

MARK 1:1-45: THE LIVING PARADOX

Introduction

Most biblical scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, whom the apostle Peter affectionately calls “my son” in 1 Peter 5:13. Because of their close relationship and many internal clues, we can surmise that the Holy Spirit used Peter’s firsthand accounts in shaping this Gospel. It was probably written between AD 64 and 70, to a mostly Gentile audience.

Mark likely wrote from fast-paced Rome, which may account for his condensed and action-packed approach, often employing words like “immediately.” In any case, Mark is anxious to unveil to us who Jesus is, what his mission was, and how we are to respond to him.

In the first eight chapters, Mark focuses our attention on the power and authority of “the Son of God” who performs many mighty works. The second eight chapters reveal a Jesus with no less authority, but who is determined to take the lowly route of suffering and death, in order to fulfill his saving mission. As to our response, Jesus calls us to “repent and believe the good news” (1:15) and to endure suffering along with him.

How would your friends describe you to someone who’s never met you?

Well, Mark wastes no time getting to the “real deal” about Jesus. He skips any mention of Christ’s birth or childhood and gets immediately to scenes from his ministry that reveal who he is.

Read verses 1-41.

[Optional: As the students read, sketch a map of Palestine on paper or dry-erase board, indicating the locations of the events described in the chapter.]

How long does it take Mark to get to the central message of his Gospel?

[Rephrase if necessary: What monumental truth does Mark reveal in the first sentence of his book?] (The deity of Christ. Mark pulls no punches!)

Reread verse 2.

In the Isaiah quote, who is “I”?

(God the Father.)

Who is “my messenger”?

(John the Baptist.)

And who is “you”?

(Jesus.)

Someone rephrase it for us with names instead of pronouns.

(The Father will send John ahead of Jesus.)

For clues to John the Baptist’s role, let’s look at his wardrobe.

What was the brother wearing?

(A camel’s-hair coat and a leather belt.)

What do his clothes reveal beyond his lack of fashion sense?

(That’s exactly what Elijah the prophet wore. John also ministered in the same area Elijah had—in the desert near the Jordan River! He was obviously making a statement since he and everyone else was familiar with the Old Testament prophecy that Elijah would return before the Messiah came. Read Malachi 4:5-6 and Mark 9:2-5, 11-13. Other parallels to mention if there is time and interest: Elijah passed on authority to his successor, Elisha, who received a double portion of his spirit. Christ’s ministry obviously eclipsed his predecessor’s as well. And Elisha’s ministry didn’t begin in fullness until after Elijah passed from the scene. The same was true of Christ and John.)

According to verses 4-5, what was John’s ministry all about?

(Repentance and forgiveness of sin.)

Since baptism is associated with cleansing from sin, why in the world did the sinless Jesus get baptized?

(To identify himself with sinners, to be involved with God’s work through John, and to be revealed by John as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”)

Name the persons involved in verses 10-11.

(Father, Son, Spirit. Once again, Mark is hard-hitting as he reveals the Trinity in his opening lines.)

What does the presence of all three persons of the Trinity at the baptism reveal about this event? What was so important about it?

(The involvement of the Godhead accentuates its importance. It's at this point that Jesus received the Spirit's empowerment for the public ministry he was about to begin.)

Skim the passage and list every action that shows the power and authority of Jesus.

[Give verse numbers as hints if necessary.]

v. 7—John says Jesus is “more powerful than I.” John also felt unworthy to even untie Christ's sandals, and believed that he would bring them a superior baptism.

v. 10—He saw the heavens open and the Spirit descend on him in the form of a dove.

v. 11—A voice from heaven spoke glowingly about him.

v. 13—He overcame temptation, was unharmed by wild animals, and was attended by angels.

vv. 15, 17, 20, 25, 41—He gave crisp commands to people and demons, who all obeyed him. Four fishermen dropped their nets to follow him.

v. 22—He taught in the synagogue without a degree and without permission. People were amazed at the authority with which he spoke.

v. 34—He healed many diseases, and cast out and shut up demons.)

Although he had all power and authority, he was also humble. Where do you see his humility in this passage?

[Give verse numbers as hints if necessary]

(v. 9—He underwent baptism.

v. 13—He allowed himself to be tempted for 40 days, during which time he fasted. (We know this from Matthew and Luke.)

v. 14—He did not preach until John's ministry was completed.

v. 16—He reached out to lowly fishermen.

v. 35—He got up very early after a late-night healing service.

vv. 35-38—He was not enticed to bask in the popularity of the crowds, but moved on instead.

v. 41—He touched a leper, and didn't say, “Of course I can!”

v. 45—He stayed in “lonely places,” not in plush accommodations.

v. 48—He told a man not to tell anyone that Jesus had healed him.)

Reread verses 35-39, looking for ways we can emulate Jesus.

So how are Christ's actions (in verses 35-39) an example to us?

- (1. He sacrificed sleep to spend time with the Father.
2. He didn't skip prayer when tired or busy.
3. He listened to the Father in prayer, seeking direction for the day.
4. He obediently submitted to the Father's direction.
5. He didn't give in to pressure from others.
6. He realized that an "open door" doesn't always reveal God's will.
7. If Jesus so needed time with the Father, how much more do we.
8. He spent considerable time in prayer, beginning "while it was still dark.")

When do you ever see people who are both powerful *and* humble? And he not only possesses both qualities, but infinitely so. Let's respond in prayers of worship to the Servant-King. Let's also ask for help to follow his example of spending time with the Father.

MARK 2:1-28: AGAINST THE GRAIN

Why are people disliked by some when things are going well for them?

In chapter 1, we witnessed the shocking authority and humility of Jesus. In chapter 2, we see that the Pharisees have also taken notice, and they don't like what they see. Skim the chapter to find the four lame complaints that the Pharisees spew.

(Jesus proclaimed forgiveness, ate with sinners, did not direct his disciples to fast, and allowed them to pick grain on the Sabbath.)

Let's read verses 1-12.

Imagine being the paralytic—a quadriplegic in today's terms. What do you think his life was like?

How do you think he feels when Jesus announces: "Son, your sins are forgiven"? How about when Jesus heals him?

How would you answer the question Jesus poses in verse 9?

(Spiritual healing is easier to fake than physical healing, but is harder to actually accomplish. In fact, spiritual healing was provided only at the cost of the cross. So forgiveness is the greater of the two miracles that Jesus performs for the paralytic.)

In what way does the healing address the doubts in the minds of the religious leaders?

(It demonstrated Jesus' power. If he can heal the outer man, maybe he can heal the inner man too.)

Though the house wasn't handicap-accessible, his friends still found a way to get the paralytic to Jesus. How would you describe his friends?

The paralytic's friends provide a model of caring. What are some practical ways we can follow their example?

(Hang with the unpopular, bring friends to Jesus, serve people together, and care for people even if it proves difficult.)

Let's read verses 13-17.

In what ways did Jesus do ministry differently from the Pharisees?

(He went to the people, and befriended them—even sinners!

- **Where?** Lakeside [v. 13], marketplace [v. 14], homes [v. 15], plus synagogue.
- **Who?** "Sinners" in addition to the religious.
- **How?** Through friendship in addition to teaching.)

Do we minister only in our comfort zones (as did the Pharisees)? What people and places might God be calling us to?

Reread verse 17. What attitude should we have as we approach Jesus?

(Humble, aware of our sins and weaknesses.)

How should this verse direct us in our witness?

(Be alert for people who are aware of their spiritual sickness.)

Let's read verses 18-20. After the feast of verse 15, observers complain because the disciples are feasting, not fasting.

Do you understand Jesus' reply about "the Bridegroom"?

(A bridegroom is the center of celebration at a wedding feast.)

How will Jesus "be taken"?

(This refers to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, just as John the Baptist had been taken in 1:14.)

Christ's use of the bridegroom metaphor is understood even more fully when we realize that John the Baptist had previously referred to Jesus as "the bridegroom." Someone read John 3:27-30 for us. Do you see what Jesus is doing?

(Instead of being his own defender, he refers to John's proclamation of Christ's superiority.)

So now that Jesus has been taken, do we now practice the discipline of fasting? Let's read verses 21-22.

Explain the physical dynamics of the metaphors.

(New cloth shrinks, pulling apart the stitching. Wine expands as it ferments, bursting stretched-out leather.)

What do the patch and wine metaphors have in common?

(The old can't contain the new.)

What is Christ's point in using these two illustrations?

(Christ did not come to patch up an old religious system. It could not contain Jesus. He fulfilled the Law and superseded it, providing a new covenant. So, since Jesus is bringing a new way to relate to God, it should be no surprise that his actions break the religious and cultural norms.)

Now let's read verses 23-28.

Why do they complain about the grain?

(They adhered to scores of nit-picking, non-scriptural laws concerning the Sabbath, not to mention the fact that they were scrambling for dirt on Jesus.)

What does Jesus imply by his reply?

What does he mean by calling himself "Lord of the Sabbath"?

(The Sabbath was meant to fulfill the human need for rest, so meeting the human need for food is consistent with keeping the Sabbath. It is meant to help us, not rule us. David's action described in verses 25-26 also occurred on a Sabbath [Leviticus 24:8-9]. So in verses 27-28, Jesus says in effect: "If the Sabbath is a servant of man, specifically David, how much more is The Man Lord of it!")

Do we have any religious traditions that hurt instead of help us?

In chapters 1-2, how have Christ's actions broken free from cultural norms?

(He called disciples, avoided publicity, taught without a degree or permission, healed, delivered, touched a leper, forgave sin, ate with sinners, feasted instead of fasted, and picked grain on the Sabbath.)

As Christ's followers, how are we to be countercultural?

As we pray, let's surrender ourselves to minister in Christ's love, however radical or risky it may become.

MARK 3:1-35: INVESTING IN PEOPLE

How do you feel when someone is watching you and hoping you'll mess up?
What is the normal reaction to entrapment?

Let's see how Jesus deals with it. Let's read verses 1-6 where once again Jesus uses a healing as a teaching moment.

Did you catch the irony of Christ's question in verse 4?

(The events of verse 6 provide a clue. His question exposes their evil motives and actions. When Jesus gives life by healing the man on the Sabbath, the Pharisees respond by plotting to take life by killing Jesus.)

So was anyone breaking the Sabbath here?

(Yes. Not Jesus, but rather the accusers themselves.)

And how do they answer Christ's question?

(They plead the Fifth.)

What is Christ's response to their evil?

(Anger, deep distress, positive action.)

Do we respond to evil as he does?

(We are often either apathetic toward evil or our anger lacks positive, constructive expression.)

How can we better model our response to evil after his?

In verse 5, Jesus says to the man with the shriveled hand: "Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored." Has God ever told you to do something which seemed impossible, but as you made an effort to be obedient, he made the impossible possible?

Let's read verses 7-12.

While the Pharisees and Herodians are plotting to kill Jesus, how are the common people responding to him?

Why do crowds come from everywhere? What do they want with Jesus?
(They seem interested in Jesus only for his miracles.)

Do we want Christ's words as much as his works?

Let's read verses 13-19.

Given Mark's usual brevity, it may seem surprising that he lists all the apostles' names. How is discipling central to Christ's ministry?

How is verse 14 an outline of Christ's entire ministry strategy?
(He appointed disciples, spent time with them, and sent them out.)

How is it a model for us?
(We should be prayerfully intentional in our discipling, invest our lives in these people, and enable them by giving them ministry responsibilities.)

Let's read verses 20-35.

What do the Pharisees accuse Jesus of in their latest attack?

How does Jesus respond?
(A country can't have two kings without a civil war.)

In Christ's metaphor, who is the "strong man"?
(Satan. We shouldn't underestimate his power.)

Who ties him up and how?
(Jesus surprisingly compares himself to a home invader! His saving work will deny Satan of power.)

What is Jesus taking from Satan?

(He's freeing those enslaved to Satan.)

Why does Jesus warn them about blaspheming the Holy Spirit?

(Verse 30 gives a clue. In their most diabolical attack to this point, the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being demon-possessed. They are looking at the goodness of God, and calling it the evil of Satan. "The sin against the Holy Spirit involves deliberately shutting one's eyes to the light and consequently calling good evil" [Bruce, 93].)

How do you think Jesus felt when his family came "to take charge of him"?

When we are opposed or rejected by those who are closest to us, what comfort can we receive from Christ's words in verses 33-35?

(Jesus is our brother, and we have a vast spiritual family that loves us.)

As we pray, let's ask for Christ's strength to focus on investing in people despite any opposition we might face.

MARK 4:1-25: TILLING THE HEART

Isn't it amazing how people have such varied reactions to a single event, whether it's a sporting event or a political speech? Tell us about a time you disagreed with a friend about a movie you'd just seen together.

We witnessed various responses to Christ's message in chapter 3:

1. Pharisees listen with sinister motives.
2. Jesus' family is embarrassed.
3. Crowds are thrill-seeking.
4. Disciples leave all to follow him.

So why does Jesus now tell a story of four soils?

(Jesus was explaining that the reason for such varied responses to his message was the varying receptivity of people's hearts. His message is not lacking in power to produce fruit, but requires human response.)

Let's read verses 1-20.

Who is the farmer?

(Jesus.)

What is the seed?

(The word or message that Jesus had been giving: "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" [1:15].)

Make a visual summary (yes, a drawing[!]¹)—have a volunteer do it if you'd like) of the story accompanied by discussion that covers the following descriptions of the four soils.

- (1. Path—birds steal [Satan], no germination, no life.
2. Rocky—sun scorches [trouble, persecution], brief joy, shallow, no root, good but short-lived intentions.
3. Thorny—thorns choke [worries, wealth, desires], alive but fruitless, trying to ride the fence.
4. Good—fruitful.)

If you've accepted the message, your "soil" was receptive at your conversion. How about now?

Is the soil of your heart still soft for God's words?

Is it producing fruit in your life or is there a snag in the growth process?

What kind of soil are you tempted to revert back to?

- Do you let Satan keep you from soaking in God's Word?
- Do you only experience joy and growth in good times?
- Do you let worldly things seduce your heart?

According to the passage, how are we to respond to the Word in order to be fruitful?

("Hear" is repeated nine times in verses 1-25. Mark also mentions "perceiving," "understanding," "listen," "turn," and "accept" as proper responses. So the verbs involve both hearing *and* acting on the Word.)

As we hear and obey God's Word, truth becomes virtue in our lives. But those whose hearts are hard, shallow, or distracted don't gain any lasting benefit from hearing truth. So let's make every effort to make the soil of our hearts receptive to God's Word. As St. Augustine writes: "Work diligently the soil while you may. Break up your fallow with the plough. Cast away the stones from your field, and dig out the thorns. Be unwilling to have a 'hard heart,' such as makes the Word of God of no effect. Be unwilling to have a 'thin layer of soil,' in which the root of divine love can find no depth in which to enter. Be unwilling to 'choke the good seed' by the cares and lusts of this life, when it is being scattered for your good" [Oden 57].

What varying degrees of fruitfulness did the seeds in good soil produce?

(30, 60, 100 times what was sown. Think about how fruitful your Christian life has been and how fruitful you want the remainder of it to be.)

[Facilitator's note: If you're short on time, cover the following section quickly or save it for next week.]

Let's read verses 10-12 and 21-25, where Jesus explains his use of parables.

At first glance, verses 11-12 seem to say that Jesus is keeping the truth from people by telling hard-to-understand stories. Is he really?

(Yes and no. He's not trying to exclude the whole crowd, but is weeding out those whose lack of interest is betrayed by their refusal to really "hear" and try to understand. Their response reveals that their hearts are like the hardened path that does not let the Word of God penetrate. So they bring judgment on themselves for their unbelief, as 2 Thessalonians 2:10 says: "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." The parables are not meant to obscure the truth, but rather to nurture a hunger for their meaning so that those who truly "hear" will seek God, who alone can speak truth to their hearts. Revelation is not obvious to all, but according to verses 11 and 25, it is "given" by God—to those who are receptive to the Word.)

What does Jesus say about hiding truth in verses 21-23?

(Hiding a lamp—referring to himself or at least his message—would be silly. Its very purpose is to spread light around.)

Let's reread verses 24-25.

What is Jesus saying about hearing his message?

(The more you hear and absorb, the more will be spoken to you. The more you reflect on Christ's parables, the more you get out of them. Those who barely listen will understand little. Jesus seeks to cultivate a hunger for truth by telling stories that take a little work to fully grasp. He doesn't spoon-feed the truth, but in verse 10, he gives more of an explanation to those who demonstrate their hunger by sticking around to ask for clarification.)

How can we apply these verses to our lives?

(Be attentive to what he is teaching us in his Word, so that he will enable us to know him more and more. It's exciting that we can influence the amount of understanding God will give us by listening and hungrily absorbing what he is teaching us now. Our prayer should be: "Open the valve wide, Lord!")

Let's pray now that God will give us insight into his Word and the desire to be as fruitful as we can be. Let's also ask him to remove the rocks and thorns from the soil of our hearts.

MARK 4:26-34: THE POTENT GOSPEL

Jesus uses the mystery of seed germination as an illustration in this passage. What hidden natural process most fascinates you?

What did the seed represent in the parable we studied last week?

(The gospel, and more broadly, the Word of God.)

Jesus now tells another parable about the gospel seed. Let's read verses 26-29.

What different aspects of planting do these two parables (vv. 1-20, 26-29) emphasize?

(The first emphasizes the condition of the soil, our hearts. The second emphasizes the mysterious power of the seed, the gospel.)

What do we learn about God's Word from this story?

(Like the hidden germination of a seed, God's Word has power that works on the heart and gives it life.)

Tell us of a time when God's Word was working on you "night and day," as Jesus says here.

[Rephrase if necessary: Do you remember a time when God spoke powerfully to you through his Word, to convert or convict or encourage you?]

How can this parable encourage and direct our evangelism?

(1. However fruitless our efforts may seem, we never know what life-giving action is happening underground. Christ's message was receiving a cold reception at the time—from Pharisees and even family. But Jesus wanted the disciples, and us, to know that what is observable on the surface may not be an accurate measure of the final outcome.

2. We should be sure to get beyond peripheral issues in our witness, and spread the good seed—the stuff that can really sprout. That is, we've got to share the good news of the gospel, and if possible, bring our pre-Christian friend in contact with the Scriptures.

3. After sowing our seed, we can relax, knowing it's not our job to convert people. As verse 27 says, "Whether [the sower] sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." The Holy Spirit speaks life into hearts through the Word.)

Isn't it amazing the changes a plant spontaneously undergoes? As Jesus said in verse 28: "All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head." A little sprout appears . . . Little leaves grow . . . Every part matures until it flowers and bears fruit. Likewise, God plans to grow you until he finishes what he started in you. Look back on your Christian life and reflect on how you've grown. How are you different now than when your Christian life first sprouted? His goal in growing us is to prepare us for his presence that we'll experience when harvest time comes, as Jesus alludes to in verse 29.

Let's read verses 30-34.

What happens in Christ's third parable about planting?

(The smallest seed, mustard, grows into the biggest garden plant.)

How does this illustrate the kingdom of God?

(Jesus, the king, came modestly, with no earthly power, and with only a few acknowledging his rule, but history has seen his kingdom expand to include millions the world over.)

As we go to prayer, let's praise God for the mysterious power his Word has to grow our faith and bring new life to those we share it with.

MARK 4:35-41: FAITH OVER FEAR

What is the worst storm you've ever been through?

Today's passage recounts a severe storm on the Sea of Galilee. Let's read verses 35-41.

How did the disciples react to this storm? And what did many of them do for a living?

(They were fisherman [see 1:16-19].)

So how strong can we surmise this storm was?

(These seaworthy fishermen were accustomed to storms on the Sea of Galilee. This one must have been fierce for them to fear for their lives.)

Are you ever annoyed when it looks like God is sleeping and ignoring the situation that has "swamped" you and threatens to drown you? Why do you think the disciples wake Jesus up?

Did they want him to calm the storm or to take cover?

(With their surprise at his calming of the storm, we can infer that they did not expect him to do so. Their "we" could include Jesus as well!)

Why are the disciples still "terrified" even after Jesus calms the storm?

(This fear was not produced by the storm, but by the calm [Morgan 105-106]. The sudden storm and sudden stillness caused brain overload. They were in fearful awe of the One who possessed authority to rebuke both the waves and themselves.)

What did the disciples ask each other in verse 41?

("Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!")

Tell us of a time when God blew away your concept of him by a display of his power.

Someone read verse 40 for us. After their brush with death, Jesus doesn't comfort, but rather scolds his disciples. Why is he so hard on them?

Is there evidence in the passage that Jesus meant to enter this storm as a test of the disciples' faith?

[Hint, if needed: see verse 37.] (Jesus suggested the boat trip himself, and promptly went to sleep. The application to our lives is that even when Jesus *leads* us "through the valley of the shadow of death," we should fear no evil, for *he is with us*. We too can rest in faith during the storm. Our boat isn't going down, because Jesus is on board.)

How would they have responded if they had had faith?

(They would not have awakened him and asked if he cared. They would have trusted his very presence to keep them safe.)

In what areas of your life are you tempted to respond with fear rather than faith?

As we go to prayer, consider how you will react when you are next tempted with those fears. Let's ask Jesus to give us his rest of faith, and let's worship him who commands all manner of winds and waves.

MARK 5:1-43: THE CARING CHRIST

If you could time travel to see Jesus as he ministered in Galilee, what is the one personal need you would ask him to meet? Let's see how Jesus met the differing needs of three people in this passage.

Split into three groups, giving each group one of the following scenes to act out for everyone:

1. Vv. 1-20: This scene requires people to act out the man, people chaining him, Jesus, pigs, and the locals.
2. Vv. 24-34: Requires people to act out the crowd, the woman, doctors, Jesus, the disciples.
3. Vv. 21-24, 35-43: Requires people to act out the crowd, Jesus, Jairus, men from his house, Peter, James, John, mourners, the child, and her mom and dad.

[If you don't have enough people in your group for this, then have the whole group mime each scene as it is read. Divvy up roles by putting multiple name tags on each person with the roles you want them to mime.]

After each act, stop and ask: What can we learn from this encounter with Jesus?

- (1. Vv. 1-20: Expelling demons from the man and into the pigs demonstrated Christ's power, the man's freedom, the destructive nature of demons, the value of people.)
2. Vv. 24-34: Jesus cares for emotional as well as physical needs. He is tenderhearted toward the hurting, seeking them out.
3. Vv. 21-24, 35-43: Instead of looking at our situations and being fearful, we should look to Jesus and trust him to help us.)

What different kinds of needs did Jesus meet in these encounters with people?

(Spiritual, emotional, physical.)

What emotion is expressed often in this chapter?

(Fear.)

How is faith expressed in each encounter?

(The man obeyed Christ's instruction to be a witness. The woman reached out and touched Jesus, believing in his power to heal her. The child's father asked Jesus to heal her, and did not give up when he heard that she had already died.)

What character traits of Jesus are revealed in all three scenes?

(Christ's authority and compassion. Jesus took on demons, sickness, and death as he cared for a man, a woman, and a child.)

Let's spend a couple minutes in silent prayer, meditating on Christ's authority and compassion that can calm our fears and strengthen our faith.

MARK 6:1-13: IN HIS STRENGTH

Do you plan on attending your 10-year high school class reunion? Why or why not?

Today we'll see what happens as a carpenter-turned-healing-rabbi returns to his hometown.

Let's read verses 1-6.

When Jesus visits his hometown, what do the Nazarenes acknowledge about his ministry?

(He taught with much wisdom and even performed miracles.)

What fair and good question did they ask themselves?

("Where did he get these things?")

How do they answer their own question?

(Instead of seeing the Divine at work, they point to the humble roots of Christ's family and profession. They say, in effect: "Who does he think he is? He's just a country boy—a blue-collar worker like us." Familiarity breeds contempt. The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* states: "The second question, 'Isn't this Mary's son?' seems also to be derogatory since it was not customary among Jews to describe a man as the son of his mother even when the father was not alive. Behind this question may be the rumor, circulated during Jesus' lifetime, that He was illegitimate" [Wessel 665].)

What affect did the Nazarenes' unbelief have on Jesus?

("He was amazed at their lack of faith," and his ministry of healing was limited. Jesus didn't throw miracles at people against their will.)

Does unbelief ever hinder God's work in your own life?

Let's read verses 7-13.

Why do you think Jesus sends them out in pairs?

(This is consistent with the biblical value of ministry in community. Not only can they lean on each other for support and encouragement; their very relationship is a witness to the world. Also, having “two witnesses” was important to Jews for establishing truthfulness.)

What provisions did Jesus instruct them to make for their journey?

(Very little—they were to bring nothing but a staff and were to receive hospitality from strangers.)

Why did Jesus instruct them to take so little?

(To encourage dependence and trust in God.)

Why were they to shake the dust of an unwelcoming town from their feet?

(“As a testimony against them.” It was to be a warning of judgment to those who reject the gospel, as was the Jewish custom of cleaning the heathen dirt from their feet when returning home from foreign lands.)

How did their ministry go?

(Modeled after Christ’s ministry, they preached repentance, exorcised demons, and healed the sick. Christ’s power goes with those he sends out.)

How can we apply the disciples’ mission to our own on campus?

1. Work together.
2. Don’t force our message on the unwilling.
3. Warn those who reject the gospel.
4. Trust in God’s provision when we take risks for him.
5. Know that Jesus will enable those he sends out.)

MARK 6:14-44: PASSION OR COMPASSION?

Tell us about the most enjoyable dinner party or wedding reception you've ever attended.

In this passage, we see two very different kings giving very different feasts. Let's read it.

[Have one volunteer read verses 14-29, and a second read 30-44. Or listen to an audio version of the whole passage.]

The flashback about King Herod and John the Baptist is bookended by the disciples' mission trip and their report of it to Jesus. Why do you think Mark recounts it here?

(Several connections can be made between the disciples and John. Both preached repentance, and Herod himself connected the two ministries when he heard of the miracles. Jesus had just warned the Twelve that they would meet opposition, of which Herod is an example. Suffering is part of being a witness.)

What opposition, if any, have you encountered when sharing your faith?

So, who are the two kings giving feasts?

(Herod, Jesus.)

Why did each give a feast?

(Herod wanted others to celebrate his own birthday with him, whereas Jesus cared for hungry people whom the disciples had wanted to send away.)

What happened at each feast?

(Herod's feast featured sensual dancing, a showy offer of generosity, and the murder of a prophet. Christ's feast supplied spiritual, and then physical, food. It included prayer, satisfaction, and plenty of food to spare.)

Describe each king.

(Herod was selfish, lusting after his brother's wife and daughter. He took life and sought satisfaction from fleshly desires. Just the opposite, Jesus is unselfish and loves all. He gives life and true satisfaction.)

The king of self still seeks to steal our allegiance from King Jesus. How are you doing in this struggle?

How do you sense the disciples are doing in verses 30-36?

(After a mission trip, they were ready for time to rest and relax. They had missed at least one meal due to the crowds and complained that the crowds remained "late in the day.")

How did Jesus view the crowd differently than his disciples?

(While Jesus took the opportunity to teach and feed them, the disciples seemed annoyed by them and wanted to send them away. His compassion superseded his own need to retreat.)

Do weariness and stress blunt your desire to care for people?

How can you view people more like Jesus does?

Tell us of a time when Jesus took your limited resources, multiplied them, and used them to do something great.

Let's pray now for strength to live not by our passions, but by Christ's compassion.

MARK 6:45-56: CONFOUNDED BY CHRIST

What is the most frightening or unbelievable thing you've ever seen?

What the disciples see in this passage was both scary and beyond belief. Let's read the passage.

What do we learn about Jesus from verses 45-48?

1. He cared for his disciples by giving them a needed break from the crowds.
2. He valued time in solitary prayer. The hard day drives Jesus to prayer, not from prayer.
3. He sent his disciples into a "straining" situation.)

Someone summarize the lake scene for us.

Why did Jesus walk out to them on the water?

("He saw the disciples straining at the oars," so he went to help them.)

What does this story reveal about Christ's involvement in our own trials?

(He is both aware of and concerned about our struggles and acts on our behalf. In addition to helping us in our plight, his deliverance reveals to us his supernatural power.)

Since it seems pretty clear that his purpose was to assist his disciples, what do you make of the words, "He was about to pass by them"?

(The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains that "we have here not the intention of Jesus but the impression of an eyewitness as to what was happening" [Wessel 676]. Less likely explanations are that he was waiting for them to call for his help, or that he did not want them to be frightened by seeing him, or that he intended them to see him and take courage by the mere proximity of his presence.)

What does Jesus say to them?

("Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.")

In what situations do you most need to take these words to heart?

The words "It is I" are literally "I am." Do you think Jesus is making a statement about his identity by alluding to "I AM," an Old Testament title of God?

(While the primary meaning is to let the disciples know that what they thought was a ghost was indeed their Master, it is possible that Jesus wanted to stretch their concept of who he was. In Exodus 3:14, God first identifies himself as "I AM" after demonstrating his power to Moses through a nature miracle.)

Let's reread verses 51-52.

What did the disciples not understand about "the loaves," and how does it relate to the present situation?

(If they had realized that none other than God can multiply bread, they would not have been as amazed when the same God-Man walks on water. Instead, their hearts were hardened to more revelation about his identity.)

Having been blown off course, the boat lands at Gennesaret, south of the intended destination of Bethsaida. Apparently morning by then, people flock to Jesus as soon as the boat lands.

How would you describe his ministry in Gennesaret?

(It seemed to consist only of healing, and lots of it. This is a stark contrast to his visit to Nazareth, with which this chapter begins. So this passage caps off accounts of a wide variety of miracles that highlight Christ's sovereignty over creation.)

As we pray, let's praise Jesus for his power and compassion.

MARK 7:1-23: TRADITION!

What are your favorite family traditions?

(Possibly a vacation spot, or something done every year for the holidays.)

Do any of your family's traditions annoy you?

In today's passage, Jesus once again steps on some favorite traditions. Let's read about it in verses 1-13.

The Pharisees have traveled from Jerusalem for the sole purpose of finding fault with Jesus. For the third time in Mark, they attack Jesus indirectly by targeting his disciples.

What is ceremonial washing and why was it so important to the Pharisees?

(This elaborate ritual washing was more symbolic than hygienic. These rules were not even derived from Scripture, so Jesus rebukes them for giving too much weight to the "tradition of the elders.")

Why does Jesus call them hypocrites?

(They honored God outwardly, but not inwardly. They were zealous to honor God through their own traditions, but ignored God's explicit guidelines for honoring him—his commands!)

According to Jesus, what is essential to true worship?

(True worship involves drawing near to God with your heart, not just mouthing words of praise.)

Staying focused on God during worship isn't easy. When your mind starts to wander, how do you focus your heart on God?

(Try to block out surrounding people and unrelated thoughts. Close your eyes. Meditate on the words. Expound on the words in prayer to God.)

How did the Pharisees give precedence to tradition over Scripture?

(On a technicality, they allowed sons to neglect helping their parents with possessions or savings that were designated in a vow. So they let a human ritual take precedence over a God-given command.)

What traditions do we often place above God's Word?

What do Christ's words in this passage establish about the authority of Scripture compared to other writings?

(Every other writing is subordinate to God's Word, our one rule of faith and practice.)

Let's read verses 14-23.

What is Christ's main point here?

(Ceremonially unclean hands or foods do not affect your heart. It's not what you put in your body, but what comes out of your heart that matters to God. And Jesus lists the many evils that "come from inside and make a man unclean.")

As were the Pharisees, are you focused more on your body than on your heart? Which do you care for more diligently?

As we pray, let's commit our hearts completely to God and seek his help in living by his Word alone.

MARK 7:24-37: IN DESPERATE NEED

Tell us about a time when you were desperate for help. What did you do?

Today we'll see how Jesus deals with two people who are in desperate need. Let's read verses 24-30.

When Jesus enters a house in the vicinity of Tyre, why does he try to "keep his presence secret"?

(Probably to get some needed rest, since his previous efforts to do so had been interrupted [see 6:30-34, 53-56].)

What is odd and unconventional about the Syrophoenician woman's request?

(It violates Jewish religious tradition for a woman, especially a Gentile woman, to approach a Jewish rabbi and make a request of him. So in terms of breaking tradition, it is linked with the scene of our previous study.)

Why does Jesus answer her with what seem to be harsh words?

(This is possibly the saying of Jesus that is the most difficult to understand. It could be that he was merely testing her faith. Let's not let his reference to "dogs" blind us to the fact that he did show care to her by granting her request.)

What do his metaphors of "children" and "dogs" refer to?

(Jews and Gentiles. It was common for Jews to refer to Gentiles as "dogs." Jesus "was not in any sense recognizing this description as accurate. He desired to see whether the woman was ready to take such a lowly position in order to receive a healing" [Cole 123].)

What does Jesus reveal here about the strategy and scope of his ministry?

(His primary focus was on Jews, but he later sent his disciples "into all the world." His word "first" extends hope to the Gentiles, and that's more than most first-century Jews would do.)

Why was the woman undeterred by Christ's reply?

(F. F. Bruce writes: "What if there was a twinkle in his eye as He spoke? . . . The written record can preserve the spoken words; it cannot convey the tone of voice in which they were said. Maybe the tone of voice encouraged the woman to persevere" [Bruce 111].)

What does she add to Christ's mini-parable?

(Sure the bread should go to the children, but what of the crumbs they drop as they eat? He need not "be deflected from his main mission to the Jews in order to do something for her daughter" [English 149].)

In what ways is the Syrophenician woman a model for us?

(She was humble, she was persistent in bringing her needs to Jesus, and she had faith that Jesus had ample power and goodwill to meet her needs.)

Let's read verses 31-37.

Who does Jesus meet in the Decapolis?

(A group of people bringing a deaf man for healing.)

What is exemplary about these people?

(They cared enough to bring a needy friend to Jesus, and had faith that Jesus could heal him—a good model for our prayer and witness. We saw a similar scene in 2:3-4 where a paralytic's friends brought him to Jesus.)

What is the first thing Jesus does with the deaf man?

("He took him aside, away from the crowd.")

Why do you think Jesus did this?

(Jesus didn't throw miracles into the crowds; he cared for individuals personally.)

How did Jesus heal this man who was handicapped with deafness and a speech impediment?

("Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' [which means "Be opened!"].)

Why does Jesus use this seemingly odd technique instead of simply pronouncing him healed?

(Jesus is communicating his intentions to the man and possibly looking for at least the smallest response of faith from him. "All the actions of verses 33 and 34 were miming his present need, the course of healing, and the manner in which such healing alone could come, in a way which even a deaf mute could understand, i.e., the blocked ears opened,

spitting an impediment away from the tongue, the upward glance and sigh of prayer" [Cole 124-125].)

How does the crowd respond to the healing?

(They spread the word of it against Christ's command. They are "overwhelmed with amazement." William Lane writes, "Mark intends an allusion to Isaiah 35:5-6" [Lane 268], which reveals the messianic significance of this miracle: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.")

Let's approach Jesus with faith that he can meet our needs, and praise him who "has done everything well."

MARK 8:1-26: WHO, ME?

Have you ever overlooked an opportunity to serve someone because you doubted that God could use you to help him or her? Tell us about it.

The disciples had the same problem, and they still missed the point even after Christ used their meager resources to feed a second mega-crowd.

Let's read verses 1-21.

What is exemplary about the large crowd that had gathered?

(They desired to be with Jesus so much that they had gone without food for three days!)

How willing are you to sacrifice in order to spend time with Jesus?

Instead of just feeding the 4,000, why do you think Jesus first calls the disciples together for a huddle in verses 1-5? What kind of feedback was he looking for?

(He was giving them an opportunity to share in his compassion, ask for him to work, and use them in the process. He was seeking a reply along the lines of: "We have seven loaves here. I'm sure you can use them to feed the crowd—just like you did last time.")

In both feeding miracles, the disciples only saw the obstacles instead of seeing that "all things are possible with God." What different obstacles did they point out in the feedings of the 4,000 and 5,000?

(Distance was the obstacle here in verse 4, whereas money was their concern in 6:37.)

What roadblocks threaten to keep you from ministering to others?

Let's stop now and ask the Lord to help us overcome them.

[Invite people to pray silently or out loud.]

Enter the Pharisees once again. What do they want this time?

(A sign from heaven.)

Why do you think Jesus refuses to give them one?

(His use of power was motivated by compassion for human need, not a need to put on a magic show to prove himself, especially to people who've already called his power demonic!)

As a further expression of his indignation, Jesus abruptly gets in the boat and leaves the Pharisees behind. Possibly in their haste to keep up with Jesus, the disciples forget to bring bread aboard.

What does Jesus mean by his mini-parable on yeast?

(Yeast is a common biblical symbol for evil, since both grow quickly and easily, often hidden from view. Jesus didn't want the disciples to be corrupted by the Pharisees, but to remember that following him requires faith, not proof.)

How did the disciples misunderstand him?

(They took it as advice about not accepting bread from certain sources. They thought they were being scolded for their lack of foresight, but Jesus was much more concerned about their lack of faith.)

After rebuking the Pharisees, Jesus has some scolding words for his disciples as well. What is his main point in verses 17-21?

(In a series of eight questions, he rebukes them for their lack of spiritual perception and failure to learn from either of his feeding miracles. According to William Lane, "Repeated exposure to Jesus' teaching and mighty works had not led to reflection on their significance but to a basic insensitivity and dullness" [Lane 281]. They continue to be preoccupied with temporal concerns such as bread and distance and money, instead of trusting the great Provider who was right there with them in the boat!)

How can we avoid the errors of both the Pharisees and the disciples?

(We should not demand things from God just for mere proof. On the other hand, we should not be so blind and hardened to peoples' needs that we don't ask anything of God. We should neither demand too much, nor expect too little from God. And unlike either of the two groups, we should offer ourselves to be used of God to meet the needs of people.)

In the remainder of our passage, Mark moves from spiritual to physical blindness. Let's read verses 22-26.

When "some people brought a blind man," what does Jesus do?

("He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village.")

Why do you think Jesus led him outside the village?

(Possibly to both avoid publicity and give individual attention to the man in a quiet setting.)

How does Jesus heal him and why?

(Jesus spit on his eyes and put his hands on the man, but it's unclear why Christ used this method. Touching the man is consistent with Christ's compassionate touch on many he healed, and the spittle on the eyes was perhaps to communicate his intentions to the blind man, whose sense of touch was heightened.)

Why do you think the healing came in two stages?

(Since Christ's question seems to anticipate his blurry vision, perhaps Jesus sensed that the man's faith was not complete. But the important thing is that Jesus finished the job, which is encouraging to those of us who, like the disciples, don't always get what God is teaching us the first time around.)

Let's pray that God will enable us to see what Jesus is doing among us, and ask for faith to be used of him to bless others.

MARK 8:27-38

How have your perceptions of Jesus changed throughout your spiritual journey?

In this passage, Jesus asks about people's perceptions of him, and then challenges the disciples' ideas about "the Christ."

Let's read verses 27-30.

Why does Jesus ask for their thoughts about his identity, instead of just telling them who he is?

(Jesus often used questions in his teaching to stir up faith in his students. He seemed less interested in pounding in knowledge than he was in stimulating thought and belief.)

Instead of only asking his disciples what they thought, why does Jesus first ask what others are saying?

(To draw out a contrast.)

Do people answer this question much differently today?

(A good percentage of unbelievers believe that Jesus was a great teacher or prophet, much the same as the reference here to Elijah, John, and other prophets.)

What does it mean that Jesus is "the Christ"?

("Christ" is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah," which means "Anointed One." This term was used in Old Testament times of kings, priests, and prophets who were chosen and empowered by God for a particular task. The Jews came to expect an ultimate Messiah who would deliver them and establish his righteous kingdom.)

How does Jesus respond to Peter's confession and why?

(In warning them "not to tell anyone about him," Jesus acknowledged the truth of Peter's statement, but made it clear that it was not time for their public proclamation of his identity. The reason could have been to prevent the crowds from acting on their nationalistic conception of the Messiah by forcing a political coronation of him. Also, Jesus may have wanted to improve on his disciples' defective view of his Messiahship before allowing them to share it with others. A teacher has got to know his subject, and the disciples grasped

Christ's identity more fully only after his passion and Pentecost. Only then did Jesus send them as his "witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" [Acts 1:8].)

Let's read verses 31-38.

How must Christ's prediction of his suffering and death have sounded to his disciples?

(They were shocked and appalled that such an infamous end would interrupt this ministry of miracles that drew such big crowds. And they expected upward—not downward—mobility in his future. "The Christ" was supposed to be a symbol of strength, not weakness!)

How could Peter rebuke the one he had just called "the Christ"?

(He obviously had a truncated idea of "the Christ." Although it's not advisable, it is conceivable to argue with a provincial king, but not with the King of the universe! And Peter's idea of "the Christ" was not a suffering servant, but a conquering king. He could also be expressing natural concern for his friend who had taken center stage in his life.)

Why was Jesus so harsh with Peter, calling him "Satan" in front of the other disciples?

(Jesus was so focused on the cross that he wouldn't tolerate any suggestion to veer from his mission. Peter's suggested diversion was similar to Satan's, who had tempted Jesus to opt for immediate worldly power.)

How do verses 34-38 expound on what Jesus has just said about his suffering [v. 31]?

(He says in effect: "Not only must I suffer, but you must as well if you choose to follow me!" This became especially true of Peter, who was said to have been crucified.)

What does it mean to deny self and carry the cross?

(Jesus isn't calling us to deny ourselves certain luxuries or bad habits, but to deny our perceived right to direct our own lives. We are to renounce ownership of ourselves, and submit unswervingly to God's will. This often brings opposition, as it did to Jesus. Whatever the cost, Jesus calls us to say no to self and yes to God.)

What paradox does Jesus give us in verse 35?

("For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." In other words, whoever retains control of his own life actually forfeits

the authentic life that only Jesus gives. On the other hand, whoever allows his own will to be crucified receives spiritual and eternal life—through death!)

Let's reread verses 36-37. What does Jesus teach here about the value of one's soul?

(One's soul is worth more than the "whole world." Jesus points out the stupidity of obtaining what this world offers by trading away the most valuable possession we could ever have.)

What cause and effect does Jesus promise in verse 38?

(If you're ashamed of him now, he'll be ashamed of you later.)

Someone summarize verses 34-38 for us in contemporary verbiage.

Let's ask Jesus now for the strength to follow him wherever he may lead us, whatever the cost.

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