



# mark: an introduction

Mark's Gospel is the earliest Gospel written—the first attempt of a Christian to write the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Matthew and Luke who wrote their Gospels ten to twenty years later appear to have used Mark's work as a primary source.

## ***the world Mark was writing about***

Mark is writing around the year 70AD, but is writing about the adult life of Jesus which had taken place some forty years prior. By the year 30AD Israel had been under the oppressive occupation of the Roman Empire for a generation. The Empire had taken control of all of the structures of government and power. They had installed their own king (Herod), who was answerable to Caesar. They had taken over the Temple, appointing High Priests who were loyal to the Empire.

This was not the first time Israel had been occupied. Two hundred years prior the Greeks had taken over Israel, but a small band of revolutionaries, led by a man called Judas Maccabaeus, overthrew Greek control.

There was hope in Jesus' day that another revolutionary leader would be raised up by God to save them all. Many people saw Jesus as one such leader; one such savior.

## ***the world Mark lived in***

The world had changed a lot in forty years, unfortunately not for the better. Rome had burned to the ground under Emperor Nero, and the Christian community had been blamed for the fire. An intense persecution of Christians in Rome followed.

In the year 70AD, tensions in Jerusalem reached a boiling point, and the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. They slaughtered the priests and Jewish religious leaders. Survivors ran for Antioch in Syria, where they tried to figure out what to do and why God had allowed all this to happen.

Mark's Gospel has been called a "wartime Gospel." He wrote his "Good News" of Jesus in a time when the world desperately needed some.

# features of Mark

## *The Way*

The Greek word *hodos*, which means “the way” is used throughout the Gospel. It is oftentimes obscured by English translations which render it as “the way,” “the path,” “the road,” etc. But, Mark is referring to more than just a road from one town to the next. He’s talking about the Way of Jesus, the Way of the Cross, the Way from death to life. Before Christians were ever called “Christians” we were called “Followers of the Way.” Mark’s Gospel is a document which is meant to show Jesus’ Way, and to compel us to follow it, even when the world seems to be going upside down. Perhaps especially then.

“For Mark, following Jesus is not a ticket to glory, it is the path to suffering; being a disciple does not bring exaltation, but humiliation and pain. Mark stresses, however, that the suffering would not last forever. In fact, it would not last long. Just as Jesus was vindicated, so too will be his faithful followers.”

*Bart D. Ehrman, The New Testament: A Historical Introduction. New York  
Oxford University Press, 2000. Pg. 74*

## *The Kingdom of God*

Very little of Jesus’ teachings in Mark’s Gospel have anything to do about himself. Unlike the Gospel of John, Mark does not spend a lot of time talking about who Jesus is. Jesus’ teachings in Mark center on the Kingdom of God. “Kingdom” was a thoroughly political word in that day. There was the Kingdom of Herod and the Kingdom of Caesar. Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God has an undeniable confrontational tone to it. And, obviously, Jesus’ challenge to the kingdoms of this world was cause for his execution.

## INTRO

### P3

### ***Immediately***

Like the repeated use of *hodos*, there is also the constant repetition of the Greek phrase *kai euthos*, which means “immediately.” Almost everything in the Gospel of Mark happens immediately. It adds to a dramatic sense of urgency to the Gospel. Mark, who is writing during a time of great turmoil sees the message of Jesus as being critical, necessary, and he thought that time was running short to get on board. Related to this point, Mark’s Gospel is written with no poetry or flourish. There is no telling of Jesus’ birth, childhood, and even no appearance of Jesus following his resurrection. It’s the shortest of the four Gospels. Again, this brevity adds to the sense of urgency. Mark isn’t convinced that there’s time for unnecessary stories or details. The word needs to get out, and get out as quickly as possible.

### ***The Secret***

One curious detail in Mark is that oftentimes when someone figures out who Jesus actually is, or he performs some great miracle, he commands them to say nothing about it to anyone. It’s as if Jesus doesn’t want people focusing on him to the detriment of focusing on The Way or the Kingdom of God. This “Messianic Secret,” As it is often called, keeps Jesus’ teachings and actions focused beyond himself.

### ***The Sea of Galilee***

As pointed out by Dr. Alexander Shaia, a theologian and anthropologist, in Mark’s Gospel Jesus has his disciples cross the Sea of Galilee five times. The Galilean Sea is known for being a dangerous place where storms can come up very quickly. In fact, in two of these crossings the disciples encounter a storm that they fear will sink their boat. Shaia notes that Mark’s Gospel, written in a scary and dangerous time, shows Jesus not steering his followers away from the Sea, but guiding them to it; yet, not abandoning them.

## INTRO

### P4

### *The Ending*

There are two endings to Mark: an original one, and a longer ending which was written and added sometime after Mark had put his pen down. The original ending closes the Gospel with the women going to the tomb, hearing from an angel that Jesus had risen from the dead, and the women running away in fear resolved to say nothing to anyone about it. That's not exactly an inspiring ending. Apparently someone felt uncomfortable with this ending that they wrote a second ending where the resurrected Christ appears to the disciples, and sends them out.

## who was Mark?

The Book of Acts speaks of a “Mark” or “John Mark,” who was a traveling partner of the Apostles Paul and Barnabas. Eventually this Mark and Paul had a falling out, and Paul left him behind. It may be the case that they repaired their relationship, for Paul invokes Mark's name in Colossians (4:10) and 2 Timothy (4:11) as a trusted co-minister of the Gospel. Peter also had a co-worker who he called “my son Mark,” who appears to have been his secretary. An early 2nd century source says that this Mark wrote down the stories of Jesus that Peter had told him. Could this be the Gospel that bears his name? Tradition says that after the death of Peter, Mark went off to Egypt to bring the Gospel to the Egyptian people. Christians in Egypt to this day—called “Coptic Christians”— credit Mark with founding their church.



# mark: chapter 1

## *the beginning*

Part title, and part prologue, Mark wants to take us back to where the story of Jesus begins. It is, of course, a different beginning place than the other three Gospels.

## *the gospel*

“Gospel” literally means “Good News” or “Good Tidings.” It didn’t have a strict religious tone to it. It could be any news that was particularly “good.”

## *Jesus Christ*

It’s a common mistake to assume that “Christ” is just Jesus’ last name. Of course, it isn’t. It’s a title. It literally means “the anointed one,” or “messiah.” It is the one who God anoints to save the people. Interestingly, this title was ascribed to King Cyrus of Persia, who liberated the Jewish people after their seventy year captivity in Babylon. For saving the people, he was called “anointed.” But, in the New Testament it is a title which is held only for Jesus.

## *Son of God*

This is the second title given to Jesus in this opening verse. It foreshadows the faithful cry of the centurion at the conclusion of the Gospel.

## *as it is written*

This is a bit of a glaring mistake, as the first quotation, while attributed to Isaiah, is actually from Malachi 3:1. Oops. In Malachi’s context “Behold, I send my messenger before you,” was something of a threat. The Temple priesthood during Malachi’s day was a mess, as was the religious life of Israel. God was saying that a “messenger” or “angel” would be coming - not to throw a party, but to clean the place up.

## *prepare the way*

This is the first instance of “the way” in Mark, and it’s a quotation from Isaiah 40:3. “The way” figures prominently in the later part of Isaiah as the “way” back from captivity in Babylon. God was going to save his people, and they could return home, following the way that God had given them.

## CHAP 1

### P6

#### *repentance*

Repentance means to “turn toward” God, while “turning away” from those things which lead us away from God. In the New Testament it has the specific connotation of turning away from sin, however in the Hebrew Bible it is the language of exile. It’s God bidding his people to return home to him.

#### *and all the country*

Mark has a fondness for sweeping statements which include everyone. He really believes that the Good Tidings of Jesus is for everyone, not a holy elite. This was at odds with many of his contemporaries.

#### *baptize with the Holy Spirit*

In Isaiah 44:3 we read: For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”

The point John seems to be making here is about how Jesus’ baptism would be greater than his own. But, he also seems to be borrowing from Isaiah’s linking of true cleansing with the Spirit of God.

#### *immediately*

Here is the first instance of “immediately” in Mark’s Gospel. It shows a certain urgency that drives Jesus from the moment of his baptism to begin his ministry.

#### *in the wilderness*

But, before his ministry can commence, Jesus first spends forty days in the wilderness - similarly to Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. Mark does not give us the details of this scene that we are familiar with from other Gospels, which tell of the specific temptations Jesus faces, and how he refuses them.

#### *proclaiming the gospel*

Jesus doesn’t go to Jerusalem to begin his ministry, but to Galilee. It’s there that he begins proclaiming the “gospel of God.” But, we aren’t yet let in on the substance of this Good News.

#### *kingdom*

“Kingdom” was a thoroughly political term in those days. Herod had a Kingdom in Judaea. The Emperor had his Kingdom. But, Jesus is declaring a totally new Kingdom which quite

## CHAP 1

### P7

obviously is meant to usurp any earthly kingdoms and kings. And, what we know about earthly kings is that they never appreciate being usurped.

#### ***repent and believe***

Here we have a first crack at a nascent creed; a formula for what constitutes a disciple of Jesus - a follower of The Way. Followers of Jesus' Way repent and believe. But, where do they turn when they repent, and what exactly do they believe?

#### ***fishing for people***

Jesus really gets things moving when he starts to gather his disciples. In this first call scene Jesus gets four followers right off the bat, who each "immediately" leave their jobs, their families, and any local responsibilities they may have, and they begin to follow Jesus.

#### ***in the synagogue***

Jesus enters the synagogue in Capernaum - which very well may have been his home town house of worship, where he would have known everyone and everyone would have known him - and during their service of worship a

man with a demonic spirit interrupts the worship service. Of all the places to find a manifestation of evil! Not some back alley. Not in the basement of some wicked man. But, in a house of worship!

And, we are still very early in this Gospel. Right off the bat Mark wants us to see the real lay of the land. There is a battle of good verses evil, and it's bubbling up everywhere, even in the holy places.

#### ***the mother-in-law***

Jesus "immediately" leaves the synagogue, and goes to Simon Peter's house with the other three disciples, and there they find Simon's Mother-in-Law sick. Jesus heals her, and feeling much better, she provides hospitality for her guests, and her healer.

Later that evening there is a huge crowd gathered around the house of people who are sick, people who are possessed by demons, and probably people who are trying to get a peek at this new local superstar. Again, Mark wants us to see a very disordered world, where disease and the demonic are pervasive.

#### ***desolate place***

Jesus takes time to pray. He could

## CHAP 1

### P8

probably have spent this time healing more people, or casting out other demons. But, solitude, silence, and prayer are a priority for him. Interestingly when Jesus is found and told that everyone is looking for him in the town, instead of staying and taking care of their needs, he tells the four disciples that it's time to go somewhere else. So he travels around to other towns, and other synagogues "preaching" and "casting out demons."

### *cleaning up*

Leprosy was not only a serious medical condition, but it was also treated as a serious spiritual one as well. The Book of Leviticus says that people with skin conditions must be completely separated from the community, live outside the walls of a town, come in contact with no one, and yell "unclean, unclean" wherever they go. It was regarded as kind of a walking death, and like many other diseases was seen to be the result of sin.

Jesus encounters a man with leprosy who asks Jesus to make him clean. Most translations say that Jesus is "moved with compassion" or "pity." But, some ancient copies of Mark say that Jesus was "angry." Later manuscripts

seem to be wary of showing a Jesus that is angry, and so they often change it to show a more gentle Jesus. Though, if Jesus was angry, who was he angry with? The leper? Or the fact that a child of God was treated as if he were dead by society.

### *say nothing*

Jesus heals the leper and commands him not to tell anyone. In fact in the Greek it's such a strong command that Jesus uses a double negative, basically saying, "say no-thing to no-one."

This is an example of the "Messianic Secret" that we find throughout Mark. Apparently Jesus does not want to be known as a wonder-worker, for Jesus can't truly be known apart from his suffering and death. There is where his identity as "Christ" and "Son of God" will be made plain for all to see.





# mark: chapter 2

## ***back home***

After traveling around healing and exorcising, Jesus returns to his hometown of Capernaum. So, we've made a big loop, and we are back where Jesus' ministry started. Apparently we are at his home, and the huge crowd.

## ***unroofing***

The crowd is so big that in order to get someone to Jesus to heal him, they have to climb on top of the roof, remove part of the roof, and lower him down.

In the Greek the man's friends literally "unroof the roof."

Of note in this scene is that it's the man's friends who bring him to Jesus. This is the model of the apostolic life: we bring our friends to Jesus.

## ***blasphemy***

The man's friends obviously bring the paralyzed man to be healed. But, Jesus uses the opportunity to forgive his sins. Again, this is the explicit job of the Temple and the Jewish Priesthood. You

can't just go around forgiving people's sins without arousing the ire of the authorities. They accuse him of blasphemy for the first time. It's interesting that the scribes are described as "sitting" amidst this thick crowd. This is the first of five controversy stories in Mark.

## ***rise***

Jesus uses this opportunity to say while forgiving sins might be pretty big, wouldn't it be bigger if he healed the man of his paralysis? So, that's what he does as an answer to the objection of the religious authorities. Notice the language of resurrection here: rise. This same Greek word is used to describe Jesus' resurrection and the raising of Jairus' daughter who had died.

## ***paralysis***

This story is obviously a story about healing, but it also could be about a bit more than that. It could very well be a commentary of the spiritual paralysis of the religious institutions of Jesus' Day

## CHAP 2

### P10

AND Mark's day. Perhaps even our own day?

Paralysis/lameness was considered by the Hebrew Bible and contemporary Qumran community as making one impure.

#### *another disciple*

Jesus apparently likes picking up his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. He gets another one, but this time he's a tax collector, and not a fisherman. This one, Levi, is not mentioned by this name in Mark's list of the disciples. It might be Matthew though, who is named. Matthew is included in Mark's list, and Matthew is named as the tax collector in Matthew's Gospel.

Tax collectors worked for the Empire, and so also for the Emperor. Judea was an occupied country, and for the pleasure of being occupied, they had to pay taxes! Tax collectors were not paid a salary by the Empire though, and this they added a surcharge on the taxes they exacted. Oftentimes they would use their position as workers-of-the-Empire to really fleece the people. Thus, they were abhorred as a class of people.

#### *hanging with the wrong crowd*

Jesus goes to Levi's house, and is surrounded by other tax collectors and "sinners." Apparently Jesus was specifically intriguing to them, and Jesus had no problem eating with them. For the religious establishment this was a scandal. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu says, "God has a soft spot for sinners."

This is a widely attested feature of Jesus' ministry: he fellowshiped with, and was followed by, people who were considered "sinners" not because of some occasional sin, but because of a lifestyle that was outrightly identified as that of a "sinner." In all of these accounts we find no exhortations to repent. We find this in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and Q.

It appears to be a hallmark of a new community that Jesus is calling together: a community of sinners who are beloved of God. Unfortunately this aspect of the kingdom was as lost on the Early Church as it is in the modern church.

What would it look like for a Christian community to faithfully reflect this priority of Jesus? How could we/you do this?

## CHAP 2

### P11

#### *fasting*

All the other religious folk were fasting, but not Jesus and his disciples. This seemed like a weak point in Jesus' leadership and message, and the authorities tried to take advantage of it. Jesus makes the argument that his presence demanded celebration, not abstinence from food.

#### *bridegroom*

Jesus uses a conventional metaphor for our relationship with God: that of a married couple, where the people of God are the bride, and God/Jesus is the groom. This metaphor is present throughout the writings of the prophets, especially when they call idolatry - the pursuit of other gods - as adultery. The New Testament picks up this theme, but instead of focusing on infidelity, uses the marriage metaphor as a device to show the radical nature of God's love for us. We aren't God's slaves, we are God's spouse.

#### *new wineskins*

Even as he uses old metaphors, Jesus says that something new is going on with his arrival and ministry. This new thing echoes the "new thing" of Isaiah

43:19 (I am doing a new thing, do you not perceive it?). The structure which holds this new wine must also be new - which is obviously another attack on the religious establishment of Jesus' and Mark's day.

Matthew adds to this scene by saying that "both the old and the new (wine) are preserved," as a way of saying that the old ways are ALSO preserved. Mark seems to have no interest in preserving the old.

Luke adds, "No one after drinking all the wine desires the new," which seems to mean that people who get enamored but the old ways won't be excited for the new ways.

The tension between the "old" and the "new" is present in every religion/culture. How do we know which "old" practices and beliefs to retain and which "new" ones deserve our attention? Certainly not everything old is bad, nor everything new, good.

#### *sabbath*

"Sabbath" literally means "seventh" and refers to the seventh day of creation when God rested, and upon which God commanded all of God's people to rest

## CHAP 2

### P12

in the fourth commandment. In the ancient world the religious establishment had created lots of rules and regulations defining what “rest” looked like on the sabbath, and what would count as a violation of that commandment.

One sabbath day the disciples are picking grain, which would have been regarded as an obvious transgression of the commandment to rest. The religious leaders again see this as a sign of spiritual weakness in Jesus, and they call him out on his apparent hypocrisy.

(Deuteronomy says that you’re allowed to go into your neighbor’s field and pick his grain, but you can’t take a sickle. In other words you can take a little to feed yourself, but anything more is stealing.)

Jesus confounds them by recalling a story from 1 Samuel where David and his soldiers entered the Temple precincts and ate the bread (the “showbread”) that was set aside (consecrated) for the clergy.

Interestingly, he doesn’t seem to offer an exact reason for how picking grain on the sabbath ISN’T breaking the fourth commandment. He seems to indicate that there was some other time that a law was broken for a good reason, and

so this law being bent isn’t that big of a deal.

### *made for man*

Jesus does say that the sabbath law is “made for man” and not the other way around. It’s an interesting way to look at all of the divine commandments. They aren’t arbitrarily made to make life more complicated for us, but rather they are made for us, to make life more full, more Holy, more meaningful. In the case of the sabbath, it keeps us from just working and working and working, and forgetting what it is that we are working for. Rest is built into the spiritual life. It’s not a suggestion, but a commandment. But, does plucking a few heads of grain keep us from resting? Of course not. Does healing someone on the sabbath violate the intention of the commandment? Of course not.

## CHAP 2

# Q

### P13

A source that Matthew and Luke used for their gospels which apparently Mark was not privy to. Modern biblical scholarship says that Matthew and Luke not only had their own source material, but they also used Mark and Q. Q appears to be a lost document composed of minimal narrative material and mostly comprised of the sayings of Jesus - similar to the Gospel of Thomas.



# mark: chapter 3

## ***that sabbath thing again***

Jesus returns to the synagogue and finds a man with a crippled hand. All eyes were on Jesus to see if he was going to do something about it on the sabbath - so this looks like something of a setup. Jesus names the tension in the room by asking if it's lawful to do good things on the sabbath day. No one answers him.

Without any incantation, touch, or any other healing action, he asks the man to stretch out his hand, and when he does it's healed. The religious authorities are incensed, and they begin to plot against him.

## ***anger***

When the Pharisees refuse to answer Jesus' counter-question, Jesus is angry. The word here (orge) literally means "wrath." Jesus is absolutely furious.

## ***hardness of heart***

This is language straight out of the Exodus experience. Hardness of heart was the spiritual condition of Pharaoh.

The Deuteronomist was focused on the condition of the heart.

*To this day God has not given you a heart to understand, eyes to see, nor ears to hear. Deuteronomy 29:4*

*It may be among you someone's heart is already turning away from God. Deuteronomy 29:18*

*Among the nations recall in your hearts the blessing and curse I have set before you. Deuteronomy 30:1*

## ***star power***

Jesus takes his followers to the Sea of Galilee and finds that a great crowd has begun to follow him - so great that he has to worry about having a boat on the ready to escape.

## ***the crowd***

In Mark's Gospel, the "crowd" is always a shorthand way of speaking of the disenfranchised masses: the poor, the displaced, the sick, and those who are

## CHAP 3

### P15

deemed by society and the religious establishment as “unclean.”

#### *the apostles*

Having already called 5 disciples, Jesus rounds out the field by calling 7 more. However, while the others were all found down by the Sea, here we have a trip up the mountain.

In the Greek Jesus “went up,” “he summoned,” and “he chose.” He chooses them, that “they might be with him.” Being “with him” is a feature of being a disciple, as is “following him.”

How can we “be with Jesus” today? What constitutes “being with?” What does this say about discipleship?

#### *twelve*

The number “12” is found throughout the Hebrew Bible, especially as it relates to Israel. The Twelve Sons of Jacob/ Israel became the titular heads of the Twelve Tribes. Prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, Israel was a loose confederation of these twelve tribes, each with their own leadership. In times of danger, the tribes would unite under one leader (Judge), but then when

things calmed down again the tribes would go back to their confederation.

The Hebrew Bible shows the transition from confederacy to monarchy as a fraught one - a transition that God only went through reluctantly. Throughout the books of the Chronicler, powerful kings are most often the evil ones, and weak kings are often the holiest. It has been suggested that Jesus’ language around “Kingdom” was a hardening back to the pre-monarchical era when only God was hailed as “King.” If so, then the reintroduction of “12” might just be a call to return to this original vision, albeit in a different way.

#### *sons of thunder*

The Zebedee brothers were given the nickname “the sons of thunder.” It’s an interesting detail. I mean, how does one get a nickname like that?!

#### *zealot*

There is a second Simon who is identified as a “zealot.” Zealots were a band of men dedicated to the overthrowing of the Roman Empire’s hold on Israel. To the Jewish people they were seen as patriots, to the Romans they were seen as terrorists.

## CHAP 3

### P16

#### ***a sandwich***

Mark loves to “sandwich” a story within another story. We will see this again and again. It’s a way of linking the meaning of both stories. In this instance A) Jesus’ family comes to seize him, B) the scribes come to accuse him of being of the devil, and C) Jesus’ family comes for him again. Both the family AND the religious authorities try and keep Jesus under control. This is what happens when people start challenging the status quo. The people in power are threatened and so the social fabric is also threatened. Everyone wants to keep the boat from rocking.

#### ***family ties***

The word here, “seize” is a strong one - connoting “arrest.” Its interesting that the Gospel presents Jesus’ own family as thinking he’s nuts. This isn’t particularly flattering.

#### ***beelzebul***

While Jesus’ family is worried that he’s nuts, the religious authorities begin to claim that he’s an agent of Satan. Jesus tries to use logic here to thwart their attack: why would an agent of evil be casting out other agents of evil?

“Beezebul” never shows up in the Hebrew Bible. In the New Testament it is found only here and Q. (Luke 11:15, 18-19; Matthew 10:25; 12:24, 27) “Baalzebub” which literally means “Lord of the Flies” is found in 2 Kings 1:3, 6 as a way to poke fun of the god Baal.

In this chapter Jesus is accused of being out of his mind by his family and of being a demonic sorcerer by the religious authorities. These don’t seem to be things that would inspire people to follow him. Why do you think Mark includes them?

#### ***blasphemy of the Holy Spirit***

The kind of transgression here is curiously unclear, and has been interpreted in wildly various ways throughout history. In this place in Mark it appears to have something to do with claiming the Works of God done in Jesus’ ministry are the works of the Evil One.

#### ***the family***

Who is Jesus’ family? Well obviously it’s his mother, father, and any siblings, right? Except Jesus extends the reach of his family to be anyone who is aligned



## **CHAP 3**

### **P17**

with him. He opens the possibility for anyone to be a member of his family. So, not only can we be a follower of his, but we can also become a relative of his.

This whole section is about discipleship - what it means to follow Jesus. Mark ends this section where Jesus is called crazy by his family and possessed by a demon by the authorities by giving a remarkably concise definition of what a disciple looks like: "Whoever does the will of God."



# mark: chapter 4

## ***big sermon***

This section, where once again we return to the Sea, is a long sermon consisting of parables. There will be another such sermon a bit later. The largest part of this sermon is the well known “parable of the sower.”

## ***knowing your audience***

Jesus’ audience is primarily poor farmers and fishers, and so in this key parable Jesus uses imagery that would have been quite familiar. Poor farmers didn’t have large fields, well plowed, and irrigated. They cast their seed on whatever ground they happened to have available to them, and they hoped for the best. The fact that in Jesus’ parable 3/4’s of the seed failed would have been hardly surprising to the people listening to Jesus.

Farmer/ peasants in those days depended on their crop to feed their own family, pay for farming supplies, and to be the starter seed for next year. When the crop did not bring in enough, they would have to go in debt, using their land as collateral. When they

defaulted on their loan, the land became the property of the one who provided the loan. In certain instances the people who took out the loan would be enslaved until the loan was settled. This is how systemic poverty worked back then. This is also why the biblical concept of Jubilee was so astounding.

## ***Jubilee***

In the Hebrew Bible every seven years was supposed to be a Jubilee year. In Jubilee, slaves were freed, debts forgiven, and lands returned. It was supposed to limit systemic poverty and the over accumulation of wealth by a few. There is no evidence it was ever practiced, but it is referenced multiple times in Jesus’ ministry - as is forgiveness, release, and liberation.

## ***bumper crop***

A particularly great yield for a farmer in those days would have been six fold. A thirty, sixty, or hundred fold yield would be a life changing event. It would take a person, a family, perhaps even an entire

## CHAP 4

### P19

village out of the cycle of poverty. In effect, this would be Jubilee.

Similarly to the story of the wedding in Cana in John's Gospel, where Jesus makes a TON of wine out of water, or in the miraculous feeding stories where baskets of leftovers remain, this parable in Mark shows the incredible over-abundance of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus teaches about it.

*Have you ever experienced the incredible abundance of God?*

*Have you experienced the abundance of the Kingdom of God during a time of great trial or sorrow?*

#### ***seeing but not perceiving***

"Seeing but not perceiving" becomes a new "hard heartedness." Some will see the liberation that is promised in the Good News of Jesus, but they will not really let it in. It will be like their hearts are still hardened to the possibilities and promise of the Kingdom of God.

#### ***seed on the path***

Who is this? The crowd. They get all excited by Jesus' healing and preaching,

but then they join the authorities and cry out "crucify him."

#### ***rocky ground***

Who is this? Who gets scorched by the heat? The disciples. They are with him at first, but when things start getting dicey around the crucifixion, they run away fearing that they too will get caught up in the persecution. In other words: when the fire gets too hot, they get out of the kitchen.

#### ***among the thorns***

These are they who get distracted by wealth and privilege. Who is this?? There will be someone we meet a little later on in the Gospel who fits this bill perfectly.

#### ***good soil***

This is also the disciples. But, it takes a while to get there. In fact, the seed sown on good soil is anyone who takes up the mantle of discipleship. We may not "get it" at first, but eventually we can let the roots dig down inside of us.

## CHAP 4

### P20

#### *dwelling in its shade*

The mustard seed grows up into a tree that provides shade and protection. This is not the first time we see this metaphor used in the Bible.

In Judges 9:1-21, the olive bush, fig tree, and vine refuse to become “king” and provide shade. It’s not until the thorns (!) arrive that they allow others to take refuge in their shade. This was a parable against a wicked king who was trying to make a power grab.

In Ezekiel 17, the prophet is trying to convince the Israelite king and court not to forge a political alliance with other countries (Egypt), but to dwell under the protection of the shade of God’s cedar trees. God promises if they do this (they don’t), then Israel will become a noble cedar tree which will provide shade for “winged creatures of every kind.”

In Ezekiel 31, the prophet dreams up a scene where he would ask Egypt’s Pharaoh to consider Egypt’s greatness - which was as great as the fallen Assyria, whose tree was cut down and in whose trunk the birds of the air make their home.

In Daniel 4 we find Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great tree at the center of the

earth, in whose branches all the birds of the world make their nest. Daniel warns that this tree (Babylon) may be cut down. (It is.)

So, when Jesus uses this very same metaphor, he’s drawing on the same anti-Imperialist message the Hebrew Bible was espousing. This Kingdom of God would rise like a tree, and any other trees/Kingdom, no matter how great, would be cut down.

*What kind of response do you think this message would have garnered from a bunch of peasant farmers who are living in the shadow of The Roman Empire?*

#### ***concealed/disclosed***

The lamp and the bushel basket is about things hidden not being hidden forever. If we remember that this whole section of the Gospel is about discipleship, this appears to be a missionary imperative: let the light shine! Things seem hidden now, in fact, things are quite dark, but if you release the light all will be able to see.

## CHAP 4

### P21

#### *measure for measure*

This phrase is used in both Matthew and Luke amidst their warnings against judging others - a context that seems to make more sense than here, where this seems to be a bit of a non sequitor.

#### *taken away*

Seems to be a harsh take on folk wisdom, i.e. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. In Matthew and Luke it's context makes more sense (after the parable of the talents).



# mark: chapter 5

## ***the Gerasenes***

In this region there were 10 cities (the Decapolis) which had been settled by retired veterans of the Imperial Army, who had been given the land as a “thank you” for their service to the Emperor.

## ***unclean***

This story is punctuated with the flashing red lights of ritual impurity: cemeteries and swine. In Isaiah 65:4 we find this description of idolaters: *They live in tombs and spend nights in dark corners, eating the meat of pigs and using unclean food.*

## ***the plight of the demoniac***

The demoniac is presented as both terribly frightening and utterly pathetic. He lives in the cemetery amongst the dead (presumably because the living won't have anything to do with him), he could not be held down even with chains (people chained him!), and he was even inflicting self harm upon himself.

## ***Son of the Most High***

The demoniac/ Legion calls Jesus “Son of the Most High God.” This is not a Jewish phrase, but rather a Hellenistic one. Totally appropriate for a non-Jew to call Jesus this, rather than the Jewish “Holy One of God.”

## ***an imperial cartoon***

The demon's name is “Legion,” and he/ they ask to be sent into a “band” of swine. Both of these terms were solely militaristic in usage. That this area was occupied by foreign veterans of war begins to reveal what this passage is all about. Of course Legion asks to be sent into the band of swine - and at that time there was a widely practiced swine cult among Roman soldiers. That the pigs then drown themselves in the sea is, of course, reminiscent of Pharaoh's army drowning in the Red Sea.

This is a story that directly challenges the Imperial war machine, and which shows the region forced to live shackled and crying out for a help that was not coming.

## ***they beg him to leave***

## CHAP 5

### P23

Jesus saves this city from suffering under the screams and terror of the demoniac, and yet they immediately ask him to leave. He has liberated this man and all of them, and this liberation is scary.

*Do you know of people who run away from liberation or healing?*

#### ***another sandwich***

As discussed before, Mark loves sandwiches—stories which are wrapped in other stories. Here Jesus heals a woman while on the way to heal a little girl.

#### ***couldn't be more different***

The hemorrhaging woman, because blood is unclean, has been on the outskirts of society for twelve years, and she has run through all of her money with doctors and healers. She is at the end of her rope, and she is a societal outcast.

The little girl on the other hand is the daughter of a prominent man. She has someone to advocate for her: her dad. She is protected and loved by her community.

*If we were going to rewrite this story today... who would the woman be? Who would the little girl be?*

#### ***also the same***

What connects them is that they are each seriously ill, AND the number twelve. The girl is twelve years old, and the woman has been hemorrhaging for twelve years. Remember, the number twelve is a way of talking about the twelve tribes of Israel. These two ladies represent the whole family of Israel: sick, in trouble, on the verge of death, or already dead.

#### ***mirror image healings***

The woman reaches out her hand and takes her healing from Jesus. Jesus reaches out his hand to touch the little girl to heal her. If these two people are Israel personified, not even death can hold them down when Jesus gets involved. And, whether we wait for Jesus to come and raise us, or we go out and touch him on the streets, we will find healing.

#### ***get up***

## CHAP 5

### P24

The word here for “get up” is used later in reference to the resurrection of Jesus. This isn’t just a healing, it’s a resurrection story. It shows that resurrection comes for all of us.

#### *death*

The little girl was brought back from death, but what about the woman? In Leviticus, blood is forbidden to touch, not because it is dirty, but because it is holy. It contains the “life of the creature.” This holy gift was not to be trifled with. If this woman was hemorrhaging blood for twelve years... then in some technical Levitical way... she was dying. When she touches Jesus she stops bleeding, and therefore her twelve year journey of death comes to an end.

In some way, you could say that these are both resurrection stories.

#### *the big picture*

If you step back and look at this chapter, it’s like a scene from a horror movie. You’ve got a guy screaming in the graveyard who can’t even be safely chained to a tree without breaking loose. You have a little girl who dies. You’ve got a woman who’s bleeding profusely. We’ve got demons, gore, and death. If

The Gospel of Mark was a movie, this is not a Rom-Com or a nice drama. This is serious stuff. And, the stuff that Mark’s community was dealing with was serious stuff as well. They must have all felt like they were living in some scary story that they just wanted to get away from.

Mark’s message does not flinch from their solemn and scary reality. Mark lets his story go right there. And, in Mark’s world it is Jesus who comes to bring healing, peace, and life.





# mark: chapter 6

## ***hometown drama***

Jesus and his disciples go to his hometown, where he starts to teach in the synagogue.

## ***five questions***

What is the source of all of this?

What is this wisdom bestowed on him?

What mighty works are accomplished through his hands?

Isn't this one just a craftsman?

Don't his sisters still live among us?

## ***rejection***

Jesus is rejected by his own people in all four Gospels - making it one of the few things that all four of them agree on. The fact that this didn't make Jesus look good - I mean his own people rejected him, so why should we follow him? - makes it all the more likely to be a historical fact. AND, knowing that the first followers of Jesus were rejected and persecuted, this would have gone a long

way to settling their fears. If Jesus could have been rejected, then it must not be so bad for them to be rejected as well. They are in good company.

## ***brothers and sisters***

Historically, and theologically, the point here that gets the most traction is whether or not Jesus' brothers and sisters here are biological siblings. Some later theologies would want to protect the notion of the perpetual virginity of Jesus - meaning that not only was she a Virgin when she conceived Jesus, but she was ever after a virgin. If this is so, the siblings were either "spiritual siblings" or children of Joseph from a previous marriage.

Whatever the historical facts here are, none of the gospels are concerned with this question at all. They use "brother and sister" liberally. Here, in this story, the plain sense meaning is clearly that these are actual brothers and sisters.

## CHAP 6

### P26

#### ***scandalized***

The people of Jesus' hometown are scandalized by him, and their lack of belief in him causes him to be unable to do any works of wonder there... which is an incredibly important detail! Here is the only place where it's pretty clear that Jesus' ability to perform miracles rests at least in some part in the faith that is in those around him.

#### ***the 12 are empowered and sent forth***

After Jesus is rejected, he sends the disciples out with this power and authority to cast out demons. This must have been a little scary, right? I mean Jesus just got run out of town and was unable to conjure up enough juice to perform miracles - and now he's asking the disciples to take the same risk.

But, that's not the only risk here. They aren't to take any provisions for a journey. No food, no money, no extra clothes. They are to completely rely on the kindness of strangers - all the while completely relying on the power of God working through them. This is a call for total trust.

#### ***the talk of the town***

Everyone is apparently talking, and wondering who Jesus really is. Is he John the Baptist? Is he Elijah? Is he one of the other prophets?

#### ***John the Baptist's demise***

The mention of John the Baptist here is cause for Mark to change gears and talk about the death of John - as if he forgot to tell this part of the story, and had to backtrack. What follows is an incredibly detailed story, at least for Mark. The story demonstrates in Technicolor how evil Herod and his family were, and what Jesus would eventually be up against.

#### ***a desolate place***

When the disciples return from their adventures in ministry Jesus bids them to jump in a boat and come away with him to a desolate place. But, people recognize them and see where they go. The crowd ends up getting to the desolate place before Jesus and the disciples do. Jesus has compassion on these people who are hungry for Jesus and his mission, and begins to teach them. But, they aren't just hungry for spiritual nourishment.

## CHAP 6

### P27

#### ***the feeding***

The disciples suggest that Jesus dismiss them because it was getting late and they all were getting hungry. Jesus counters by saying that they should feed them. The disciples figured out that it would take nearly a half-years worth of wages to feed this huge crowd. Jesus asks how much they have. They have five loaves of bread and two fish.

#### ***fourfold action***

Jesus tells everyone to recline, as if they were dining at a fancy Mediterranean meal. He 1) took the food, 2) blessed it, 3) broke the loaves, and 4) gave it to the people. These four actions show up again and again in the Gospels, and are called the “fourfold action of the Eucharist.”

#### ***satisfied***

The little detail that everyone ate till they were satisfied demonstrates an over abundance of food. They weren’t just eating to survive, this was true feasting. This was an extravagance. (Which interestingly fits with the Gospel of John’s story of the wedding in Cana.)

#### ***how many?***

Mark says that there were five-thousand, which is a strange way to count, since we know that there also would have been women and children present. That might make the crowd top out at 10-15 thousand.

*This could be a teaching about feeding those who are in need. Or, if not an outright miracle, it could be about Jesus inspiring a feast of sharing. Or, it could be about Jesus sustaining the people of God with not only his words, but also the Eucharist. What do you think?*

#### ***do not be afraid***

Jesus sends his disciples out on the boat to go ahead of him to the other side of the sea. Jesus then goes up the mountain by himself to pray. When it is getting late, Jesus sees that they are out on the sea getting tossed by the waves.

So he walks out on the water towards them.

They think it’s a ghost. (Yet another instance of the disciples not “getting it.”)

## CHAP 6

### P28

They don't realize it's him until he speaks to them. (Similar to the resurrection appearance to Mary, when she thinks Jesus is the gardener before he speaks her name.)

Jesus gets in the boat and the sea calms. Mark tells us that the disciples are "bewildered." Not only are they confused and discombobulated by the storm and the sighting of a ghost, but they are still trying to figure out the feeding of the multitudes.

### *big picture*

Jesus doesn't just lead people to where there's plenty of food and outright safety. He takes people to places where there is no food, and sends people out on seas that get rough. BUT, while they are there he feeds them, joins them, and calms the waters.

Jesus doesn't treat us with kid-gloves, but he doesn't abandon us either.

*What would this have meant to Mark's primary audience? What might it mean to us?*



# mark: chapter 7

## ***dirty hands***

The section here where Mark describes the disciples eating without washing their hands is NOT about cleanliness, but rather about ritual purity.

Interestingly there are no Hebrew Bible laws which correspond to this. There are laws about washing hands after touching specifically *ritually unclean* objects, but that is it.

The Mishnah, a series of Jewish tractates from the 2nd century AD, does have a section on hand washing. This section from Mark could be about the oral tradition that led up to these laws being codified two centuries later.

## ***an Isaiah smackdown***

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13 to smackdown the Pharisees questioning of Jesus' disciples eating with unclean hands.

## ***hypocrites***

The word that Jesus uses here to call the Pharisees hypocrites comes from

Greek drama, and literally means “to play a part,” or “to make believe.”

## ***the Pharisees***

The standard line in the New Testament is that the Pharisees are bad, faithless, hypocrites. There is an over generalization here though. The Pharisees were the sect of Judaism that honored and respected the Bible above all else. Many of them committed the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) to memory, word-for-word. They are also the main sect of Judaism which believed in, and taught about a resurrection.

Decades after Jesus' death and resurrection, and right after the destruction of Jerusalem—around the time that Mark is writing—the Pharisees were blaming the tragedy on the people's lax view of the Bible, and were calling on God's People to treat the Bible and its teachings with far more respect. They believed that if they did that, then God would forgive them and rebuild Jerusalem.

The Christians of that time had a totally different message: *it doesn't matter what*

## CHAP 7

### P30

*happened to Jerusalem, and being more strict about the biblical laws isn't going to help. There is a new Good News from God about grace and mercy, which we are supposed to carry to the ends of the earth.*

Thus, while Mark is writing his Gospel, he and his community were in direct opposition to the Pharisees.

### ***all is clean***

In a rather stunning statement, Jesus says that nothing that enters the body can make it unclean, and Mark adds a note to say that this means that all food is clean and fit for consumption. This is diametrically opposed to not only Jewish practice and custom, but also the purity code of the Book of Leviticus. This would not only have upset the religion of Jesus's time, but also of Mark's time.

Even the early Christian community had ongoing discussions about what foods were appropriate to consume. The Christian community in Jerusalem actively advocated for Gentile Christians to eat kosher. In the Gentile world there was a major argument within first century Christianity as to whether Christians could eat meat that had previously been sacrificed to idols. Even

the New Testament has contradictory rulings on this matter. Paul thinks eating meat sacrificed to idols is ok, as long as you don't believe the idols are real gods. The author of the Book of Revelation strictly forbids the practice.

*This whole section brings to mind the discussion over moral rigidity. There are times when the desire to do what is right goes beyond this simple desire, and it becomes a something more. Jesus is actively over-ruling the laws that had been set down centuries before in the Bible. How do we come to realize what was prohibited at one time no longer needs to be prohibited? How do we keep from casting away those ways which should still be followed? How do we know the difference?*

### ***gentiles***

Mark's community would have regarded the pronouncement on the abolition of the food laws as a pronouncement on the acceptance of gentiles into the Christian Church. This is one of the first places in the Bible where we see a

## CHAP 7

### P31

Christianity that can be approached without first going through Judaism. The fact that the next scene takes place in clear gentile territory with a gentile woman highlights this all the more.

#### ***the woman***

Jesus' encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman is unique because it is one of the rare times where we find Jesus alone. In Matthew's rendering of this story he adds the disciples back in —as if he's uncomfortable with Jesus being alone with this foreign woman.

She begs for his help with her sick child —just as the synagogue leader Jairus did a few chapters earlier—but Jesus rebuffs her.

#### ***controversy***

Jesus' response to her, calling her a dog and refusing to heal her child, is obviously troubling here, and it has sent commentators scrambling for centuries trying to figure out what's going on here.

Is Jesus really so cold as to not want to heal her child? Is Jesus really ok with calling someone a “dog?”

In its context I think this is a statement

on Christian-Gentile relations. I think Jesus is responding as most of his contemporaries would—and as many of Mark's as well.

We are accustomed to see people different from us as “other” and “less than.” So Jesus responds accordingly. But, when she retorts, Jesus backs down, remarks on her behavior, and heals her possessed child from afar.

#### ***the deaf mute***

This story is strangely only found in the Gospel of Mark. And, its manner of healing is quite odd. Given that Jesus had just healed a girl from afar, the fact that he puts his fingers into the man's ears, spits, touches his tongue, and utters an Aramaic word is kind of stunning in contrast. Almost magical.

#### ***what we've been waiting for***

This passage harkens back to Isaiah 35:5-6: “The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” One of the marks of the reign of God in the prophetic literature is that all that is wrong will be righted. All that is damaged or unwholesome will be made whole again. For Jesus' contemporaries this was a HUGE signal

## **CHAP 7**

### **P32**

that something quite wondrous was happening in him—that he was indeed the fulfillment of the what the Hebrew Bible promised.





# mark: chapter 8

## ***another feeding***

Jesus has already fed a large multitude, and now we find Jesus with another crowd of thousands who are hungry. You'd think the disciples would know the drill by now, but of course they don't—they say, "How can one feed these people with bread in this desolate place?"

Again, Jesus takes some bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the people, and there is more than enough.

## ***baskets***

In this feeding there are seven loaves of bread and seven baskets of leftovers. In the previous feeding there were five loaves and twelve baskets.

There are also two different words for "basket" in these two feedings.

The five-and-twelve feeding is about the Jewish nation, given that there are five books in the Torah and twelve tribes in Israel. This second feeding seems to be about the inclusion of the gentiles, as seven is the biblical number of

perfection, and the word for basket here is a Greek term.

## ***hypocrites***

The word that Jesus uses here to call the Pharisees hypocrites comes from Greek drama, and literally means "to play a part," or "to make believe."

## ***a sign***

The Pharisees come to Jesus looking for a sign, and Jesus is obviously exasperated, after all he's just performed a pretty decent sign.

In fact, his feedings of the multitudes is a perfect parallel sign of the manna that God provided the Israelites in the wilderness. That was a sign that God was providing for them in their hour of need, Jesus' sign is that the same God that was at work way back when is still at work in Jesus.

Obviously, no sign will ever be good enough to make people believe.

## CHAP 8

### P34

#### **comedy**

Jesus has already wondered about his disciples lack of faith in a sea crossing. But now they disciples are freaking out in the boat because they don't have enough bread.

This is truly high comedy.

#### **questions**

*Do you not yet perceive or understand?*

*Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?*

*Do you not yet understand?*

Jesus is gobsmacked that the disciples are this thick in the head. They have no clue what is going on, what Jesus is capable of, and who Jesus is.

*When we are in crisis it's hard to see the whole picture—it's even hard to realize what the possibilities are. We don't often "see" what was right in front of our face until sometime later. There's really no reason for the disciples to be in crisis—but*

*Mark's original audience sure is.*

#### **leaven**

Jesus warns his followers against the "leaven" of the Pharisees and of Herod. Leaven was thought to be a sign of decay and death, even though it makes bread rise. It's that little invisible ingredient that is pervasive. Jesus is warning them against the little seeds of faithlessness and evil that were being sowed in those days.

#### **blind**

This healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is pretty amazing because it's the only one where the healing is gradual. It's no coincidence that the first miracle that Jesus performs after questioning whether the disciples "see" involves sight.

*"Do you not see?" Isn't a yes-or-no, black-or-white question. You can see, or you can be blind... but you can also just see a little bit. Just enough sight to be dangerous. Just enough sight to mistake a person for a tree.*

## CHAP 8

### P35

### *the hinge*

We are now at the direct midpoint of the Gospel, and what happens next is meant to happen right here.

### *Caesarea Philippi*

It is absolutely astonishing that Jesus takes his disciples to Caesarea Philippi. Also known as Baneas, this is the global headquarters of the Pan cult. This is the Vatican of Pan worshippers. There was a yawning mouth of a cave in Baneas which was believed to be a direct portal to hell. The cave was called, “the Gates of Hell.”

Every year the high festivals of Pan would be held here, with one of the prime features being acts of bestiality with goats as an act of worship.

THIS is where Jesus brings his disciples.

### *another call to discipleship*

It is here that Peter identifies Jesus as “the Christ,” the Messiah, the anointed one of God—of whom people of that time were expecting great things, especially the overthrow of Roman rule in Palestine.

This is the one lucid moment where Peter seems to understand what’s going on—the first disciple to see what God is truly doing in Jesus.

But, it won’t last long.

### *foretelling*

After teaching in parables, Jesus here opts to teach “plainly.” He tells that that he must suffer and die, and after three days he will rise again.

Peter balks at the first two items on the agenda: suffering and dying. After Peter’s shining moment a few verses earlier, he gets rebukes as “Satan.”

*It should be noted that the third item on the agenda, rising again, is never accepted by the disciples. In all of the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection in all the gospels, no one is expecting Jesus’ death to be anything but absolutely permanent.*

### *take up your cross*

Religion has always been about control, power, and victory. If you had the favor

## CHAP 8

### P36

of the gods, then you could be assured of control, power, and victory. Your women would bear children, your armies would prevail, your crops and herds would thrive. Religion was thoroughly about currying favor with the gods through prayers and sacrifice. If things started to go wrong for you and your people, then it was because you weren't praying or sacrificing enough.

This is the hallmark of almost all religious belief and activity across the globe, across history, and across across cultures.

However, Jesus' religion is different. To follow him means to deny yourself, take up a cross—a means of horrific execution—and follow him to death. To follow Jesus means not to save your life, but to release control and give up your life.

It is only in loss, lowering yourself, defeat, death, that you can ever come to anything that resembles victory. This is a complete overturning of religious thought and practice.

Jesus said things which led to his crucifixion. This isn't one of them. But, that might be because even his closest followers didn't take to it.



# mark: chapter 9

## *six days later*

It's a strange detail right? We haven't been getting a day-by-day account of Jesus' ministry prior to this in Mark's Gospel.

This could be an allusion to Exodus 24:16 where Moses goes up Sinai, where he beholds the glory of God "for six days."

## *apocalypse*

This is an apocalyptic story, in the fullness of the word. "Apocalypses" were a genre of writing in ancient days. The word doesn't mean "end of the world," as it usually does in pop culture, but rather "an unveiling." This scene is literally an unveiling of Jesus in the fulness of the glory of God. It might not be that *Jesus changes*, but that the eyes of the disciples are changed so that they can see Jesus in the same glory that he's always cloaked in.

## *old friends*

Jesus is here with Moses and Elijah. Moses had lived somewhere around

1500 years before this scene, and Elijah lived about 800 years before.

Symbolically, Moses represents "the law" and Elijah represents "the prophets." The presence of these two giants of the Jewish faith places Jesus squarely in the Jewish tradition. In other words, Jesus isn't doing something completely new. He's standing in the same river as the rest of the Jewish faith.

## *oh Peter...*

Peter is so struck by this moment of transfiguration that he wants to keep it going. He offers to build three "dwellings" or "tabernacles" for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The word "tabernacle" commonly referred to the temporary huts that the Israelites lived in during the Exodus. The word literally means "cloud."

Functionally what we see is Peter blowing it again. He doesn't understand what's going on one. more. time.

*When someone has a profound spiritual experience, it is common for the person to want it to go on*

## CHAP 9

### P38

*forever. However, the very nature of spiritual experiences is that they are temporary. We can't live in ecstasy, but we can take our experience of the ecstasy and use it to change our lives and the lives of those around us.*

#### ***the cloud***

After Peter offers to make a “tabernacle”—which means “cloud”—God sends an actual cloud. In the Hebrew Bible, clouds are frequent references to the Presence and Glory of God. God followed the Israelites in the wilderness as a pillar of cloud. When Solomon dedicated the Temple, a cloud infused the Temple Mount.

#### ***the voice behind the cloud***

God's voice booms from within the cloud, urging Peter, James, and John to “listen to” Jesus.

How does that work out?

#### ***rising from the dead***

Jesus again speaks of his eventual rising from the dead, and here we find the

Peter, James, and John—fresh off the experience of the Transfiguration—trying to figure out what in the world that means.

*But, if anything vexes us, shouldn't it be the resurrection? I mean, do we really understand it? At the end of Mark's Gospel we'll see his strange account of Easter morning, which ends with the women fleeing the tomb in fear, not telling anyone about Jesus' empty tomb. What might Mark be trying to tell his original audience—and us?*

#### ***the argument***

When Jesus comes upon the rest of the disciples, they are embroiled in an argument. Jesus asks what in the world is going on. Someone explains the situation: There is a child who is seized with a demon; they asked the disciples to help, but they couldn't do anything about it.

Remember that the disciples had already been commissioned to go out into the world to preach, heal, and exorcise. They appear to have lost their ability to do the latter.

## CHAP 9

### P39

#### *faithless generation*

Jesus seems to make a connection between the boy's affliction and this generation which is "faithless."

This child has, apparently for years, been rendered mute, rigid, and is continually dashed to the ground.

#### *come to Jesus*

When the demon sees Jesus it throws the child into another convulsion, and he is knocked to the ground. The father of the child asks Jesus to do something "if he is able."

Jesus is thoroughly exasperated by this —by the thought that this might be impossible for him, or for anyone with faith.

The father replies, obviously in desperation—"I believe! Help my unbelief!"

*Is this not the quintessential prayer? Do we not find ourselves stuck in the void between belief and unbelief all the time?*

#### *not dead yet*

Jesus casts the demon out, the child looks like he is dead, but Jesus takes him by the hand and lifts him up.

The disciples ask Jesus why they couldn't cast this one out. Jesus says that this kind of demon can only be cast out by prayer.

This could mean that 1) this was some special sort of demon, or 2) that the disciples weren't praying. If it's the latter, then this is a further indictment of them.

#### *foretelling*

AGAIN, Jesus tells them about his death and resurrection, and AGAIN the disciples have no idea what he's talking about. We find them in verse 32 mired in a mixture of fear and confusion.

*Ever been scared and confused?  
Can you relate with the disciples here?*

#### *who's the man?*

When they get back to Capernaum Jesus confronts the disciples—he's aware that they had been arguing on the way there. He wants to know what they

## CHAP 9

### P40

were arguing about.

They had been arguing about who the greatest disciple was. They don't tell Jesus this, he just knows.

This is another new low point for the disciples.

#### ***a child***

To reprimand them, Jesus brings a child into their midst and says if they want to be truly great they must become truly small.

#### ***the sons of thunder***

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, demonstrate how they got the nickname "sons of thunder." They inform Jesus that they saw someone casting out demons in Jesus' name. With righteous indignation they tried to stop him.

They are very proud of this.

Jesus is not so impressed.

#### ***a severe warning***

Jesus offers a severe warning to anyone who would "put a stumbling block

before one of these little ones"— obviously referring to the child in their midst.

It would be better for that person if they had a millstone hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea and drowned. Not subtle at all.

*Who is Jesus talking about here?*

*Who are the "little ones" that*

*(Mark's) Jesus is so protective of?*

#### ***amputations***

The following piece about body parts causing you to "stumble" is also found in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon "sin" is substituted for "stumble."

The message seems to be that it would be better to self-mutilate than to suffer the consequences of stumbling.

*What do you think Jesus is referring to here? What is stumbling? What is (Mark's) Jesus talking about?*





# mark: chapter 10

## *two rabbis*

Within first century Judaism there were four “hot issues” which were routinely argued about, and which served as a litmus test for whether one were in the school of Rabbi Hillel or Rabbi Shammai. These two important ancient teachers each had a serious following.

## *the four issues*

- Shammai believed Torah study should be reserved for only “worthy” students, while Hillel accepted anyone. Hillel thought such study had the potential to make one worthy.
- Shammai said it was sin to lie under any circumstance whatsoever, while Hillel said that there could be situations when lying was acceptable. (The famous test case was whether it was ok to tell an ugly bride that she was beautiful. Shammai said you’d have to just tell her that she was, in fact, ugly. Hillel got around this by saying every bride is beautiful on her wedding day.)
- Shammai said that on the first night of Hanukkah all the candles should be lit,

and then one should be left out on each successive night. Hillel said you started with one and then worked your way up to eight.

- Shammai said that divorce was to be undertaken only for a serious offense. Hillel said that even burning dinner was an ok grounds for divorce.

Thus the school of Hillel was significantly more “liberal” than Shammai. Shammai was more popular in Jesus’ day—and Mark’s day—but in the long term, Hillel’s positions ended up winning. In fact to this day Jewish Campus Ministries are always called... “Hillel.”

## *Rabbi Jesus*

Generally, Jesus followed the more open-minded stance of the Hillel School. Whenever he gets into a debate with the Jewish teachers of his day, he always scolds them for their cold legalism.

## *divorce*

However, the subject of divorce is an issue where Jesus disagrees with both

## CHAP 10

### P42

schools, but maybe for a surprising reason.

In the Torah divorce is permitted (Deuteronomy 24:1-4, 10:3-4), especially in cases of infidelity. If there is a break, the man issues the decree and the couple is divorced. The woman has no say in the matter whatsoever.

Shammai says that divorce is acceptable in the case of infidelity—sticking closely to the letter of the law in the Torah, as he usually did. Hillel says that any reason is ok, because the Torah doesn't have a firm ruling on this—it is never specific about reasoning. So, as usual Hillel takes the more “liberal” route here.

In Mark's Gospel Jesus forbids divorce for ANY reason—seemingly blowing past both Hillel and Shammai. However, is this the more “conservative” ruling or the more “liberal?”

#### ***a new ruling***

In Jesus' day, divorce absolutely ruined a woman. As women were completely dependent on their either their father (before marriage) or their husband (after marriage) for financial stability—women were not even allowed to own property

—divorce stripped a woman of her only source of security. Divorced women could be absolutely destitute following a divorce—especially if their originating family didn't accept her back into their home.

Jesus' more “conservative” take on divorce here is on the one hand stricter, but on the other it actually protected the woman from destitution. She could not be denied the protection and security of her husband if she happened to burn the toast, or if her husband was unfaithful.

#### ***Matthew***

And yet... in Matthew's version of this teaching Jesus adds “except in cases of infidelity.” (Matthew 5:31-32) So either Jesus wasn't always consistent in his divorce teachings, or Matthew and Mark disagreed on the matter.

#### ***children, a reprise***

Again we find Jesus among children—and this time the disciples are displeased. (Did they forget the whole millstone thing?!)

“Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it,” is a hotly contested verse.

## CHAP 10

### P43

*What do you think Jesus is referring to here? How are the inheritors of the Kingdom of God to be like Children? How does one receive the Kingdom as a child?*

#### ***the rich (young) (ruler)***

In Matthew and Luke this man is further identified as “young” and as a “ruler.” Here he is just a certain man who were learn later is wealthy.

#### ***the most important question***

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

*Before moving on, how would you answer this? What other answers have you heard?*

#### ***the law***

Incredibly—for a modern Christian audience at least—Jesus does not appeal to faith or belief. Instead, Jesus quotes from the Ten Commandments—and even then, he doesn’t reply with the more “spiritual laws” (Honoring the One

God... keeping God’s Name holy), but rather the more “social laws.”

“Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear faults witness. Do not defraud your neighbor. Honor your mother and father.”

*Extra credit: which one of the above laws is NOT from the Ten Commandments?*

*Is this not a stunning answer to how one attains eternal life??!*

#### ***a little cocky***

The man says that he’s fulfilled these laws for his whole life. He’s done!

But, not so fast. Jesus has one more little thing: “Sell all you have and give it to the poor.”

This is a Bridge too far for the man, and he goes away sad, for he had so much wealth, he was not willing to part with it.

#### ***the spiritual danger of wealth***

“How difficult it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Another just stunning statement!

## CHAP 10

### P44

There is a serious strain of New Testament teachings against wealth. We see it most strongly in the Gospel of Luke, but also in Matthew and Mark and the Epistle of James. We do know that the majority of the first generation of Christians were poor, some of them slaves. But, we also know that there were indeed people of means within those first communities as well. Joseph of Arimathea is one who is considered both wealthy and devout, even giving Jesus his own rock-hewn tomb.

#### ***the camel***

There is a common interpretation that goes around that identifies the camel going through the eye of the needle being a reference to a narrow Jerusalem gate which was called “the needle.” Camels weren’t able to enter, but would certainly be more likely to enter a gate than an actual needle’s eye. However, this is mostly legend. The Greek word for “camel” is closely related to the Greek word for “rope.” It is possible then that what Jesus actually said is that it’s “easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle” — which makes a little more sense, AND also carries the meaning of “unlikely though not entirely impossible” depending upon the size of the needle and the size of the rope.

#### ***astounded***

This astounds the disciples... because wealth was generally a sign in those days of divine favor. Jesus appears to completely upend that idea, and the disciples are astonished.

#### ***the faith of the disciples***

And yet, the disciples did exactly what the rich young ruler didn’t do, they left everything to follow Jesus. They may not have had wealth to forsake, but they at least forsook what they had.

#### ***Mark’s audience***

This section appears to be a direct message to Mark’s followers who gave up so much for their faith, and who lost much in return. Their loss could have been seen as a lack of divine favor. Jesus says that this is not the case.

#### ***foretelling***

Jesus again foretells his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. Here Jesus gives the most detail to date of his passion.

## CHAP 10

### P45

#### *the sons of thunder*

Again, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, demonstrate how they got the nickname “sons of thunder.” They ask Jesus that classic question all children ask their parents: Will you agree to do something for me before I tell you what that something is?

They want a blank check.

Jesus doesn't bite, and instead asks them what it is that they want.

They want glory for themselves. Apparently they ask this away from the prying ears of the other disciples, because when they hear about this they are enraged. Probably not because it's an astoundingly bad question to ask of the teacher who keeps telling them all to divest themselves of power and glory, but because if glory is going to be handed out, the other disciples don't want to be left out!

#### *true greatness*

“Whoever may wish to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever may wish to be first among you shall be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for

many.”

Greatness and pride of position is not something to be considered in Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God. Such things count for nothing. Lowliness and servanthood are paradoxically what truly matters.

*How does modern Christianity live up to this teaching? Where do we fail to abide by it?*



# mark: the final week

The Gospel of Mark is the only Gospel which explicitly separates the activities which happened on each day of Jesus' final week. This could be just an inadvertent detail, or it could be an artifact of an ancient Holy Week liturgical set of readings for each day.

**SUNDAY: 11:1-11**

## *Jesus enters Jerusalem*

In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John this is Jesus' first trip to Jerusalem during his ministry. John's Gospel shows Jesus in Jerusalem all the time. But, this is the first time in the Gospel of Mark that the action takes place in the big city.

In Zechariah 9:9 we find the king riding on a donkey as a way of showing that he was coming in peace. On this Palm Sunday there would have been another procession into Jerusalem, where Pontius Pilate would have risen into town with a battalion of Roman soldiers. This happened every Passover week. Passover is a holiday that is all about a subjugated people being freed from tyranny and slavery. The danger here was not lost on the Romans. They came into Jerusalem in a show of force, while Jesus rides in on a symbol of peace.

The crowd doesn't quite get the message though for they pick up the palm branch and sing "hosanna." The palm branch was the triumphant flag of ancient Israel, and "hosanna" was a prayer that really caught on the last time Jerusalem was liberated from its oppressors. The cues of the crowd show that they are expecting Jesus to do something much different in Jerusalem than that which he has come to do.

He goes into the city, goes to the Temple, looks around... and he leaves to go back to Bethany. A little bit of an anticlimactic moment... or just a foretaste of what is to come next.

*The crowd expected Jesus to save them from the military might of Rome, and to reclaim Israel for their own. This is what they expected*

## FINAL WEEK

P47

*Messiah was supposed to do, in their view. And, to this end, they are disappointed. He hasn't come to conquer, he's come to die. Has Jesus ever disappointed you? Do you understand what the crowd is going through here?*

### MONDAY: 11:12-11:19

#### *Jesus curses the fig tree*

This poor fig tree was not supposed to start producing figs until May or June, and yet here we are in March or April and Jesus is apoplectic about it not having any figs. This is totally out of character for Jesus. We never find him using his power for his own personal comfort. And yet, here he is cursing a tree for something that it was not supposed to do yet.

This is one of those framing stories that Mark likes so much. The cursing of the fig tree and the discovery of his curses's effect on the tree cradle the story of the cleansing of the Temple. And there is where we can find some meaning to this story which seems so uncharacteristic.

#### *the cleansing of the Temple*

In the Hebrew Bible the fig tree represents the peace and prosperity of Israel. It is a visible sign of God's blessing upon His people. The barrenness of the fig tree therefore symbolized a forsaken Israel—specifically due to the spiritual vacuity of its leaders. (See Hosea 9:15)

When Jesus enters the Temple he sees the very House of God, but also a building whose leaders are spiritually, ethically, and morally bankrupt. They have colluded over and over again with the Romans, the chief leaders were chosen by the Empire itself. It may be the House of God, but it is being run by political hacks whose allegiances aren't with God.

## FINAL WEEK

P48

The cleansing of the Temple serves as Exhibit A for why Jesus must be crucified. He riled everyone up with his teachings, but when he disrupts the order of the Temple they finally have something to hang over his head.

*If Jesus were to come today, what institutions would he find morally bankrupt? Where would Jesus find new tables to overturn?*

**TUESDAY: 11:20-13:37**

### *the withered fig tree*

The cursed tree is found withered. A striking similarity to the Temple in Mark's day—in ruins. Mark's community would not have missed this.

### *prayer*

Jesus then gives a short teaching on prayer, where he seems to say that all you need to do is ask for something and it will be given to you. To anyone who has ever prayed for the health and well-being of a loved one who only got worse and died, this one can sting a bit. In our Christian experience sometimes our prayers are answered in glorious ways, and other times they feel like they have fallen on deaf ears.

If you look a little closer here though, you will find Jesus say that our prayers need to be aligned with God, and the purposes of God's reign. Jesus says that whenever we pray we must first forgive those who have wronged us. In some situations this might stop some prayers before they are even uttered. We might want to pray that God would smite our enemies, but if we first stand to offer forgiveness before praying that prayer we might find ourselves choking on the words.

*What do we do with unanswered prayer? Is God not listening? Does God not care? Are we not good enough for God to answer that prayer?*



## FINAL WEEK

### P49

#### *his authority is questioned*

The religious leaders come to ask Jesus by whose authority does he do the things he does? They know where their authority comes from: from the hierarchy, their view of the scriptures, and ultimately from the Empire. But, where does Jesus get his authority to do the things he does?

He trips them up with a great question that should they answer it they would end up losing their authority. This is one of the classic places where Jesus does not answer a simple question, but rather answers it with another question.

#### *the parable of the tenants*

Jesus tells a parable to the assembled crowd—which certainly included those same religious rulers—which is about an evil group of tenant farmers killing the emissaries of the land owner and then even killing his own son. This parable doesn't take much parsing to know it's about the religious leadership of Jesus' day.

#### *should we pay taxes?*

Jesus answers yet another question designed to trip him up with incredible deftness. Unfortunately this passage has been reduced through the years as a mere call to submit to your authorities. But, some authorities are not worthy of submitting to—that's certainly Jesus' view in this section where he's bashing the political and religious ruling class.

“Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's.” It should make us wonder... if we set God and Caesar both up on a stage and were meant to follow this command, should Caesar go home with anything? Don't all things ultimately belong to God?

#### *is there a resurrection?*

## FINAL WEEK

### P50

The sect of the Sadducees took a minority position on the “resurrection”: they didn’t believe in it. But, what was the majority position? It was believed that at the fulfillment of all things (the end of the age/world), there would be a General Resurrection. It was believed that there was no separation between those who were righteous and those who were evil at death. Rather, everyone initially went to the same place, a place of rest, where they “slept.” But, on the Last Day all the dead would be raised, and God would judge them all. The righteous would enter into some sort of eternal life (this thought wasn’t fully developed though) and the evil would be annihilated—in other words they would cease to exist. This is what the Sadducees are questioning Jesus about. Of course, Jesus believed in the resurrection, his view of it was entirely different than both the minority and majority opinions. The resurrection was about to begin in him. Therefore, he doesn’t give a straight answer here, but questions the very basis of their question.

### *the greatest commandment*

One of the Pharisees asks Jesus “What is the greatest commandment.” In typical fashion Jesus doesn’t answer the question in the manner it was asked. He doesn’t give one commandment, but two, one from Leviticus and the other from Deuteronomy. When the Pharisee accepts Jesus’ answer, Jesus says that he is not far from the Kingdom of God.

In other words, he’s on the right track.

*If you were asked this question, would you have a different answer?*

### *David’s son?*

This is a reference to Psalm 110:1, where the psalmist calls the coming Messiah “Lord.” The traditional view of the Psalms is that they were written by David. Jesus’ argument to those around him was if David calls this one “Lord” then this one can’t be simply someone from his lineage.

## FINAL WEEK

### P51

I think in Mark's day this would have had an added meaning, saying to the people that this isn't a mere continuation of the past, but in Jesus something greater has come—where even the great King David calls him Lord.

#### *scribes denounced*

This section is lifted almost word-for-word from the sermon on the mount. Nothing gets Jesus as fired up as self-righteous religious people. Notice he never chastises the people who practice other religions (or no religion at all) the way he chastises Jewish leaders. This would have been a tempering passage to the leaders of the emerging Christian movement in Mark's day.

#### *the widow's mite*

This scene should be seen as a direct follow up to the previous scene. The widow here stands in contrast to the self-righteous and showy religious leaders. Her faith is shown by Jesus to be genuine, humble, and (unlike the rich young ruler) self-sacrificing.

#### *the little apocalypse*

The entire thirteenth chapter of Mark gets very dark. What is Holy in Jerusalem will be desecrated. The Temple is foretold to fall. Faithful followers will be persecuted. Family member will be pitted against family member.

As dark as it is though, it all happened both in Rome and Jerusalem. Mark's people would not have been surprised by any of it, because they were living through the aftermath.

There are lots of allusions here to what had happened about 180BC when the occupation of the Greek Selucids, under the authority of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. The Greeks tried to subvert the religious culture of the Jewish people for years, but then things escalated when they took over the Temple Mount, setting up an idol to Zeus

## FINAL WEEK

P52

and sacrificing swine on the Altar. This sacrilege led to the Jewish uprising of Judas Macabbeus (“Macabee” means “the hammer”) which eventually liberated Judea and Jerusalem.

### WEDNESDAY: 14:1-11

#### *Jesus anointed at Bethany*

Bethany is on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, no more than two miles from Jerusalem. This is Jesus’ home-away-from-Home for this whole week. In John’s Gospel Jesus spends much more time in Bethany, as it is the hometown of Jesus’ friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. But, because in Mark’s Gospel, this is Jesus’ first trip to the big city, this is also Jesus’ first time in Bethany.

Here at Bethany, Jesus is anointed by a woman “with an alabaster jar.” The Greek here is a little simpler, just saying “jar without handles.” The description of the expensive nard that she anoints him with tells us that it this ointment was from a plant that is indigenous to India. This would have been expensive indeed.

The disciples scold Jesus and the woman for this lavish display, for the money they say should have been used for the poor. Jesus doesn’t deny this, but counters by saying that her exceedingly generous act was wholly appropriate since he is about to be killed and be buried.

Of course, the disciples don’t accept this possibility.

*What might this story tell us about Jesus, worship, and care for the poor? Don’t the disciples have a point here?*

### THURSDAY: 14:12-72

#### *Judas*

## FINAL WEEK

Here, after this controversial scene, Judas Iscariot agrees to betray Jesus, and the religious leaders offer him money for his trouble.

### P53

#### *the Last Supper*

Mark (along with Matthew and Luke) explicitly names this day as the first day of Passover. (John disagrees with this timing.)

Jesus upsets the meal by saying that one of the people who is dining with them that night would betray him. The disciples erupt in a chorus of nervous indignation.

This is the second oldest description of the Last Supper that we have, the oldest being from Paul's 2nd Letter to the Corinthians.

#### *Jesus knows Peter better than Peter does*

Just as Jesus identified one among them as a betrayer, so also Jesus identifies them all as future deserters. When Peter objects to this, Jesus tells him that not only will he be a deserter, but he will also deny Jesus. Another chorus of righteous indignation erupts.

*For Mark's community, this scene would have struck a deep chord. In the aftermath of the burning of Rome, and in the destruction of Israel they all surely knew of people who had fallen away from their faith—people who talked a good game, but when the chips were down couldn't back it up.*

#### *Gethsemane*

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke we find Jesus going to the Garden of Gethsemane for a period of agony and prayer. Jesus' closest disciples haven't yet deserted or denied him yet, but they cannot keep from falling asleep.

## FINAL WEEK

### P54

Jesus asks God that the “cup” set before him might pass. He says that all things are possible with God—even that. But, then he reminds His Father, and himself that it’s God’s will that matters most.

Judas then comes, kisses Jesus, and Jesus is arrested. The followers of Jesus are not ready to give Jesus up so quickly, and one of them takes up a sword and strikes one of the guards. In Mark’s version of the Passion, Jesus does not rebuke his followers, nor does he heal the one who was struck with the sword.

One very strange detail at the end of this story is the naked man. There’s a “young man” who was “following Jesus” who was wearing nothing but a linen cloth. When he tries to get away, the guards try and grab him, but he’s too quick and when he runs off they are left with nothing but the cloth in their hands. The young man runs off naked.

*Who is this man? Does he represent something?*

### ***the trial begins***

It is strange that on the first day of Passover, this HUGE religious festival that served as the center of the Jewish calendar, that all the most important religious leaders of Jerusalem are able to get together for a trial. It would be like trying to get a bunch of clergy together on Christmas Eve for some extraneous reason.

Instead of detailing Jesus’ teachings, or his uproar in the Temple earlier in the week, all they can do is find some people willing to offer false testimony against him. Their corruption is that deep.

But, when Jesus answers that he is indeed the Messiah, the High Priest sees this as an act of blasphemy, and the wheels are set in motion.

### ***Peter lets Jesus down***

## FINAL WEEK

### FRIDAY: 15:1-41

#### P55

#### *Jesus before Pilate*

The trial of Jesus resumes first thing in the morning before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Empire's Governor in Judea.

Pilate's question, "Are you the King of the Jews?," is a thoroughly political question. Authority went through Rome, and by extension, Pontius Pilate. To declare yourself a "king" would be to subvert the rule of Rome and ultimately the Caesar. You see, Pilate doesn't care about the religious charges against Jesus. He doesn't care if he thinks he's the Messiah or if he heals people on a Saturday. Pilate isn't a Jew. He couldn't care less about those things. But, when he threatens the Empire... well, that gets him moving.

Pilate, in a moment of public spectacle, dangles a pardon of Jesus before the crowd, but they will have none of it. They want to see Jesus crucified. Pilate instead releases a man called Barabbas—whose name means "son of the father."

#### *the crucifixion*

Before Jesus bears his cross, he first endures a public episode of violent taunting, where he is mocked as a king. At 9AM, he is crucified on Golgotha, and he is again taunted as king with a sign put above his head. He is offered a drink of wine, but he refuses it. In Mark's telling of the story both criminals who are crucified with him taunt Jesus.

The picture is this: Everyone taunts Jesus. Even the other people being executed that day.

#### *the cry of dereliction*

## FINAL WEEK

### P56

Perhaps the most disturbing part of the crucifixion in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is Jesus' cry from the cross: My God, my God, Why have you forsaken me? This is a direct quote from Psalm 22:1, and is highlighted all the more because it is written into the text in Aramaic, and not Greek.

Some commentators point to the end of Psalm 22, which has a decidedly triumphant feel to it as the reason Jesus exclaims this. Others say this is the primal scream which reveals Jesus' humanity. Still others say that here we find Jesus feeling abandoned by God, as do we all at some point in our lives.

Surely Mark's community could have prayed that very prayer over and over again.

### ***the death and burial of Jesus***

Jesus cries out and he dies. The only friendly faces around him are a few of the women who had been followers of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the religious establishment, asks Pilate for Jesus' body, offering to place him in his own tomb. Pilate first gets word that Jesus is dead—thus Mark here provides confirmation that Jesus is indeed dead, and not just “passed out” or something. After Pilate gets such confirmation, Joseph takes the body, has it wrapped in a cloth, and lays it in a tomb. Several women who witnessed his death, are also there to witness Jesus' burial.

*Do you see Mark being very careful here to provide layers of accountability for the resurrection?*

## **SATURDAY: THE LOST DAY IN MARK**

There is only a reference to this day, as “the sabbath,” but the events of the day are not given in real time.



## FINAL WEEK

### SUNDAY: 16:1-8

#### P57

#### *the resurrection of Jesus and the frightened women*

Presumably after sundown on Saturday night, three women go out to purchase the things they would need to prepare Jesus' body for burial. Then very early on "the first day of the week" they head to Jesus' tomb. When they get there they find the stone removed from the entrance of the tomb, and when they enter in they find a "young man dressed in white"—interestingly a very close description to the man who ran off naked on Thursday night.

The young man tells them not to be afraid, for Jesus isn't there because he has been "raised." The women are then explicitly told to go and tell the disciples what they've seen and heard—but, instead they run off in fear and say nothing to anyone.

*All through the Gospel Jesus had been telling people NOT to tell people of the wondrous things he were doing, and every time they'd disobey him and tell people anyway. Here, when people are told to go and tell people, they don't!*

#### *the shorter and longer endings*

Most of the ancient texts of Mark end at verse 8.

Some ancient texts add a shorter ending which reverses the ineptitude of the women, and which describes the Gospel of "eternal salvation" being spread throughout the earth. The language in this shorter ending isn't Markan in the least bit.

The so called "longer ending" details a resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene, to two disciples (which seems remarkably similar to Luke's story of the road to Emmaus), a commissioning of the disciples by Jesus, and Jesus' ascension. This longer ending appears to be an amalgamation of the ending of Matthew and Luke, and doesn't seem to use Mark's voice at all. It's clear that people were not satisfied

## **FINAL WEEK**

### **P58**

with the ending of Mark at verses 8. It could be that there was originally a longer ending that Mark did indeed write, but that was lost. But, the most probable answer is that Mark ended his Gospel right where he wanted it to end.