read these words slowly, thoughtfully. Absorb the impact of Jesus' first words to His disciples: *"Follow me."* Slow down and absorb this compelling call in your heart. Are you following Him today? Talk to Him about your day-by-day journey with Jesus.
3. An honest reading of Mark 1 leaves us engulfed by a strong sense of Jesus' authority. His unrivalled power is superior to the religious leaders, to spiritual forces, to disease. Examine your own life. Are there pockets of your life where Jesus' authority needs to be recognized?
4. Cherish in your mind today the delightful picture of Jesus' personal touch and compassion for Simon's mother-in-law. Rest in His restoring kindness.

We Never Saw Anything Like This!

MARK 2.1-12.

Study #3

1. Read all of Mark 2.1-12. Then revisit v. 1. What do we learn about the town of Capernaum (cf. Matt. 4.13; 9.1)?

While Mark consistently presents a high view of Jesus as being the Son of God, this gospel also provides unique insight into Jesus as a man, with human needs and vulnerabilities. Here we're reminded that Jesus needed shelter (likely His Capernaum "home" was that of Simon's and Andrew's). What other evidence in Mark points to Jesus' full humanity?

Jesus needed _____ (3.20)

Jesus needed _____ (5.30-32)

Jesus needed _____ (4.38)

Jesus needed _____ (14.32-37)

As we work through Mark, stay alert to the finely balanced presentation of Jesus—fully God, fully human. How does Jesus' humanity influence us as disciples? Why does it matter that we follow a Saviour who fully knows the human experience? (cf. Heb. 4.15-16).

2. What is Jesus once again engaged in as this episode opens (v.2)? How does this remind us of His central purpose? (If necessary, review 1.14-15, 38; Isa. 61.1-3).

3. Why were the paralysed man and his loyal friends driven to their ingenious method of making an entrance (v. 3-4)?

4. Why does Jesus not rebuke them for their destructive and disruptive approach to Him (v. 5)? Can you *imagine* how noisy and dirty it must have been for those standing underneath that dismantled dirt roof? And how frustrating—these fellows didn't even wait in line properly to see Jesus!

One commentator described the faith that fuelled those four friends as being “robust and active” (A. Cole). This will be the first of many times within Mark that Jesus may shock us by overlooking strange, even scandalous, behaviour if He discerns behind it authentic faith and a determined passion for Himself. “The single-tracked, intense determination of these people was consistently rewarded” (A. Plass). Do authentic, needy faith and determined passion for Jesus characterise us . . . as individuals? As a congregation? Why or why not?

5. What is Jesus’ first word to the paralysed man, lying there helpless, the centre of attention, in a packed house (v.5)? How does Jesus convey both authority and affection?

6. What two levels of need does Jesus perceive within the man lowered in front of Him (vv.5-6)? Which does He prioritise as the more fundamental issue, while not belittling the other?

Consider your conversations, your concerns, and your prayer life, both private and public. Do you, like Jesus, discern all layers of need? Do you struggle to focus on the essential needs? What steps can we take to stay focused on what is fundamental?

7. Why is Jesus promptly labelled as a blasphemer (vv. 6-7)?

8. Mark enjoys using irony, and we find some here. In their condemning thoughts of Jesus as a blasphemer, what truth do the teachers of the law unintentionally and ironically express (vv. 6-7)?

Jesus knew what His opponents were thinking (v. 8). God is described as the One “who searches hearts” (Rom. 8.27; cf. Ps. 44.20-21). Share with your group any habits you practise to stay aware that every thought, emotion or motivation is witnessed by God.

9. Why was Jesus’ penetrating question (v. 9) such a challenge to His opponents?

Lesson 3

10. What realisation are we to gain about Jesus from this story of forgiveness and healing (v. 10)?

The healing of the paralytic was more than a display of mercy to a wretched man. The announcement and presentation of radical healing to a man in his entire person was a sign of the Kingdom of God drawn near (W. Lane; cf. Isa.35.6).

11. What does Jesus call Himself in v. 10? The _____ of _____. This title is the most common way Jesus refers to Himself in Mark. He will use it 12 times in the second half of Mark (e.g. 8.31; 13.26). For those familiar with Daniel 7.13-14 (as the teachers of the law surely were), what claims is Jesus implying by applying this title to Himself? Did His enemies eventually perceive what He was claiming? Read Mark 14.61-65.

12. Don't you just love these final two verses (vv. 11-12)? Having already pronounced His forgiveness, now Jesus provides a graphic illustration of that inner healing through His outer healing of the man. And the formerly paralysed man—the guy who had to be carried around—promptly gets to his feet, and walks away, carrying himself the symbol of his former disability. Before closing the Bible, discuss what you've learnt about Jesus today.

Along with the crowd inside the house, we are witnesses to the increasing evidence of Jesus' authority. Today we were dazzled by His authority to perceive and forgive our sins. Are there ever areas where we feel unable to be forgiven or unwilling to concede that others can be forgiven? What are we implying about Jesus' ability and authority to forgive when we refuse forgiveness for ourselves or others?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: *Know that that Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2.10).*
2. Jesus noted and approved the faith of those four bold and resourceful friends who were determined to bring their paralysed friend to Jesus. What a lovely picture of true friendship! Is there someone who needs you to show such creative and determined love as you bring them to Jesus?
3. *Faith is first and foremost not knowledge about Jesus but active trust that Jesus is sufficient for one's deepest and most heartfelt needs (Edwards, 76).* Spend some time expressing your deepest needs to Jesus. Trust Him.
4. In your prayer times this week, remember to pray for friends' and family's spiritual needs. Let today's text remind you of the paralysing effect of unforgiven sin and of the generous and healing forgiveness offered by Jesus.

Lord of the Sabbath

MARK 2.23-3.6

Study #4

1. Read Mark 2.23-28. Verses 23-24 set the stage for the drama to follow.

a. What day was it?

b. What action of Jesus' disciples drew fire from the Pharisees because of the day it was?

Note: the action itself was permitted by the Old Testament Law (Deut. 23.25) but the Pharisees had devised a catalogue of 39 specific actions to be prohibited as "work" on the Sabbath and this action was one of them!

c. What accusation do the Pharisees hurl at Jesus? Did you notice that the disciples did the eating and Jesus got the blame!

Are there ways in which we evangelicals, like the Pharisees, have developed our own catalogue of rules and regulations, accepted practices and markers of spirituality? What's the remedy?

2. Let's see for ourselves what the Scriptures actually teach.

a. Read Exodus 20.8-11 and 34.21 then fill in these blanks:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it _____ (=set apart). Six days you shall _____ and do all your _____ but the seventh day is a Sabbath _____ the LORD your God . . . On the seventh day you shall _____."

b. Use your own words to explain the essential ideas of the Law's teaching on the Sabbath.

c. How did the Pharisees' additional prohibitions exceed what God's Law actually said, and intended?

3. The Pharisees' accusation referenced Old Testament teaching. In His reply, Jesus also, shrewdly, appealed to the OT. Why would Jesus' opening words, "Have you never read . . ." (v. 25)? have been a subtle yet stinging rebuke to the Pharisees?

*Throughout His life, Jesus displayed his knowledge of and reliance on the Scriptures. It's fascinating to observe how, faced here with cunning and hostile opposition, Jesus quoted from a text we might consider "obscure" or puzzling. How can Jesus be an example for us? How can we too cherish and rely on **all** of the Bible—not just a select number of familiar, favourite passages?*

4. Jesus countered this attack by reminding the Pharisees of David's actions in 1 Samuel 2.

a. How did Jesus describe David's situation? He was in _____ and was _____ (v. 25).

What parallels do you detect between David and Jesus, the messianic Son of David?

b. Since Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law (Matt. 5.17), and He suggests here that human need is to be prioritised over the Pharisees' burdensome applications of the Law, what does this suggest about the true intent of the Law?

In their concern for legal detail, [the Pharisees] had forgotten the mercy and grace shown by God . . . when He made provision for the Sabbath (W. Lane).

5. To what key principle does the illustration of vv. 25-26 lead us (v.27)?

Although we don't practise keeping the Sabbath like the Old Testament believers did, we do follow the God-given life-rhythm of celebrating one out of seven days as "unto the Lord."

How is this rhythm of work and rest a gift to us? How can the 7th day restore, refresh and refocus us?

Lesson 4

6. How do the closing words of v. 28 skillfully conclude the teaching on Sabbath *and* re-introduce the theme of Jesus' authority?

7. Read Mark 3.1-6. This incident also occurs on a Sabbath, thus demonstrating the truth of 2.28. Where is Jesus? Whom does He encounter there (v.1)?

8. How does v. 2 make it crystal clear that the real issue for the Pharisees wasn't about God being honoured by obedience to His Word? What is their true motivation?

9. Knowing Himself to be under the scrutiny of the Pharisees, what does Jesus do (v.3)?

OPTION: How have the Pharisees failed to "see" and love this man?

10 a. What absolutely brilliant question does Jesus pose (v.4)?

b. Why must the Pharisees remain silent? The *ESV Study Bible* helpfully explains, *[They] should have answered "to do good." This would not violate the Old Testament law but it would violate the opponents' extra-biblical . . . tradition. Their tradition misses the point of the Mosaic law: to love God and one's neighbour.*

Jesus suggests that the truest way to celebrate Sabbath is to "do good . . . and to save life." How can we shape our times of worship and rest so that they are of refreshing benefit and restoration to ourselves and others?

11 a. What is Jesus' intense emotional response to the lack of compassion and stubborn unbelief of the Pharisees (v.5a)?

b. What is His outward response (v. 5b)? Note: Does He, or the man, actually "work"?

12. Verse 6 concludes not only this story, but the entire string of conflicts which has been escalating from 2.1 onwards. On what chilling (and ironic) note does this narrative end?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath*” (2. 27-28).
2. Read Isaiah 58.13-14. Feed on this call to genuine delight in Sabbath celebration.
3. Follow Jesus’ example this week and saturate your heart and mind with the Old Testament Scriptures. Choose a passage you’re not familiar with. Enjoy exploring new (inspired!) ground.
4. Jesus was grieved and angered by the Pharisees’ hardened hearts. *They had double-padded their minds against the intrusion of any new ideas about who Jesus might be or the significance of the things he was saying and doing* (A. Plass). As you read Mark, pray that the Spirit would soften your heart and open your mind to truth about Jesus.

Authentic Listening

MARK 4.1-20.

Study #5

Welcome to Mark 4, a chapter to be prized since it preserves for us Mark's most extended record of Jesus' parables.

1. Read vv. 1-20. Then list all the background information v. 1 provides. Cf. 3.9, 20.
2. Re-read v. 2, then read vv. 33-34. What were favourite teaching tools of Jesus? What do you know about them?

Parables were comparisons (usually stories) using every day, ordinary things that Jesus taught in order to challenge hearers with deeper truths about life in God's kingdom. Jesus was a master of crafting parables. "In quality and excellence, Jesus' parables were without parallel" (J. Edwards). Share with your group any other parables which have enabled you to grasp a spiritual truth.

3. Review vv. 33-34. How did Jesus determine when to use parables and when to explain or interpret them?

The NIV Study Bible comments on vv. 33-34, "Jesus used parables to illustrate truths, stimulate thinking and awaken spiritual perception." How can we follow Jesus' model in sharing our faith with others?

4. How does Jesus initially invite His listeners' alert attention (v.3)?

OPTION: How do Jesus' words in vv. 24-25 further motivate us to listen?

5. Let's unpack this parable (vv. 3-8) before we tackle its interpretation.

Main character	v. 3
What he is sowing	v. 3
Soil type	v. 4
	vv. 5-6
	v. 7
	v. 8

What progression in the "soil receptivity" can you discern?

6a. How does Jesus' concluding appeal (v. 9) reinforce His opening command?

b. By framing the parable with these invitations to attention, what does Jesus reveal about His heart for us? About his expectations of His listeners' involvement? What attitudes are implied by "hearing ears"?

Read Proverbs 2:1-6. What are 8 ways we can respond to God's wise words? How proficient is the 21st century Canadian church at listening to and absorbing Scripture? Share with the group what helps you stay receptive and engaged with God's word.

7. How well did Jesus' followers comprehend the meaning of this parable (v.10)? What did this indicate about their insight into other parables (v. 13)?

8a. What did Jesus' identify as the main topic His parables taught to those with believing, responsive hearts(v. 11)? How had this kingdom already begun (cf. 1.14-15)?

9. While parables revealed insight to those with spiritually seeking eyes, what was their effect for the persistently hard-hearted (vv. 11b-12)?

For thought: Jesus' parables leave no neutral ground for casual interest or idle curiosity. They sharply divided their original audiences into disciples and opponents. They must continue to function the same way today (C. Blomberg).

Lesson 5

10. Record how Jesus interpreted the elements of the parable:

The sower / farmer	v. 14
The seed	v. 14
Soil #1: bird infested path	v. 15
Soil #2: rocky ground	vv. 16-17
Soil #3: ground with thorns	vv. 18-19
Soil #4: good soil	v. 20

(What 3 things does good soil do? Describe its yield [cf. Gen. 26.12])

God's word may be met with hardened unbelief (v. 15) or a temporary, superficial response which withers in the face of hardship (vv. 16-17). How would you describe the response of vv. 18-19? Why are "worries, wealth and wishes for pleasure" such deadly threats?

11. Jesus reveals that the "seed" stands for "the word." While this term often applies generally to Scripture, it likely here refers particularly to the gospel, the good news of Jesus.

a. Read vv. 26-29, another parable—found only in Mark—about the "seed." What do you learn about the indomitable power of the seed?

b. One commentator called this (vv. 26-29), "the parable to end despair" (W. Barclay). What perspective do you glean about evangelism, specifically sharing God's word and the gospel? Who's in control?

c. OPTION: Be further encouraged by magnificent imagery of Isaiah 55.10-11.

Parables are demanding. They confront us with new ways of seeing the truth, and they challenge us to listen attentively, to think imaginatively and, most importantly, to respond. “The whole of the Christian life is one of continual and progressive response to fresh spiritual revelation” (A. Cole). How have Jesus’ words in Mark 4 challenged you this week?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: *Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear”* (Mark 4.9).
2. Time to conduct a soil test! Evaluate your recent responses to the word of God. Which soil type matches your heart’s condition most closely? Is the gospel “fruitful” in your life?
3. Use the lovely words of Isaiah 55.10-11 as a model for you as you pray about a specific situation where God’s Word is being sown.
4. *“It is easy to pack life with such a multiplicity of interests that there is no time left for Christ”* (W. Barclay). Examine your thought life—are pre-occupations with worries, wealth or pleasures taking over?

A Taste of the New Creation

MARK 5.21-43

Study #6

Mark 5 contains one of Mark's favourite writing patterns. One story—here, that of Jairus' daughter—forms a “sandwich” or “envelope” around another—in this case, that of the suffering woman. Keep your eyes peeled for ways that the interjected (middle) narrative relates to and adds to the framing story.

1. Read Mark 5.21-24a. Jesus is once again thronged by a crowd at the seashore. Who now approaches Him in distress? Why?
2. What clues do these verses offer about Jairus' desperation (vv. 22-23)?
3. What does Jairus believe about Jesus?

Jairus—a prominent and respected man—abandoned his dignity, pride and religious prejudices. W. Barclay writes, “Here was a man who forgot everything except that he wanted the help of Jesus; and just because he forgot, he would remember for ever after that Jesus is a Saviour.” What prevents us from likewise casting ourselves at Jesus' feet in desperation? Have you ever experienced a crisis so great that there was no other course to take? How did your Saviour meet you in your crisis?

4. Mark now “interrupts” (intentionally, not impulsively) this Jairus narrative. He leaves us in suspense, as he pauses that narrative and places in its centre another story of desperate faith. This moving account, which is framed by the spectacular story of Jesus' raising the dead, has itself been called “a minor miracle of love and mercy” (A. Cole). Read vv. 24b-34.

- a. Who is the second despairing individual who also comes to Jesus in faith (v. 25)?
- b. Why is her situation so desperate (v. 26)?
- c. What actions does she take? She had _____ . . . about Jesus and _____ . . . and _____ His garment (v. 27). Savour this lovely sequence—what can we learn here?

Note: The Greek term Mark uses for “disease” (ESV) or “suffering” (NIV) in v. 29 is *mastix*, a strong word denoting “scourge, shame, suffering, torment.” Not only has she borne the physical distress of hemorrhaging for twelve years, she has been considered ceremonially unclean. Her presence would have been unwelcome in any setting, even that of worship.

Jesus has just healed an extreme example of an outcast: a demon-possessed homeless man living in a cemetery (5.1-20). Already He’s reached out to fishermen (1.16), a middle-aged housewife (1.31), a leper (1.40), a disabled man (2.3), a loathed bureaucrat (2.15) and others. Now He meets an “unclean” woman and an ailing adolescent. Why does Jesus consistently help and heal the individuals whom society either doesn’t value, or outrightly rejects? What does this say about Him? What does this speak to us—as individuals? As a church?

5. Although her actions maybe reflect superstitious belief (v. 28), why is the woman healed, then commended by Jesus? (vv. 29, 34) How does she model faith—for Jairus? for us?

6. Verse 30 mentions the power that Jesus embodies in Himself (cf. Lk. 5.17; 6.19). How was the suffering woman transformed by that power?

v. 29 (&34)

v. 34

v. 34

7 a. Describe what happens in v. 33. What more do we learn about the woman?

b. Why would her telling Jesus *the whole truth* have been unsettling for many in the crowd?

Jesus doesn’t hush the woman up; instead He listens as she “tells all” and then affirms her. Hmmm. Are we uncomfortable that He allows someone to blurt out to Him intensely personal, shameful even, information? Do we likewise show such honesty and openness to Jesus when we talk to Him? Or have we forgotten that God is all-knowing and unshockable? Read Ps. 62.8. Discuss what it means to pour out our hearts before the Lord. (OPTION: Read 1 Sam. 1.12-15)

Lesson 6

8. Review v. 34. Jesus addresses the woman here by a title that is not used by Him to anyone else in the New Testament. What does He call her? What is the significance of this?

9. The woman disappears from our view—healed, freed from her suffering, in peace—and we return to Jairus. While Jesus dealt with the woman, what has happened (v. 35)?

10. What is Jesus' surprising reply to this seemingly catastrophic news (v. 36)?

"Fear not, only believe" was a call for intense faith . . . faith even in the presence of death. Such faith is radical trust in the ability of Jesus to confront a crisis situation with the power of God" (W. Lane). Why can Jesus be trusted even in the direst of situations?

11. Mark pits fear against faith in v.36. Read Mark 4.40. Why are fear and faith opposed to each other? How does Mark 5 feed our faith in Jesus?

12. Read vv. 37-43. What evidence of Jesus' sensitive, tender care can you see?

v. 40

v. 41

v. 43

STOP! Take a moment to dwell on vv. 41 & 42. Absorb the impact of what Jesus did. Praise Him for His power over death. Savour this beautiful picture of His mingled love & authority.

13. Jesus had touched a contaminating, unclean leper, but instead of Jesus becoming defiled, He made the leper clean (1.40-42)! The expected reality was completely reversed! How do today's two stories also present Jesus as the One whose touch can heal and purify that which is unclean (vv. 30, 41)?

14. Are you being blown away by Jesus? The night before our narrative, He'd dramatically shown His lordship over the forces of nature (4.35-41). This morning, He asserted His sovereignty over evil spirits (5.1-20). What new facets of Jesus' authority have we just seen?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. MEMORISE: *Jesus said, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (4.40).*
2. *Mark 5 might be called the [chapter of hopeless causes], for . . . the demoniac, the . . . woman, and Jairus each find hope in Jesus when all human hopes are exhausted (J. Edwards).* Are your hopes also exhausted? Are you exhausted? Talk to Jesus, the same Saviour as in Mark 5, about this—resting in His marvellous power and tender love for you as an individual.
3. Stay alert to opportunities to love individuals—even society's "outcasts"—like Jesus does.
4. Did you notice v. 41's Aramaic words? Mark likely preserved them because his source, Peter, remembered the voice of Jesus speaking those very words. "And he could never forget Jesus' voice . . . He could hear 'Talitha cumi' all his life. The love, the gentleness, the caress of it lingered with him forever" (W. Barclay). Like Peter—treasure the words of Christ.

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